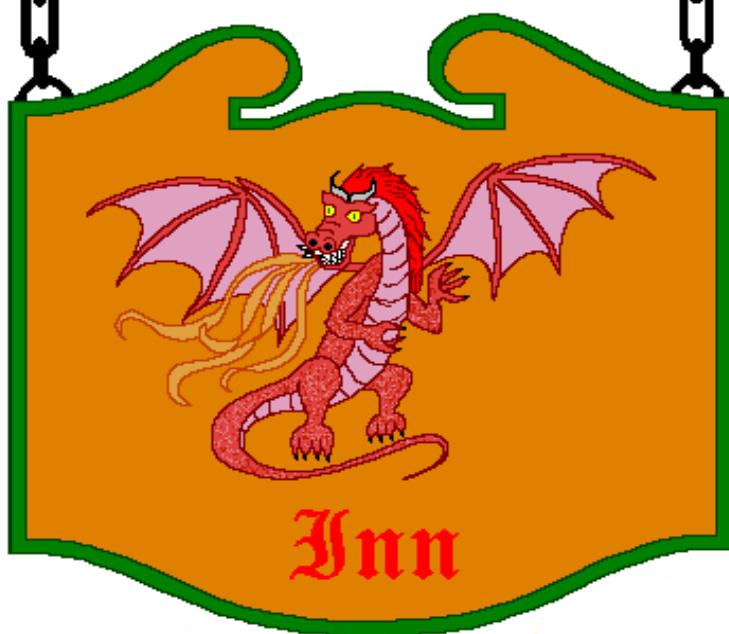


# Red Dragon Inn

By Maurice & Dayon Storm



# **THE RED DRAGON INN**

**BY MAURICE & D. C STORM**

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## FOREWORD by Maurice Storm

This is a fictional story, but, it is also a story that is factual. It brings the reader to the cold reality of America's collapsing educational system -by bringing the authors into the story. Most authors hide behind their name, unwilling to bare themselves, even though they are quite willing to bare their fictional characters, shamelessly, physically and mentally.

How any times have you given a supermarket cashier two pennies to even up a sale, only to hear them say, "what am I going to do with these?" Because the total sale cost was, \$10.02 and you wanted to avoid receiving 98¢ in change. But because these guardians of the big company's finances could not compute simple arithmetic--nay--rithmetic--they could only do what the computer in front of them told them to do, --you smiled resignedly, took the two pennies back, and accepted the handful of coins, to keep the line moving behind you, because America must move.

Here is a story, likewise, written by a brilliant computer expert who cannot spell, but guided our missiles--and--an ancient relic of the one room schoolhouse days who was educated in reading, writing, and rithmetic. It shows the collapse of the small town attitude to where nowadays, world creeping in to our backyard garden, both physically and morally. And, we are accepting it, allowing the drugs themselves to erase the nightmares our wiser knowing brain conjures up, to warn us of the consequences of stupidity.

Locked in this entrapping plot, this story tells us only absolute stubborn adherence to principles of black and white, right and wrong, and devotion to immediate and total friendliness will guide us back to the Old Testament relationship with God, His Goodness, and His goal for us all....

If by this book the right person is inspired to think, we have turned the tide of battle, to the goals of the common sense, decency and the nobleness of life. Is that person you?

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## CHAPTER 1 -- THE OLD MAN

It was late and dark outside as the Innkeeper filled the glass of a roguish looking individual with booze.

The light from the crackling fire in the fireplace cast an eerie glow throughout the room; the light strobe the sign above the bar that said, 'RED DRAGON INN'.

There were four other customers in the Inn, sitting at tables and talking softly.

The roguish individual, who had a sword slung on his left side and a very large dagger on his right, turned and said, as he pounded his fist on the bar, "Come--the drinks are on me."

The other four individuals, who also looked just as roguish, got up and came to the bar.

The Innkeeper then filled everyone's glass as the rogue dropped several gold and silver coins on the bar, which he got from his leather pouch; he then retied the drawstrings and tied the pouch on his belt.

The guy next to this rogue said, "Thanks friend, why the kind gesture?"

"I'm Red Erwin the dragon slayer, and I just freed the people of Mallwort from the biggest dragon that ever was. They paid me in gold and silver," returned the Rogue, the coins jingle as he shakes the pouch.

Suddenly, the door to the Inn opens and everyone turns to see who is entering.

The Inn becomes quite except for the sound of the crackling fire in the fireplace.

An old man in a long black cloak trimmed in blue, slowly hobbled into the Inn on a crooked wooden cane; the cane was polished with years of use and it had strange engraving's on it.

As the old man slowly hobbled pass the bar and headed for the fireplace, everyone at the bar went back to what they, were previously doing.

The old man stops in front of the fire and looks into the dancing flames, he mumbles something, the fire grew and the light became so intense that the room no longer had a soft glow.

Everyone at the bar turned to see why the fire was burning so brightly.

The old man turns to face the men at the bar, his eyes now glowed like the fire behind him, and his voice boomed and echoed in the room as he spoke, "Who killed Draco the Dragon?"

**Everyone was quiet.**

**The old man repeated in a louder tone, "Who killed my friend Draco?"**

**Still no answer came from the men at the bar.**

**The old man raised his cane, pointed at the men and the fire behind him flared up so brightly that everyone at the bar was blinded.**

**The old man points his cane at the fire and roars, "BEHOLD, DRACO STILL LIVES!"**

**The men froze with fear as the fire grew twice its size and took the shape of a DRAGON, and then the floor shook and the mighty hearth split open to reveal a passage into darkness.**

**Red stood there transfixed by the manifestation before him; the old man was now looking at him, Red looked back, and as his eyes met the old man's, the old man now knew that he was the slayer of Draco.**

**The old man spoke, "It is you that I seek," as he raised his cane and points it at him.**

**The flaming dragon now danced in the hearth with flames belching out of its mouth, almost touching the old man; the heat was scorching hot and the light was blinding.**

**The passageway that led from the center of the hearth was a stone stairway, and it seemed to go into a black hole.**

**"You must follow me and atone for this deed," The old man said, now glaring at him with eyes like red cinders.**

**"The dragon was terrorizing the people of Mallwort," Red responding, "I need to atone for nothing. The dragon was the evil one here. I was doing a good deed."**

**The old man stood there with anger and glowing eyes that also seemed to belch fire.**

**"You will follow me--you have no other choice!" The old man commanded in a very loud and threatening tone, and then he pointed his finger at Red and softly spoke an incantation.**

**And as he spoke, the fire dragon leaped out of the hearth and stood behind him. Red and the others were now terrified.**

**"NOW FOLLOW ME!" The old man commanded, and then he turned and followed the flaming dragon down the stone steps and into the black hole.**

**Red stood there watching, as they disappeared down the stairway; the passageway was now lit by the flaming dragon, as the old man and fire**

dragon proceeded down the stairway.

The Inn was now dark, as there was only a small flame still burning on the remaining piece of unburned wood, and then a cool gush of air hit them in the face; it came from the still open passage in the hearth, and it had a repulsive pungent odor.

Then the silence was broken by the loud words coming from the black hole after the fire, "COME—WE'RE WAITING! TIME IS GROWING SHORT!"

Red now feels an irresistible urge to go into the passageway; then he slowly makes his way to the hearth as the others in the Inn try to persuade him to stay.

As he gets closer the urge gets stronger, as well as the strong smell.

His drinking friend tries to hold him back, but Red frees himself and starts down the cold stone steps, and as he descends the stairs, he sees shadows in front of him; the din of the men in the Inn trying to call him back, grows quieter.

Then all is black, and he's in total darkness...

Red opens his eyes and he's lying in bed looking at the ceiling, as the faint light from the streetlight outside of his window cast's shadows, and for a moment, he thought he saw a shadow of a dragon!

Red Brillion sat up straight in bed.

"Damn," he cursed, "these damn nightmares--always at the black hole after fire! What can it mean?"

He might as well get up; he would sleep no more tonight, and he had a big day at the shop tomorrow with that big digger to work on.

He was a down to earth man, so what in hell was all this unreal stuff coming into his mind?

Would he have to go see a silly mind doctor, like Aunt Jane, and have everyone smirk behind his back?

He couldn't keep working and not sleeping!

He could probably start drinking, quit working, hope it would go away and no one would be the wiser.

At least there was no stigma to being a drunk; a couple of his uncles had been drunks, was that their reason?

Red didn't like that thought; one had died in deliriums--bad nightmares or a natural result of the disease.

Was the black hole a prediction of his fate?

Was effect creating a cause?

Was there a curse on the family from the past ages?

Bah--humbug, now he was sounding like Scrooge!

Yike'--he was going haywire--he needed a drink!

Red went to his dresser and pulled a bottle of Scotch from the bottom drawer, that he only used for rare occasions; like when he knew he wouldn't sleep after a traffic scrape or an almost industrial accident.

After a good stiff swig, Red lies back on the mattress and lets the warm feeling sweep up over him.

"To hell with dragons and black holes!" Red exclaimed with relief, "A good drink could lick the hell out of any problem. That's why the stuff was made, to make man king of his own domain."

Tomorrow he would be back at the dreary job of mechanic, he liked doing in spite of itself, and the prestige he would feel when he completed a big tough job, and then he could swagger into The Red Dragon Inn, beat a few games of pool, and go home tired, but feeling good.

Maybe he should switch to some other bar, with a different name; Naaa--he was getting older and maybe deserved better liquor, that was it, he would order better quality from now on, and make up for it in cost, by drinking less, and then, he wouldn't have to worry about becoming a drunkard--man, he was logical again!

"See--all it took was a good shot of Scotch," it had always been a friend in the times past.

But, he had no narrow escapes!

So what was his mind doing dredging up all this crap, from something his teachers had called his sub-conscious.

He'd never bothered to worry about that world before, as it hadn't existed at all, as far as he was concerned.

He reached over and snapped the light on; he would sleep with it on tonight, instead of just the faint light of the distant streetlight.

He needed his sleep to do his work tomorrow, that was all there was to it, and that was final!

And soon, the steady snore of Red Brillion drifted through the thin walls of his room.

## CHAPTER 2 - - THE FIRST PUZZLE

Red Erwin was standing on the bottom step of the stairway; it was very dark and he couldn't see anything, but the step he was standing on.

There was a pungent smell, and he could hear a loud sound like that of grinding stones; the sound seemed to be coming from behind him.

Red turned and saw the opening from which he had come, was closing; it was the mighty hearth returning to its normal position.

He could also hear men shouting, but couldn't make out as to what was shouted; it sounded something like, "HURRY--GET OUT!"

When the stones finally closed, all of the light from the opening was shut out; as too was the shouts, he was now standing in total darkness.

Fear overcame him, as he couldn't see anything; then, he heard the voice of the old man, "Behold--I give you light," and then torches became ablaze, and the room he was standing in was filled with a soft glow, and there standing in front of him, was the old man.

The old man spoke, "Draco's sole is trapped in the darkness of the netherworld, because you hath placed it there, so it must be you that frees it. Draco must take his place in the heavens, as the stars of the constellation, Draco. For if you fail, you will join him there, for eternity, always fighting each other."

Red looked around for a way out.

With hand on his sword, he firmly commanded, "Tell me the way out, old man, or I'm going to run you through as I did to that dragon!"

The old man laughed and said, "To kill me is to condemn yourself, along with Draco, to netherworld for eternity. For only I can give you the way out!"

"I will leave the same way that I came in," Red declares, and as he shook the second of two pouches that he had tied to his belt, he added, "For I also have some magic. I will make the stones part, just as you have," for it contained black powder, that he obtained from his travels to the orient.

"What way out? With what magic?" The old man asked, laughing again.

Red said with a smirk, as he pointed over his shoulder to whence he had come, "That way. I'll use my magic to part the stones and leave."

"What way? I see nothing but a wall," The old man appraising Red of his dilemma. Red turns and looks with fear at a solid stonewall behind

him.

“The only way back is to go forward,” affirms the old man, “for you must unlock the door to netherworld and pass through into your world, thus freeing Draco and yourself.”

Red asks, “How do I unlock the door? Which way is the way out of here?”

“The way out is through one of those five doors. Be careful! As only one door leads out. The other doors hold eternal confinement in the netherworld with Draco. You are not allowed even one mistake,” the old man replied, pointing to several locked doors and the fountain in the center of the room.

“How do I know which door is the right one?” Red asked, with puzzlement and fear.

“You must solve the puzzle of this room,” the old man replied, “for this will be the first of three puzzles which you must solve in order to unlock the door to netherworld. The answer to the first puzzle lies within this room. For this is the room of elements. The key to the correct door is somewhere in this room. Be mindful of your feet, as they may lead you to the solution or to failure. You have until the awaking of Sol to solve this puzzle.”

Red was about to speak when the old man vanished leaving him alone in the room.

Red was standing in a round room with five stone doors and a stone fountain in the center.

Red walked to the fountain, and as he approached the fountain, the pungent odor got stronger; the odor seemed familiar and was very strong.

When he reached the fountain, the odor was so strong it made his eyes smart with tears and breathing became difficult.

Holding his breath, he looked into the fountain and saw his reflection; it showed not him standing there, but a man lying in bed sleeping!

Red jumped back, startled, and stood there in shock!

Red stares at the fountain, and there at the top he sees a white key inside a crystal globe.

He smiles, as he thinks, “This is going to be easy. For all I’ve got to do is to get that key, unlock one of these doors and walk out.”

Then a terrible thought came to him, “WHAT DOOR? I’ve only got one chance to open only one door!”

Red walked to the first of the five stone doors; all five of the doors were exactly alike, except for the cryptic inscription on each.

The inscription were a series of letters and numbers and on each door, and they were different!

The first door had the inscription, HNO3.

The second door had the inscription, HCl.

The third door had the inscription, H2S.

The fourth door had the inscription, NaCl.

The fifth door had the inscription, KCN.

Red was now totally devastated, as he didn't know what this all meant!

There at the top of the fountain was the way out, but little use was the key without knowing which door to open.

The old man had said, the solution was in the room, but for a man of little education what good was it.

The inscriptions on each door meant nothing to him and his time was running out!

So, in despair, ignoring the strong odor he walks to the fountain.

He figured he could at least get the key, and maybe with blind luck open the right door with the first try; after all, he was lucky especially with all the dragon slaying, for he was still alive, and maybe luck was still with him.

Upon reaching the fountain, he climbed up on the edge and was about to step in, when he kicked a stone into the fountain; the stone went plunk, hissed, fizzed and was gone!

Red stopped short and froze; this was no ordinary fountain!

He got back down, stepped back and stared at the nightmare before him; this was the final blow, now he couldn't even get the key!

He just stood there, staring at the fountain with the key at the top, and then he noticed the fountain also had sets of the same type of cryptic inscriptions as the doors, but they all were of the same symbol, H2SO4, repeated over and over all round the base of the fountain, and separating each set was a dagger.

Red went over and knelt down to examined one of the daggers, and to his astonishment it was a real dagger as it fell into his hands.

When he examined it, he saw engraved on its blade, was one of the symbols from the inscription on the fountain.

He went around the fountain and found five daggers, all with a different symbol from the inscription on the fountain.

Looking at the five daggers, Red had a morbid thought, "I'm I to take my life? Is this the way out? Is this the key to escape from here? The old man did say the solution was here in this room. Is this the solution, that I must die in order to free both Draco and myself?"

Red was now in a state of tears thinking, "What of the key at the top of the fountain? Is that a false lead to nowhere! Was I to die in the fountain trying to get the key? Is one these daggers, meant for me all along? NO! — I can't kill myself. There's got to be another solution to the puzzle."

As time was running out for poor Red, he sat there on the cold stone floor with head in his hands sobbing.

After sitting there for a while, he noticed the floor was made of large square stone tiles, and on each tile was engraved a letter or number; he also noticed that each stone had an open slit under the engraving.

As Red stared, a thought came--could it be possible--he had been standing on the solution all the time!

Didn't the old man tell him his feet could provide the solution, or his death!

Are these daggers meant to be placed into the stone tiles?  
But which tiles?

"I only have five daggers," Red told himself, "so that means, there are only five tiles that will accept the daggers. Do I need all five daggers or just some of them? Of course--the letters on each blade!"

Then Red had another thought and looks at the daggers and then at the doors; maybe the daggers are the keys!

Now to figure out which door?

As poor Red matched each dagger to the doors, he got even more confused, because there were letters on each door that match the daggers!

Now, the 'H' on one of the daggers matched the 'H' on three of the doors, and then he noticed the third door had symbols for three of the daggers!

"I've found the way out!" Red happily exclaimed, "It's the third door, and all I've got to do now, is to find the three tiles with the same symbols, and place the daggers into the slits, and then the door should open and let me out of here."

Red went and searched each tile until he found the one that matched the 'H' dagger; he then placed the dagger into the slit.

Then after the dagger slid all the way to its hilt, the tile dropped down with a grinding sound.

Next, he went and found the tile that matched the '2' dagger; he placed it into the slit and that tile also dropped down.

Red was now feeling good, as he knew he was only one dagger from leaving this room.

The final tile wasn't far, and he smiled as he placed the 'S' dagger into the slit; and like the last two tiles this one also dropped down.

Red had two daggers left as he went to the third door, and when he got there, he pushed on the door; the dumb thing wouldn't open, it was like pushing a stone wall, and then he noticed that, the door had two slits in it!

Of course, how stupid--the last two daggers are for opening the door!

Red now inserted the last two daggers into the two slits in the door, and waited for the door to open, but nothing happens!

He retried the daggers, still nothing!

He tried to push on the door; it was still tightly closed!

How can this be!

Red was sure he had solved the puzzle, or has he?

He looked at the other doors and they too had slits!

The first door had three slits.

The second door had four slits.

The fourth door had only one slit, and the fifth door had five slits!

Now this didn't make any sense to Red, why do some doors have more slits then there are daggers?

Poor Red, he hadn't found the solution after all.

Red felt despair, and he now knew he was doomed; nothing seemed to make any sense.

Red went to get the other three daggers and rethink this.

As Red bent down to extract the 'S' dagger, it wouldn't come free of the stone tile; it was as if it had become part of the tile!

Red got very angry and using all of his might, tried as he may, but he just couldn't pull the dagger free.

Finally, in anger and despair, Red swore, "If the God damn floor wants the God damn daggers, then it can have them," so in anger, he placed the last two daggers into the stone tiles.

He placed the 'O' dagger into the 'O' tile and it dropped down like the other three.

Red then placed the last dagger into the '4' tile and it dropped down, and then a loud grinding sound of large stones moving, came from the fountain.

Red turns and looks at the fountain, the crystal globe had popped open exposing the white key.

Red quickly goes over to the fountain and looks in, it's empty!

He jumps up onto the rim and down into the fountain, and slowly he advances to the key.

When he reached for the white key, it wasn't smooth, but rough and grainy as he plucked it from its resting place in the globe; the key looked very fragile, but it was as hard as a rock.

Red was overjoyed for now he had the key, but he still didn't know which door it was meant to open.

Red now had to hurry, because for some unknown reason he knew Sol was awaking.

Holding the key, Red looked at each door, but nothing made any sense.

Red looks at the key he was holding, it still looked fragile, but what's this on the shaft?

It had an inscription like all of the others; 'NaCl' was stamped there.  
"THE FOURTH DOOR! --I've found the DOOR!"

Red quickly went to the fourth door and inserted the key.

Sol was starting to stir, and as he turned the key it crumbled, but it didn't matter, because the door slowly started to move sideways into the wall with a loud grinding sound; like the sound the hearth had made when it opened and closed.

A ray of light came from the opening as the door opens farther and farther, until finally, the door was all the way open and Red happily stepped through the opening and was free of the room.

Red awoke with the sun shining in his face.

The alarm had gone off; it was six o'clock and time to get up, and go to work, that big digger still needed to be fixed!

The bottle of Scotch was still sitting on the table where he left it last night.

Red was sweaty and hot, "Damn nightmare! Must be that Scotch!"

I've just got to get quality and not drink this cheap stuff!"

Red then got up, got dressed and had breakfast.

Red made bacon with fried eggs and hot black coffee; need it hot and black especially after that sweaty sleep.

After Red had finished eating, he left the house and went to the shop.

## CHAPTER 3 - - THE BOY

The day was hot and sweltering, and Red was glad for an opportunity to get down under the machine to complete some work.

He was lying near the front tire when suddenly, S W O O S H, all the air went out of the tire; the rim came down, just missing his head!

He swore, rolled out from under the machine like a flash and stood up; a small Negro Boy was standing there with a machete in his hand.

There was a big long slash in the flat tire.

“What are you doing?” Red yelled at the Boy, who shrank back from his outburst.

“That little old man was going to shoot an arrow in your head--I cut him in two!”

“What are you talking about? What little old man?” Declared Red.

The little Negro Boy knelt down by the tire and examined everything very carefully.

“He was standing right on this tire and had a bow and arrow. He was going to shoot you!”

Red stared at him incredulously. “You almost killed me! Where did you get that machete? Where’s your Dad? What are you doing here?”

Red was mad, scared and enraged; he grabbed the Boy by the shoulder and swiftly propelled him towards the office.

A Negro woman came out of a house nearby and ran towards Red.

She tore the Boy from Red’s grasp and yelled, “TAKE YOUR DIRTY HANDS OFF MY CHILLUN’, I’LL HAVE YOU ARRESTED FOR CHILD ABUSE.”

“And Lady--I’m having him arrested for trying to kill me with a deadly weapon!” Red huffishly argued.

Once in the office with all stories told, Red’s foreman said, “Sorry Red, looks like you’re in big trouble!”

“This dumb kid watches too much television, sees little old men, swings a machete at my head, misses, slashes a tire, and nearly drops the rim on my head and I’m the one who’s in trouble!” Red asserted.

“What proof is there of your story, Red, while she and him is two against you?” Red thought, and then said, “If the security camera is on in the daytime, then there’s the proof.”

The security tape was played back, with all present, and the shoe was

now on the other foot.

“Why did you swing that machete at Red’s head? Why did you slash our implement tire? What were you doing in our yard?” The Foreman harshly asked.

The Boy was crying as he replied, “I was trying to save his life. I was chopping weeds along the road for fun. I stopped to watch him work. I saw this little old man standing on the tire and he was aiming a bow and arrow at his head. He was pulling the bow when I swung and cut him in two.”

The Foreman stared at the Boy for a moment, and then he quietly said, “Does everybody want to walk out and forget all this ever happened?”

The Forman looked at the Boy’s mother and added, “Maybe you better take him off TV, Madam?”

The woman stomped out with the Boy in hand.

Red quipped, “That’s it?”

“What do you want to do, Red, drag the kid into court? Spill it out in court to give the town something new to talk about?”

Red cooled down, turned, walked out the door, and walked back to his job; he had a hard time finishing the job, as his hands were still shaking from the ordeal.

Red watched as the damage tire was thrown in a corner of the yard; he walked over to look at it.

What the hell was he looking for?

The blood of the little old man!

Nuts! --The whole world was going nuts!

He needed a good stiff drink after work--again!

Two days in a row, crap--what’s going on!

After work, as Red was about to go into The Red Dragon, when the little Boy approached him. “Ma says I gotta’ apologize. I’m sorry. But, I really--really did see a little old man. I really did!” The words came in a rush.

“Yea? What did he look like?” Asked Red squinting.

“Well--he had on this long black cloak, trimmed in blue. He had a crooked wooden cane in his belt. He had a bow and arrow, and the arrow seemed to have fire on the tip, though it could’ve been the sun. I really thought I was saving your life.”

Red turned an ashen white, and backed away from the bar door.

“Let’s go get a snack at the fast food, and sit in the shade and enjoy

it someplace. Go ask your Mom for permission," the Boy's face lit up, and he took off running.

Red wandered slowly down the street after him; he felt sick to his stomach, and didn't think he could eat too much.

Even a stiff drink wouldn't help him now, and he knew he had to face up to this thing.

The Boy came back joyously, and said, "Mom says I can go, but don't make a hog of myself."

Red laughed, "We'll both order the same--Ok."

The boys chatter relaxed Red, and made him feel much better, better he thought, than a drink would've.

There was this gnawing puzzle in his mind, but at the same time he was absorbing the information the little Boy was giving him from his chatter.

"How come you came to this town, if you got no relatives here?" Inquired Red.

"Ma went to court, every day for a long time, and then one day a big government truck came and loaded up everything we had an left in the night with a guardsman and we drove all night. We unloaded at a house here in Lanesboro, that Ma said they bought us, and left and never came back. We aren't allowed to write any of Ma's relatives, so I'm lonely a lot. I'm not spose' to tell you this either--you won't tell anyone I told you, will ya' mister?"

"Never," Red said emphatically, and muttered under his breath, "Secret witness!"

The Boy's sharp ears heard and he remarked, "That's the word I heard them say."

"Where does your Mom work?" Red asked.

"She couldn't get hired anyplace. She's a good cook. Makes awful good smoked fish. Will you go fishing with me--Mister? It gets awful lonely out there all day, an no one to talk to--that Ma trusts."

"Never fished much, but I can try it once again."

"Ma say's I have to fish a lot, so we got something to put on the table, Ma says. She does some guide work for sportsmen, out in the woods and at night a lot," said the little Boy.

This was becoming a bigger mystery then he had been called on to solve last night, in his nightmare.

An idea was beginning to develop in his mind, and he made a promise to go fishing with the Boy tomorrow after work.

Returning to the bar, he met an old crony at the door.

“Hey Red--where were you last night, bout’ midnight? I saw your light on and pounded on your door, but you never woke. Wanted you to go down to the back room for a snack and chew the fat.”

“Hot weather, hot work and bone tired,” Red mumbled, “same tonight, I’d say.”

Red pushed past her and climbed the stairs to his room.

It would be another hot night, but he would not sleep tonight.

In a corner of his untidy room was a stack of magazines, of every title and description; he had tossed them there for a better time to read.

Sometimes he almost caught up--almost, during the long winter months.

He would search them for solutions to his problem, but--for sure, he would not chance any sleep of any kind tonight.

Tired and totally exhausted, the next afternoon, the Boy was waiting eagerly at the bar door with two fishing poles over his shoulder.

Red went to the fast food for a healthy size meal for the both of them, with extra to spare.

Together, they walked past the Boy’s back yard and down to the river; the Boy stopped at a grassy spot where he said, he fished a lot.

“Mind if I nap awhile? I’m dead tired,” Red said with a yawn, the Boy’s face fell, which annoyed Red.

“I work hard for a living, --what did you do all day?” Red bluntly asked.

“Nothin’ important, I guess,” The Boy said, “I just thought today would be a perfect day in my life--finding a new friend.”

“Nobody’s perfect,” Red said, “not even you.”

“What’d I do wrong now?” The Boy said.

“Well--for instance--look at you picking on them little bitty fishes. Why don’t you pick on fish your own size? How much do you weigh?”

“Ninety six pounds,” the Boy responded.

“Well then, fish for a eighty pounder, and see if you can handle one about your own size.”

“How’m I ever gonna’ catch one that big?” The Boy asked.

“Like this,” Red said, as he put the tape he always carried, down

into the water, and then remarked, "Sixteen inches--Ok. We'll put the biggest hook you've got, on the line, and then put about six worms on it, like this, and then move your float so the worms just barely touch the bottom. Then I'll lay back and catch a nap. You be real quiet. Wake me only if you're getting licked by something about your own size," pretty well pleased with himself, Red laid back and was soon fast asleep.

It was an hour later; he was awakened by screaming people running up towards him from downstream, and the sight of the Boy sliding on his stomach, down the bank, grabbing at the grass.

Red got up and grabbed him and the fish pole.

He felt the tug of something mighty big on the other end, so he let go of the Boy and concentrated on bringing in that big fish, or turtle, or whatever was on that line!

Surfacing at times, he saw the huge head and mouth of the biggest catfish he'd ever saw.

It was some fifteen minutes later that he managed to wrestle it to a low place on the bank, coming out as wet as the fish.

"Did I do it--did I do it--a fish my own size!" Exclaimed the Boy.

"Looks like you sure did," Red marveled.

The onlookers took several pictures, and of course Red had to be there, barely able to hold the heavy thing for each picture.

At the Boy's house, his mother produced a scale; it read hundred and six pounds; the head was near the rafter, where it hung, and its tail touching the ground.

"I did it Ma--I did it. I caught a fish bigger than me!" Exclaimed the Boy with delight, as his mother looked at him with adoring eyes, but suddenly bent to smell the fish.

"Well--Mister Red, you all know how to teach my Boy to catch big fish, but not good fish. This'n a bottom feeder, from that hog lot up the line, that washes into the river. Ain't rained for a spell, so he was probably hungry. He got so big eaten on corn, but tain't good fish meat."

"You mean Ma, we gotta' throw him away?"

"No Son, I'll smoke him up for us to eat in the winter, when times are tough. We can't sell it to anyone. I'm still mighty proud of you Son for bringing one home that big."

"Mister Red, you're sure looking awful tired. Care to sit a spell over coffee?" The Boy's mother asking.

“Sounds good to me,” Red replied with another yawn.

They both left the Boy chatter on, exchanging smiles at his excitement and happiness.

“If you’ll excuse us a few minutes, we’ll go out and gut it afor’ the big one takes up odor,” she said, winking at Red.

Red was glad to have a few minutes to himself.

When they returned, Red was slumped in his chair fast asleep.

The lady shushed the Boy and moved the coffee cup out of Red’s reach, and then she sent the Boy off to bed.

She settled back down on a sofa in the other room.

Red was awakened by a jangling phone, but the woman was already answering it.

“No suh, I’m tied up right now. Try me tomorrow--Ok?”

“I can get out of your way,” Red said.

“No harm done. Like another coffee. You slept bout three hours. Can you visit a bit now?”

“Might as well,” replied Red, “we were never introduced, my name is Red Brillon.”

“I know you, but I’m not telling you my name. I want you to go over to the bar and ask loudly if anyone knows my name. So’s you find it out over there an that’ll keep your reputation good. Coming out here after dark ain’t no smart thing to do.”

“Why did you let me sleep then?” Red inquired.

“You looked so beat. I didn’t have the heart to wake you,” she said with a warm benevolent smile, “I thank you again for showing kindness to my Boy, especially under the circumstances. Minnesota is sure more understanding than where I came from.”

“So where do you come from?” Red asked, the woman was silent, gnawing her lip.

“Oh ya’--secret witness program,” Red answered, the woman turned white. “My Boy’s a been a blabbing to ya?”

“Not much,” Red said, “I’ll never breathe a word, and have your fate on my conscience. But, guess we can’t visit much, ifn’ nothing you can tell me;” the woman hung her head.

“That’s the trouble with all this. The government uses you and then dumps you off so’s you’re out of their hair. You got nothing to show for it but, grief and more problems. They never come near you again. It’s your

duty. Duty don't buy the chillun' no shoes, not even food. I got no one to visit with, no job, --no income. No one here likes us 'Niggers', as they call us behind our backs. I freeze in the winter and rot in the summer. My Boy has to suffer too. Las six months or so, he's been talking an readin' engine books and watchn' you work. Cause he says, he wants to be a mechanic. But, you know kids can change as they grow up so's whose to know?"

She babbled on till finally drying her tears, she said, "Sorry Mister Red, guess first time since I come up here. I could talk to anyone, open like. Maybe--you best be gettin' home while the neighbors are gone. Yet--lessen they have something to talk about. I'se black and you're white, you know."

"So I've noticed," Red said dryly, and rose to go, extended his hand, and shook hers.

Radiance warmed him from her soft, delicate touch, and he didn't want to let it go; to cover it, he clasped his other hand over hers and said, "Keep the ole' chin up, and you'll catch your big one too!"

"You'll have to teach me, if I ever do. Every hook I throw out, hooks snags."

Red wandered back to his room and lays down on the bed.

"To hell with the nightmares, other people got real troubles, right under my nose."

The last thinking he was doing was about that pool of, what could it be, sulfuric acid, that he better not step in.

## CHAPTER 4 - - THE SECOND PUZZLE

Red stepped into the bright sun from the dimly lit room; he was squinting, because the bright light was hurting his eye's.

After a while he was able to make out his surroundings; he was standing at the edge of a forest, and a short distance in front of him was a deep chasm, it seemed to extent to the horizon in both directions.

He turned when he heard a voice behind him. "So you solved the first puzzle. Now you must solve the second puzzle."

There again was the old man; he was standing where Red had exited from the room of elements, but there was no longer a door!

The only thing he saw was a very large oak tree where the door should be!

The old man spoke, "Behold the puzzle! For you must free the little one."

Red looked to where the old man was pointing.

There--way out in the middle of the chasm was a small plateau; it was cut off from the mainland by the deep chasm.

It was a barren plateau, about twenty feet across at the widest point and there in the middle stood a small Negro Boy crying.

The old man continued, "You have until Sol retires! If you fail, then all three of you are doomed! Believe not your eyes, and have faith in your feet, for only those who are unafraid will persevere. I leave you something to help you see," and then, he was gone; only a small sack of flour remained where he once was.

Red walked to the edge of the chasm and peered over the edge; it was very deep, so deep he could barely see the bottom!

He just stood there, as he didn't know what to do; this task is impossible!

There is no way that he could see to get to the plateau and rescue the Boy.

Red looked over to where the Boy was; he waved and shouted to him, but it did no good, as it was too far.

Red now walked along the edge of the chasm, trying to find a spot that was closer to the plateau.

There--just up ahead was a ledge that seemed to jut out to the Plateau; Red walked over to the ledge.

There besides the ledge was a large flat white rock with an inscription on it, 'ONLY THOSE WHO BELIEVE NOT WHAT THEY SEE, BUT ARE BRAVE ENOUGH TO STEP OUT, WILL CROSS THIS BRIDGE'.

Red looked out passed the stone tablet and saw nothing but space.

"What does this mean? The old man told me the same thing," Red thought.

"Do I need to become suicidal to see and walk across the bridge? This is NUT'S! I'm not about to become suicidal. So there must be another meaning, but what is it?" Red asked himself.

Red sat down and looked across the now shorter span to the small Boy, who was also sitting, on the other side; the Boy seeing Red, waved.

Red waved and shouted, "I'LL BE OVER IN FEW MINUTES."

Red sat back down to think this out; he knew that there was a solution, because there was a solution to the room of elements.

The clues were in the room and what the old man told him.

"So the clues to this puzzle are here in front of me, I've just got to figure out what they are and what they mean," Red said to himself, taking stock of what he already knew.

First, the old man said, don't believe what you see and have faith in your feet.

Second, the stone tablet say's almost the same thing.

Red looked back to where he had seen the old man and there, sat the sack of flour; now this was very puzzling, and then he remembered something that the old had man had said just before he vanished, "I leave you something to help you see."

Red got up and walked over to the sack of flour, and as he walked, he thought to himself, "This has to be a clue, but how can a sack of flour help me to see better?"

As Red walked back to the ledge with the sack of flour, he could not think of a way flour can help someone see better.

When Red got back to the ledge he sat back down to do some more thinking.

Sol was now at its zenith, and Red knew his time was half gone, and he was hungry; was this flour for him to eat?

Boy--he would love a piece of bread with butter and honey. The more he thought of the bread and honey, the hungrier he got.

Red looked around for a way to make bread, but the more he thought of how it was made, the harder it seemed to make; he had no other ingredients and no oven in which to bake it in.

“No--this won’t do! This flour is a clue and it wasn’t meant for me to eat.”

His thoughts returned to the words ‘BELIEVE NOT WHAT THEY SEE’. “This must be a clue, but to what?”

Red sat there thinking and thinking; his thoughts kept returning to the sack of flour and the words ‘BELIEVE NOT WHAT THEY SEE’.

The more he thought the less sense it all made.

Red just couldn’t figure this puzzle out; he knew it had something to do with the sack of flour and the words ‘BELIEVE NOT WHAT THEY SEE’, and then he had an inspiration! The old man had said, ‘Have faith in your feet!’

Red said to himself, “My feet were the answer to the last puzzle, could they also be the answer to this one? The flour, how does it figure into the puzzle?”

Red picked up the sack and walked to the ledge, and looked over to the little Boy, who was now sitting in the center of the plateau.

Red said, repeating the words, “Believe not what you see, but have faith in your feet.”

Red shaking his head, saying aloud, “Believe not what I see! Does that mean there isn’t a little Boy over there! That’s NUT’S! The Boy is real and he’s there, otherwise why would I have to try to rescue him? There’s an answer somewhere. I’ve just got to find it!”

Red was standing at the very edge of the ledge, and then he opened the sack of flour and reached in grabbing a handful of the fine white powdery stuff.

Removing his hand, he looked at his hand, now white, and his closed fist, which held a small amount of the flour.

“Yes this is flour alright,” he remarked, as he held his closed fist to his nose, and suddenly he sneezed when some of the flour got into his nose; his fist opened and the fine white flour was airborne.

Red watch as the flour settled to the ground, and stared in awe as a pathway appeared before him; the flour had made the path become visible as it settled.

Red shouted with joy as he had found the solution to the puzzle, now it all made sense; the flour made what was invisible, visible.

If he would of had faith in his feet and not believed his eyes, he could've just walked out from the ledge and over to where the little Boy was; the bridge was there all the time, he just couldn't see it.

Now with the help of this sack of flour, he'll be to the Boy in no time.

So using the flour, Red slowly walked out on to the bridge and headed to the plateau.

When Red got to the plateau and the little Boy came running over to him, he was smiling at Red as he said, "I just knew you would come for me."

Red bent down and hugs the little Boy saying, "You think I would leave you here? Look, old Sol is getting ready to retire for the day. We must hurry and get back before it gets dark, else I can't see the bridge and we'll fall off," so, Red and the little Boy headed back to the ledge and forest.

After they got back, Red said, "My name's Red. What's your name and where do you live?"

"My name is Joey and I'm lost! I want my Mother and I want to go home," The little Boy replied, then, he started to cry again.

Red felt sorry for the little tyke and said, "I'm hungry, how about you," Red was hoping that, talking about food might take the little boys thoughts of home, away.

Joey stopped crying and looked at Red saying, "I'm hungry too!"

"I'm really sorry," Red said to him, and looking sad he said, "I have nothing for us to eat. Maybe we can find something to eat in the forest."

And so, Red and Joey started to walk down a path that led into the forest.

In fact, it was the same path the led across the bridge to the plateau.

Red though, maybe this is how Joey got out on the plateau in the first place, and figured, maybe this path might lead to a town or farm.

After walking for a while, they came to a lake; it was a very large lake, as Red couldn't see the other side, and the path that they were using led off around the lake to the north.

By now, Red and Joey were getting very hungry.

Red now knew that he wouldn't reach any town or farm before dark, as Sol had already retired and his wife Luna was arising, so Red figured best thing to do was to make camp here for the night and continue their journey tomorrow, besides, both he and Joey were in need of food.

Red gathered an arm full of dry twigs and branches to make a fire.

Red saved a long thin branch, and using his dagger, he began to carve a fishing pole; Joey watched intently as Red carved.

Finally, Red was finished, he then withdrew a string and a large thin bone from his pouch; Red smiled at Joey as he strung the line around the carved branch several times.

“Shall we see what we can catch?” Red asking Joey.

“I hope it’s a whopper! As I can eat a horse,” Joey replied with a big smile.

Red and Joey walked down to the lakeshore.

The full brightness of Luna made the lake shine; she was now high in the sky and lit up the forest and beach like daytime.

Red flung the line out into the lake; the bone, with a big red and black bug Red had found, went plunk as it hit the water.

Red looked at Joy and said, “You watch. Fish feed high in the lake on nights like tonight, as they can see bugs and such. For them its dinner time, and I hope if we’re lucky, it will be dinner for us as well,” Joey just smiled back.

After a while, Red looked at Joey sitting on the beach, he got an idea, and said to Joey, “How would you like to run this fishing pole? As I can’t seem to make it work, maybe you can do better;” Joey jumped up and said, “I sure can. I’ll hook us a whopper.”

Red smiled as he handed the pole to Joey. “You had better or we’ll be going to bed hungry.”

Red then walked back to where he had laid the pile of twigs and branches.

He then found some large stones and dug a depression in the sand, and then he placed the stones in a circle around the depression, after which he placed some twigs and branches inside; this was going to be their campfire for tonight.

After he sprinkled some fine grains of black powder, from the second pouch, on to the twigs, he used the back of his dagger and a piece of flint he had found, and struck the flint several times; each time a large red hot spark flew and landed in the pile, it went snap and hiss, as it set off a grain of black powder, and after several tries, he had a fire going and was ready for dinner.

Red looked over to Joey, who was still trying to catch something.

Red now laid back and looking at the clear night sky with all the

stars, he fell off to sleep.

Red awoke with a Negro woman shaking him saying, "Mister Red--wake up--wake up," Red still half asleep and groggy, was looking into the face of the Negro woman, whom he had visited with last evening.

"What time is it?"

The woman in a state of anxiety, responded, "its ten thirty Sunday morn. Where's Joey? I thought he might be here with you!"

Red now coming around said, "I haven't seen him since yesterday."

Red looked into the woman's face as tears formed and she sobbed, "I just know somethin' bad has happen to him and I'll never see him again."

## CHAPTER 5 - - COUNTY FAIR

Getting up Red said, "He didn't go fishing I hope. If he fell in the river, we'll never find how far downstream he's gotten by now," they looked at each other, the deep anguish showing in each other's eyes.

Red got his act together first. "Where was he yesterday?"

"We went to the county fair," She replied, "he wanted to stay. A neighbor boy said he could ride home with him. But I called them, and they said they couldn't find him, and they had to leave. I'm afraid to go there and look for him myself. I don't know where to start."

"We'll start there. You can ride with me."

Walking into the fair, they heard a shout, and Joey came running up to his mother and threw his arms around her.

"Look Maw--I earned five dollars for you, watching a man's tool box for him all night, So no one would steal anything from it. Ain't that great? Ain't that great, Mister Red?" Declared Joey in jubilation.

"You scared us both by not coming home last night. Now Mister Red drove me all the way down here fo' nuthin'."

"What you mean for nothing!" Red exclaimed, "Here the boy is safe and sound!"

By this time, both the mother and the boy were looking crest fallen.

"So--let's enjoy the fair together. It's such a beautiful day, it's early and it's Sunday, so who has to be anywhere?"

"You're always so good about everything," the lady said, as she wipes a tear from her eye.

So, they wandered about kidding, laughing, teasing the poultry, rabbits, calves and sheep.

The midway began to awaken as they cut across it.

Red stopped outside of a tent, on which it said, 'FORTUNES TOLD'.

"C'mon--Mister Red, I'll read your palm fo' you, fo' free. As dis stuff is all bunk anyways an you can save yu's money."

Red smiled down at the surprise on the Negro lady's face.

"Wait for me."

Inside, the seated gypsy stared into her glass ball and her brow became a mass of wrinkles as she spoke, "I see your path crossing a tall, slender, black woman. I see you doing battle with the underworlds. A desperate

battle of mind, sword and space. I--I--don't know how to describe this all—Mister. What is going on in your life? It's frightening me!"

"Don't let it bother you. I've survived so far. But, I was hoping you would be able to tell me something I don't already know. Look ahead in that ball, am I still around next year?"

The woman took his hand and opened it, to stare at the palm.

"You have a long lifeline. Your good fortunes are not wealth, but friendship, good times and changing moments."

She looked back into the crystal ball and said, "Who is this mean little old man--threatening me?"

She backed away from the ball and declared, "He's wearing a black cloak trimmed in blue, carrying a crooked cane! What's this? He's got a crossbow or something, and he's pointing it at me!"

She suddenly threw herself on the grass floor of the tent.

Red grabbed her and held her close to him; she was tense and shaking, staring at the ball.

Again, there was a flame flicking from the point of the arrow, pointing straight at him; Red threw himself under the table, clutching the slender gypsy woman close, waiting, but nothing happened.

Finally--rising cautiously, he saw only the glass sphere in its simple everyday look; as it would seem to anyone.

He looked down at the gypsy woman and said, "Quite a show--lady. What do I owe you?" Her lips were quivering as she spoke, "I'm scared! What's going on that I should know about?"

"I don't honestly know," Red replied, "but, I'll try and keep you out of it, and hope I can let you know when I get to the bottom of all this. Is twenty dollars enough?"

He took the card the lady handed him; it read, 'Madame Twine - Readings'.

"Calm down--now--this is all my problem. Sorry to upset you. If I need to, I'll call you, --someplace--?"

"My mother lives here and also does readings--she will answer."

Red gave her another hug to reassure her, and then he stepped out into the bright sunshine of the grounds.

Joey's friend was there, and Red peeled off a ten from the roll of bills he took from his pocket, giving it to Joey and telling him, "You two go have some fun, and your mother and I will visit."

Red led the woman to the old bleachers, walked to the highest level and sat down; from there, he could see the whole fairgrounds.

He patted the space next to him and she dutifully sat down.

There was concern on her face as she peered at him. "Are youse' alright Mister Red? I knows there's sompin' not going right fo' youse', Mister Red. I'se just all confused about lots of things."

Red said nothing for a while, trying to collect his thoughts, until finally, he wilted under her penetrating gaze and said, "I don't rightly know where to start."

The woman took his hand, turning it over she looked at his palm and Red smiled.

"Well, --go ahead and read it. See what you come up with in this profession. It'll be worth twenty dollars to you too!"

"You paid her twenty dollars fo' that nonsense, and it just upset youse'."

"Give me your best," Red shot back defensively.

She looked long and seriously at his palm, and then tells him, "Youse' got a long lifeline, thank God. But, I don't sees nothing to be frightening to a big man likes youse', cept' youse' own doins' and makin' ups."

She held his hand in her two and looked at him with real concern; Red looked at the heavyset woman, estimating her weight at like 350 pounds.

"You do scouting for hunters, in the woods, at night, all year long?"

"Fo' money, Mister Red. But, wese" talking about youse'. I got my boy back, safe and sound, thanks to youse'. I'se got no problems. Can't I'se do nothin' to help back, --even listen?"

Red studied her awhile and said, "Well, you got competition. The fortune teller said my paths were to cross with a slender Negro woman."

The woman released his hand and affirms, "This isn't me Mister Red. Normally, I'se real slender, like Joey. But, men likes fat woman. So, I'se put on all this weight to invite men. I'se learned a lot about game when living in the Louisiana bayous. I'se got a reputation for helping men get game. I knows the trails, where to look. The sol-lunar tables are in my head. We had to find game or starve. I knows I'se a joke at the bars. But, I'se a good record for success, and I'se do help them get trophies. That big carp didn't hurt my reputation none--no how. They think you got it cause of me. I'se haven't set no one straight, cause they won't believe me, or you

—anyways, God helps me so many times. I'se don't knows what I'se do without him. I'se knows I'se is mysterious to you. But Mister Red, why are you going under another name? Youse' billfold was open on the table, when I'se rushed in this morning. Youse' ought to lock youse' door at night. Youse' got the name Brillion for a las name. That's not how I'se and others knows youse'. An this little old man stuff. Joey ain't never tol me a lie befo'. How come he's done got somthin' going on, I'se ain't a part of? I'se scared-- much as I'se like youse'."

"Joey isn't lying," Red said softly, "I seen the little old man myself. I don't know what it all means, or what it all adds up to. The fortuneteller lady seen him, she's scared stiff. The little man tried to kill me again in there. I met him in my nightmares. Now he's out in my real life. I think he is trying to kill me in real life, cause he can't get me in my nightmares. I had Joey in my nightmare last night. I don't know where it will all end, I truly don't. I was raised by foster parents. My wonderful foster mother died when I was twelve. So, I asked her husband if I could use their name, because I hurt so much to lose her. I respected her so much and he understood. I have to use my family name for legal work, as that's who I really am, no matter how I want to be something else. Guess I got ta' face the past somehow, someway, sometime. I'm sorry to involve you, or anyone else, but what can I do? If you want to help me, give me ah' answer."

"Youse' don't spose there are aliens from some UFO?"

"You tell me, I'm open to any suggestion--of any kind."

"I can't tell youse' nothin' much. I'se not educated good enough. I'se can only tell youse' this. Mister Red, I'se don't want to marry no white man or even fall in love with one. I'se wants to keep Joey and me true to our color and race. But, youse' become a--a--close family friend, as ever I'se opened up to. I'se do whatever youse' need to help youse'. With my hands, my feet, my talents, an--my--eart'. And Joey too, so all I'se can say is here wese' is and that's where youse' is. I'se beginning to realize wese' people all got to live together, in whatever way life is dished out to us. No matter who, what, where wese' is. Most all problems is made by us, ourselves, cause of things wese' do or did. I'se done say youse' made this problem youself. But please, Mister Red, don't let it get the best of youse', when we need youse'. We want to help all wese' are able. It's always someone else that keeps us going thru the bad times. If it's just us, wese' just fold up and give up right off. Cause with nothin' and no one to care for, wese' just say, 'the ell with it all'. Put all this youse' way, or some other way, it'll be a clue to

solving youse' problems," she hung her head and told Red, "guess youse' think I'se is trying to talk to youse' like I'se talk to Joey. Scold me if I'se need it."

"Guess we both need a good cup of coffee," Red said, standing up and looking down at her so far below, now on the next row of seats, "and we watch any entertainment, you sit beside me, till we integrate this whole silly town!"

"Youse' ain't listening worth a darn, Mister Red," She muttered under her breath!

## CHAPTER 6 - - THE THIRD PUZZLE

She said, "My name is April Brown," as she slowly edged her way to the isle.

Red stood there watching, and then he started to follow saying, "I'm sorry. Please wait! I didn't mean it the way it sounded. What I meant was, I would like to sit with you tonight in the grandstand. That's if you don't mind. The entertainment is on me, Joey can come too."

He now had reached her and she looked at him saying, "Sure--I'se hope no one will makin' up bad stories about us."

Red looked at her and replied, "So what! Let them say anything they want. I really want to do this," she smiled at him as they walked out of the empty grandstand and on to the midway.

Now Joey and his friend Billy were having a ball going on all the rides and sampling all the food.

It was about three in the afternoon when April said to Red, "I'se better go and find Joey, befo' he gets sick on all the food around here. Else wese' won't be a goin' to the show tonight."

Red spotted a sideshow that he wanted to see, and so, he told April that he will be inside of that tent, and after she had found Joey, to return and get him; after watching her walk away, Red went inside the sideshow tent.

Inside this tent, there were lots of old style movie machines; each one had a peephole window and a coin slot.

Now some of them were X rated, and some Red didn't recognize.

An old man wearing a carnival style black suit, with blue buttons and the lapels with blue piping, came over and said, "I think I've got just the movie for you."

Red looked at him, as he stood there leaning on an old wooden cane.

The old man was smiling and repeated, "I have a movie just for you to see."

A chill ran down Red's back, because this guy somehow looked familiar.

The old man still smiling, once more said, "Well--how about it? I've got, I think, just the show for you."

Red now coming around, saying, "Yeah--sure let's see it."

The old man took him over to one of the movie machines and said,

“This one’s just for you.”

The machine was brightly chromed with gold trim and covered with carved images of nude women.

Red inserted four quarters into the coin slot, and bent over and looked into the viewing hood.

Lights flashed and a kaleidoscope of brilliant colored images danced in front of him; it was hypnotic, and Red was drawn into the kaleidoscope.

The brightly colored lights were dancing all around him and he felt as if he was falling, and falling, and falling, never reaching the bottom, if in fact, there was one.

The colored lights surrounded him and seem to spin him, he had no sense of up or down; he felt like he was falling in a loop, not going anywhere.

Then as quickly as the images came they were gone, and Red was standing in a beautiful meadow surrounded by flowers.

The aroma was so sweet that it was almost nauseating.

The sky was a deep shade of blue and the sun was shining through the branches of a beautiful tree with flowers; the beams of light shining through the branches, cast shadows that danced with the branches as they moved to the gentle breeze that blew.

The grass was a deep green, and felt soft and cool unlike that of a deep pile carpet.

Red felt very tired, and he wanted to lie down on this wonderful grass.

Red fell to his knees and felt the grass with his hand and then lies down and closes his eyes; he thought this place just has to be heaven, because he knew of no place on earth that was this beautiful.

Red said to himself, as he lay there, “If I’m dreaming, never let me awake. For here is where I want to remain,” when suddenly, Red heard the voice of the old man inside his head, “you must now escape from the puzzle of entrapment. You must rely on your friends, for only they can help you to escape. If not, then you are doomed.”

Red opened his eyes and the voice was gone.

Red thought he was hearing things and dismissed the voice.

Red again closed his eyes and fell off into a wonderful sleep as the cool breeze blew over him, and the wonderful soft green grass felt so nice.

Red was awaken by a soft voice saying, “Come to me and I’ll show you such wondrous things that you may never again experience.”

Red opened his eyes to see a beautiful black woman standing before him; her black body glistened in the sunlight.

She was tall and slender; her breasts were full and bare.

She was the most perfect woman he had ever seen, and then another woman stepped out of a beam of sunlight; she was white, and just as beautiful.

She had long blond hair and bright blue eyes; her breasts were also full and bare.

Now, both women knelt down besides Red, and while the white woman was caressing his body the Negro woman softly spoke in his ear, "Come with us," and then, each woman, took one of his hands and helped him up; their hands were soft in his.

Red got to his feet and the women led him down a path that led into the forest.

The forest was filled with wondrous things; no man would ever die or starve here, for food was everywhere.

Red saw no dangerous animals or plants, and as they walked, Red saw a blackberry bush, which was covered with the biggest blackberries that he had ever seen.

The white woman picked one and smiled as she ate it.

The black woman picked one and placed it on Red's lips.

He opened his mouth and drew the blackberry in on his tongue, it felt cool and juicy; he bit down and his mouth was filled with sweet juice, it tasted so good that he pick another one and ate it.

He was about to pick a third, when the white woman took his hand and led him once more down the path; the black woman was already walking down the path ahead of them.

Soon they came to a small river; it wasn't a big river, only about ten feet or so across, and in the water, there were large flat stones every few feet apart, just right for hopping from stone to stone, to cross.

The white woman started across by hopping from steppingstone to steppingstone.

The black woman motioned for Red to follow, as she started across.

Red hopped to the first stone as he followed the two women, and as he continued to cross, a small brightly colored fish jumped out of the water and as it reentered the water, a few ripples radiated in an outward circle.

When he got to about the center of the river, he paused, bent down

and looked into the water, and there he saw several of the brightly colored fish swimming to and fro; he reach in, to touch one, they all scattered with one momentarily touching his hand in its haste to flee.

Red smiled as he withdrew his hand; he then stood up and proceeded to follow the two women.

Red followed the women for some time, only stopping long enough to sample the large luscious fruits and berries.

Finally, they came to another open meadow, not unlike the one from where, he had started.

It was surrounded by trees and clumps of red, white, yellow and blue flowers, that were everywhere.

Again, the breeze carried the sweet aroma of the flowers.

They were now in the middle of this meadow.

The two women sat down in the cool green grass and motion for Red to do the same; Red dropped to his knees by the white women, then, he lay down beside her.

The black woman began to caress his body while the white woman blew into his ear, and then she began to lick his neck, and finally, she got to his lips; her lips were soft as they kissed.

Red closed his eyes, as he was enjoying every minute of this.

As they continued to kiss, she slid her body onto his, her breasts were firm as she lay on top of him, and then he reach and touched them and felt their fullness as he continued kissing her; this indeed was heaven.

The grass was cool and soft as the three of them made love and rolled about.

It was now starting to get dusk as the sun began to cast long shadows through the meadow, and as the late evening dusk gave way to darkness, Red and the two women continued to make love until well after the moon had risen, then both women laid down, one on each side him, and they all fell off to sleep.

Red was jolted awake by the voice of the old man inside his head, "BEWARE OF THE ENTRAPMENT!"

Red abruptly sat up; the two women were gone and he was alone in the meadow, and the sun was again up.

He looked around and saw only trees, clumps of flowers, and the path leading into the forest, and so, Red got up and started down the path, and as soon as Red was in the forest, he found more of the luscious food to

eat; he ate his fill and set off to find the two women.

After walking for a while, he came to another small brook it made a gurgling sound, as the water ran over the colored rocks and pebbles.

He was thirsty, so he knelt down, reaching in with his hands, he withdrew some of the clear water; it was cool and good as he drank.

He got up, and jumped across the small brook and continued to follow the path, to where ever it led.

After a while, Red came upon another meadow with two grazing deer, and as he entered the meadow, the deer looked up at him; they showed no fear, as they stood there eyeing him.

As Red slowly walked towards them, they just stood there, still showing no fear, and when Red was about two feet from the closest one, he bent down, plucked a hand full of grass, and held it out to the deer; the deer reached for the grass and moved closer to smell it.

Red slowly moved to the deer until the deer's nose was in the outstretched hand full of grass; the deer sniffed it a couple of times and opened its mouth, and then using its tongue, the deer drew the grass from Red's outstretched hand, into its mouth.

Red felt its soft muzzle and moved in to pet its head and pat it on the side of the neck; Red couldn't believe he was doing this, as the deer now was muzzling him, looking for more food.

Then the other deer came over, also looking for treats, now Red was surrounded by both deer muzzling him for food.

Red petted both of them and then started to move away towards the forest; both deer started to follow him.

After Red had entered the forest, he looked back and both deer had vanished!

Red stopped and scanned the meadow, but the deer were gone; Red figured that they had gone elsewhere to graze, so he turned and started to look for the two women.

Red walked for a long while, still following the path, but nowhere were the women to be found.

Then he came to yet another small river with stepping-stones for crossing.

As Red stepped out on to the first stone a small brightly colored fish, jumped out of the water; Red now stopped dead in his tracks!

Red studied the river and it looked familiar; it looked just like the

one he had crossed yesterday, including the fish!

That meadow with the deer; now it also seemed familiar!

Red turned around and returned to the side of the river from which he had started, and then started back down the path that led back to the meadow.

As Red approached the blackberry bush, two bears were eating the berries; Red stopped and froze!

The first bear, which was black, paused and looked at Red; the other bear, which was very light brown, almost blond, also stopped eating and looked at Red.

Fear gripped Red as he just stood there, he wanted to turn and run, but his feet wouldn't move; it was as if they were glued to the ground.

Red now knew he was dead as the light brown bear started to approach him; it came to within eight feet.

Then the black one followed and it also stopped within eight feet of Red.

There they were, Red and the two bears looking at each other, eye to eye, when suddenly, both bears reared up on their hind legs, they towered over Red, as they stood there waving their massive paws; Red closed his eyes, waiting for the deathblow, but it never came!

When Red opened his eyes, both bears were gone, vanished!

Red spun around, looking for the bears, but they were nowhere to be found; he was alone again.

Red gave a sigh of relief and continued down the path to the meadow.

When he got to the edge of the meadow, he walked to the center and stopped, and slowly turned and studied the area; it looked very familiar.

The meadow was surrounded by flowers, just like the meadow from which he had started from yesterday.

Red stood there in shock, as the words he had heard in his head began to make sense; he was caught in a trap!

He was going in circles, no beginning--no ending; was this to be his final fate?

Is this his netherworld?

Had he finally not been able to solve the puzzle?

If this was the netherworld, then where is Draco the dragon?

For, he was also in netherworld.

Red sat down and put his head in his hands; this was too much--for he had no idea what to do.

Red now knew that this was another puzzle, but he didn't have any clues in which to solve it.

How much time was he allotted?

The other puzzles had an allotted time frame in which to solve them.

Had he missed all of these important pieces of the puzzle?

Had the time ran out on him and he was now forever doomed, to go in circles here, for the rest of his life?

Red cussed himself for being so stupid and giving in to the flesh, because now, he figured that the two women were there to distract him and keep him from discovering the clues to the puzzle.

Red was devastated as he lay back on the grass.

Red now knew that, this was his heaven and hell all rolled into one.

Red closed his eyes, as a tear formed and ran down his cheek.

Red thought back to the last puzzle and little Joey; he wondered if the little tyke was still fishing, trying to catch that whopper, and as he fell off to sleep, the words, "It's always someone else that keeps us going thru the bad times. If it's just us, we'd just fold up and give up right off. Cause with nothin' and no one to care for, we'd just say the ell' with it all," running through his head.

"Mister Red--please wake up," echoed in his head, Red opened his eyes and looked into the tear stained eyes of little Joey standing by his bed.

April, seeing Red coming around, went to the door of the room and waved to someone; soon a nurse came in and stood by his bed and said, "How do you feel--sir?"

Red looked into her face with confusion and replied slowly, "Ok--I think."

The nurse then pushed a button to summon the Doctor, smiled and said, "The Doctor will be here in few minutes. Just rest for now."

April and Joey standing on the other side of his bed, were smiling.

April picking up his hand, and wiping a tear from her eye with the other said, "We thought we had lost you. You gave us a scare, when we came back to the tent and found you lying on the ground unconscious."

Red dazed and confused softly said, as speaking now seemed difficult, "Where I'm I?"

"You're in the Hospital," April answered, "the Doctors think you may have had a small stroke. You were in a coma for about three days."

“Stroke--three days!” Red exclaimed; he was now totally confused and concerned, and then the Doctor walked in and said, “Mister Brillion, I’m Doctor Mason. Welcome back to this world. It was touch and go for a while. The X-rays show that you had a mild stroke. With proper care and some medication, you should be ok in about five weeks. Now let’s take another look at you.”

The nurse directed both April and Joey to leave the room, after which she closed the door and drew the curtains around the bed; as April and Joey walked to the waiting area, the Doctor began to examine Red.

## CHAPTER 7 - - GET IT DOWN IN BLACK & WHITE

The longer the Doctor examined Red, the more puzzled he looked, until finally, he got the charts at the foot of Red's bed and studied them; he looked at Red a long time.

"Do you have a twin Brother?" He asked.

"Of course not," Red replied, "why?"

"Well it's like I'm examining a totally different person. There seems to be absolutely nothing wrong with you. You're in perfect health, except for some ravages of alcohol. I assume you're a hard drinker, not a heavy drinker."

"I can go then, don't need no five weeks of rest?"

"Oh no, I need to take another x-ray and other tests to verify these here findings, but it is certainly strange. What were you doing at that fair? The lady and the boy said they thought you were seeing a sideshow, but now that you're conscious, I want to hear your side of this."

"That was what I went in there for. Looking at old shows, well, that's the last thing I remember. I guess I can't really fill you in on all the story. It's too unusual, so I just want to hear your results and I'll be on my way," Red said with a look of anticipation.

"We don't have another UFO story here in the making, do we?"  
Asked the Doctor looking wary.

"What gave you that idea?"

"The old Red Dragon Inn had some weird goings on back in the old days when my father was a physician in the town. I discounted them as I grew up, but I was able to get a part of the story from your lady friend when I told her I needed more and more information, as you didn't respond. I showed no surprise, as like I've said, I'd been broken into such stories from my childhood, and she began to open up to me. So..."

"Damn," Red said, "I don't want her getting involved!"

"My Father brought in the Catholic Church to stem some of the problems he faced, they're not afraid to face the weird and the unbelievable. You may want to resort to that, if you are concerned about your good friends."

"I'm not a Catholic."

"But the black lady and her son are. They are listed here under next of kin, as they said they knew no one to put there."

The Doctor left and the nurse returned.

“Did a Priest come into visit me when I was out those three days?”

“Why yes, they prayed over you, probably what brought you out. I thought you were stone cold out of it, the first time I saw you. But here you are and I’m supposed to keep you from leaving, till some final tests are made. You aren’t going to give me any trouble, are you? Seeing you look pretty spry. Everyone wants to go home from here, you know. I’ll send your friends back in.”

There was a happy, relieved look on April’s face, and Joey was also smiling; the Doctor says you’re much better,” April said, “I’m sure glad of that.”

“But I got to stay here at least another day. And I didn’t know you were Catholic,” said Red with a somber expression.

“You white people ain’t goner’ hold that agin’ me too, are you?” April asking, looking crestfallen, “I don’t go to church here, but back in the bayous we done went sometimes to a little congregation.”

“No, I appreciate your concern for me, but I surely don’t want you getting involved in my weird problems,” said an appreciative Red, and then with a sigh he added, “We missed the grand show.”

“Boy, I’m sure glad the carnival left town, an all that foolishness will maybe go away. Kin’ me an Joey go now, I ain’t took care of my house in three days and there could be things going wrong?”

“Sure go ahead, when I’m back in good shape again I’ll be seeing you,” Red told her.

After they left, Red lay puzzling over the puzzle that was evidently thrown at him in this last experience.

If the two women, the two deer and the two bears were all the same entity in different forms, then what was the purpose of it all anyway?

He didn’t have any serious white girl friends, and April evidently didn’t want to be serious about him, so how could he be getting into an entanglement?

Fearing the worst, he decided he would not go to sleep again tonight, after he had been out for three days, he didn’t need any rest anyway.

About midnight a nurse came in and finding him awake, asked if he wanted a sleeping pill.

“Good grief no,” Red harshly told her, and then requested, “Have

you got something to keep me awake? I get bad nightmares so I don't want to go to sleep, and I really don't need sleep."

"I could hook you a pot of coffee from the nurses lunch room, would that make you feel better?"

"I'd even feel good about you if you made it extra strong!"

Her flashlight clicked out and the door closed; Red turned the light on and read everything in sight until she returned.

"Great," he said, "and now you can find me some books and magazines to while away the night. Bring a big pot of coffee in the morning again before you go off your shift. And how about dinner at Wong's after I get out of here, to repay you for being so considerate."

"Mister Brillion, I'm a married woman, but thank you anyway. It has been a long time, since someone real wide awake asked me for a date," She giggled.

The coffee kept his mind alert and he read cautiously.

Evidently facing the possibility of the old man striking again was lessened by being wary of him and giving him no opportunity to strike.

Just what was it about the place he lived in, that it was connected with this weird world; maybe he should buy the jinxed thing, tear it down and plant grass on its grave.

About 2AM, the telephone beside his bed rang, and after answering, it was April.

"For heaven's sake, what are you doing calling me this time of night? I might have been asleep," Red hotly answering.

"But you weren't, were you Red? I just somehow knows you ain't sleeping well. Cause I ain't sleepin' well either. I'se got this strange thought running thru my mind that youse' been makin' love to a tall, slender, black lady. Are you behaving youse' self, up there in that hospital?"

"Who wants to know?" Red teased.

"Youse' are avoiding the question, like men always do when they's stark raving guilty!"

"How could I possibly be doing something like that right here in this hospital?"

"There youse' go avoiding the question. Say yes or no!" Red didn't answer right away and "Well" came in his ear.

"I guess I been fantasizing about you all slim and beautiful, and how you would look then, but I didn't think it would go out to you without a

telephone connection."

"That's not a true description of what's goin' on--is it?" April huffishly asked.

"It has to do with one of these nightmares again, so don't be so hard on me," explained Red.

"I heard youse' set a cup down, what are youse' drinking this time of night?"

"The nurse brought me a pot of coffee."

"At 2AM?"

"A while ago."

"And?"

"And what?"

"Was that all there was to it?" April asked sounding skeptical.

"I tried to make a date with her," Red pointedly replied, and then huffishly said, "April Brown, you said you didn't want nothing to do with no white man. So what's wrong with that?"

"Did she accept?"

"No."

"Well, I'se ain't letting you out of my life till these weird things goin' on are settled. And youse' ain't helping none by bringing in new problems, are youse'?"

"Probably not. But I didn't know you cared."

"I care about youse' as a dear friend," April told him sounding sincere.

"Only cause you ain't got a dozen black, dear friends."

"Youse' ain't goner' get rid of me trying to hit me low. Youse' need my help in this matter, even if it's only a prayer," April harshly retorted.

"You good Negroes are awful darn persistent, I'll admit," remarked Red in a sardonic tone.

"An youse' white people leave youse' best friends, soon as a few nasty remarks are made. Youse' need to get some soul," April flatly told him in rebuff.

"Sing me a song then, I got all night to listen an nothing to do but stay awake."

"So youse' afraid to go to sleep cause youse' might have nightmares, ain't youse'?" Asked April in a hard accusing tone.

"The Doctor says he can't find nothing wrong with me. It was that nasty little old man, who put me thru this. And as soon as the spell was

**broken, I was free of all the problems. They weren't real, they are from another world somehow, and if I can stay in the real world, I'll be alright I think."**

**"How can something from another world affect us that's real in this world?"**

**"I don't know April, I just don't know."**

**"I think wes' is got to get this problem down in black and white!"**

## CHAPTER 8 - - CRAZY

“How do you mean--on paper? I’m not that good at writing!” Red replied.

April nodding her head, saying, “If that’s what it will take to get you’n sane again, then so’s be it.”

Red raised his brow, saying, “You think I’m insane, don’t you? Well--I’m not! I’m as sane as you!”

“Peoples just don’t goin’ around tellin’ other peoples about little old men whose taken them’s to other places that don’t exist!” Said April looking stern.

Red getting upset declared, “I didn’t imagine him! This guy does really exist! Ask Joey--he’ll tell you, because he seen him too. So did the gypsy fortuneteller at the fair! Now all of these people couldn’t have imagined the same guy, now could they?”

April biting her lip, sat quietly as she contemplates her answer, until finally she says, “First, Joey’s a little boy with a lot of imagination. I’s thinks he’s over hears youse’ talking to youse’ self. As he’s always playing near where youse’ work. So’s he’s thinks he’s see’s the same little old man that youse’ do. But he’s never imagined those strange places that youse’ have. Second, that gypsy was actin’ just’ a liken’ she’s supposed too. Youse’ did pay to have her tell’en your future, didn’t you? Anyway--who’s knows where these peoples get their information. Youse’ might have given her enough clues for her to figure it all out. All ah’s tryin’ to say’s is, youse’ needs help.”

Red was now quiet and after several seconds of silence, April on the other end of the line spoke, “Red are youse’ still’s there?” Red coming around, replied, “Yeah--I’m still here. You had better get some sleep. It’s 3 AM--we’ll talk about it again in the morning.”

“Ok--morrow then. Ah’s be down to see’s youse’ morrow morn. Tryin’ to get some sleep youse’ self. Bye now.”

“Yeah--see you in the morning. I’M NOT CRAZY!” He then hangs up the phone, lays back and stares at the ceiling trying not to fall asleep.

But no matter how much coffee and how hard he tries, before long Red is in dreamland.

Red was awakened early as the Doctor and another man enters his room; the Doctor introduces his partner, “Good morning Mister Brillion. I like you to meet Doctor Carl Tibs. He’s here from the Mayo Clinic.”

Dr. Tibs extends his hand, "Good morning. Your Doctor was very concerned about your condition. He called me last night and asked if I might see you. I'm a Psychiatrist and I think we can get to the bottom of all these goings on, so, you can get a good night's sleep again. You were lucky this time, the next time you may not be. This kind of event was a warning! You need your rest. I've setup an appointment for you at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester on eighteenth of August. You may even want to stay at our facilities for a while."

Red took his hand saying, "I'm not crazy and I'm not staying in no loony bin!"

Dr. Tibs said, reassuring, "I didn't say you were crazy and I'm not asking you to stay in sanatorium. I think some time away from everyday activities will help with your recovery. We need to explore you inter-mind to find the answers to all of these puzzling events that your experiencing. I've got some ideas, based on a past case in Europe that I've studied. Your case is very similar and I need time to explore the very depths of your inter-mind. We got a very nice Hospital in Rochester and you're welcome to come. I can't force you, but you should seriously consider coming. Peace and quiet is what you need now to relax you."

Red is a little wary and a bit confused as he responds, "How long will I need to stay there? I've got lots of work to get done," as he's thinking of all the welding jobs waiting for him at the shop, and that big digger which still hasn't been fixed yet; what will the boss say? "He might even fire me if he thinks I'm going nuts."

Dr. Tibs responds, "Finish up some of the small jobs. You've got two weeks before our first session. Tell your boss that, you have a medical problem to take care of and you need time off. If he asks, tell him that it has to do with your passing out at the fair. Tell him, the Doctors think it might have been a mild stroke and they need to run tests on you. If he wants to know how long, tell him, you may need about two months. So the Doctors can watch you closely."

Red smiles as he thinks, "If this guy can send that little old man back to where he came from, and if they're anymore puzzles to solve, they're on him to solve;" and Red silently laughs to himself.

"Ok--I'll do it. I'll see you in Rochester in two weeks."

They once again shake hands and Dr. Tibs smiling says, "Good--I'll see you in two weeks, bye now," and then leaves the room, leaving Dr. Mason.

“I think the time off and the rest will do you a world of good,” Dr. Mason tells him, “now let’s take another look at you.”

He pushes the nurse call button on the bedside console, and a few minutes later, the Nurse walks in; she pulls the drapes around the bed as the doctor starts his examination of Red.

After the examination, Dr. Mason again looks puzzled.

“I still can’t find anything wrong!” The Doctor exclaims, and then declares, “I’m glad you’re going to Rochester. Maybe while you’re there, we can use some of their hi-tech medical equipment on you, something just may show up, but for now, I’m going to release you. So, go home and take it easy until we see you in Rochester.”

The doctor was now finish and leaves the room; the Nurse draws the drapes back and leaves.

Red no more than rolled back the sheets, when in walks April; he quickly recovers himself scolding, “Don’t you ever knock before entering a man’s room?”

“Why--,” She barks back, “youse’ have somethin’ to hide? Ah’ see’s what men’s have’s, no shame here,” she smiles at him as he lays there with a red face.

Then she commands, “Well--you’s say ah’s can come to see’s youse’ last night, on the phone, remember? Well--are youse’ ah’ leaven’ or stayin’ here?” Red, looking at her standing there like a Nanny.

“Yes--I can leave, but not while you’re standing there, watchin’. Go out to the lobby while I get dressed. I’ll meet you there,” she smiles, turns and walks towards the door.

Red say’s as she walks to the door, “Don’t forget to close the door on your way out,” she then closes the door as she leaves the room.

Red now gets out of bed, gets dressed and looks around to make sure he hasn’t left anything and walks out of the room.

Red checks out at the nurse’s station, and then heads for the lobby and April.

Red finds April sitting in a soft overstuffed chair, with purse in her lap and both hands clasping the handle of the purse.

Red walks over to her and says, “Well--I can go, so let’s leave.”

Red takes her hand and helps her up from the chair; they both walk out of the Hospital and across the parking lot to April’s car.

She unlocks the passenger door and as Red opens the door and slides in, she goes to the driver's side, unlocks the door, opens it and gets in; they both close the car doors and fasten their seat belts.

April inserts the key and starts the car, and then she backs out and drives out of the Hospital parking lot, makes a right turn and heads for Red's apartment.

On the way to Red's apartment, Red softly announces, "I'm going to the Mayo Clinic in two weeks."

April, with a surprised expression, turns to look at Red and says, "What! Did they's finds somethin' wrong with ya?"

"No--I'm going to see a Psychiatrist," Red replies, "you said on the phone last night, I should see someone about my nightmares, so I'm going to take your advice."

April responds, smiling as she continues to drive, "Bout time youse' listen to me and come to your senses."

Red just smiled as she pulled into the parking lot by his apartment; after pulling into a parking space, she shuts off the engine.

She says, as Red unbuckles his seat belt, "Youse' need any help, just gives me ah' call on the phone. You'n knows ma' number," Red smiles and nods as he opens the door and gets out.

Red standing there holding the door, looks into the car saying, "Thanks April. If I need anything, I'll call. See you later, bye now," he shut's the door and April restarts the engine, and backs out; they wave to each other as she drives out of the parking lot.

Red watches her drive off, and after she has gone, he picks up the small hospital bag and goes into his apartment.

Early the next morning, Red walks into the office at work and asks to speak to the boss.

The secretary picks up the office phone, pushes a button and speaks, and finally she says, "Ok sir, I'll send him right in," hangs up the phone and tells Red, "you can go right in."

Red walks into the boss's office and say's "Good morning sir."

The Boss asks, "What can I do for you?" Red replies, with apprehension, "As you know sir--I was in the hospital for three days. The Doctors are sending me to the Mayo Clinic in Rochester for further testing and observation. I'll be leaving in two weeks. I need two months leave of absents."

The Boss eyed Red, and then he spoke, "Two months--huh?"

Red nods.

"You know with all the work, you're leaving me shorthanded. Any ideas as to how I can get all of the work done?"

"Hire a couple of part timers," Red responding, with a suggestion, "I'll finish the work on the digger and some of the small welding jobs before I go. The part timers can get you through until mid-October, when I return. I'll be back for the fall work."

The Boss looking at Red, old him flatly, "Ok--I'll let you do the interviews. You can pick whom you think can do the work. I'm not letting you off until I get someone to pick up the slack, ok!"

Ok," Red replied, "Then I better be getting to work. Lot's to be done, with so little time to do it in."

Red then leaves the office and heads out to the shop area; there he starts in on that big digger.

Two days later, Red is still working on the digger, which he has about completed; Joey is sitting there pointing and asking questions, when a very young looking guy walks up.

He says, "Mister Red Brillion, I'm David Banks. I was told in the office that I'm supposed to talk to you about a job."

Red eyes what looks like a fifteen-year-old kid; this kid really looks young!

He was about five-four, blond hair, blue eyes and was smiling.

A flock of hair falls from his forehead and covers his left eye, he brushes it back and says, "I like to apply for the job."

Red doesn't say anything and continues to eye him up; there the kid stands, blue jeans, blue, black, and white plaid shirt, and black and white tennis shoes.

"Kinda' young for this work, aren't ya' Kid?"

Joey breaks in, "He's no kid! He's a grownup like you, Mister Red."

David looking at Joey smiles and says, "Yeah--I guess I am a grownup."

"Just how old are you?"

"I'm nineteen, almost twenty," David responding, "and I really could us the job. I'm starting my second year at the U of M. They told me in the office that the job is only until mid-October. That'll work just fine, as I've got to be back for the fall quarter."

Red is surprised at the age of this kid; boy, he sure missed this one.

Red starts the interview, "Tell me something about your background?"

"There's not much to tell," David replies, "I'm starting my second year in Med School at the U and I'm on an athletic scholarship. I'm hoping to get another scholarship to the Mayo School of Medicine. I want to be a cardiac surgeon. Looks like I'm going to be in school for the next six years."

"If you have a scholarship, why do you need this job?"

"The scholarship doesn't cover everything. It doesn't pay for my room, food and transportation to and from classes. It doesn't even cover some of my book's and lab time."

Red now thinking, "This kids name seems familiar."

"Are you the Son of Mark Banks the big rich lawyer?"

David feeling bad looks at the ground, because his affluent and famous parents may cost him this job; David very softly, almost at a whisper replies, "Yes--I suppose I don't get the job now."

"Cake eater--you don't need a job," Joey declares, "you rich people got everything!"

"Well--Joey's got a point," Red argues.

"My Dads got all the money, not me," David explaining, "he told me if I get a job, then he'll match dollar for dollar. No job--no money. That's why I need this job," and then he again looks at the ground and very softly say's "all I want--is to be a doctor."

Red begins to feel a little sorry for this kid, and then he remembers something else and announces, "You're the Banks that played on our High School Hockey team, that won the State Championship two years ago."

David now smiles and nods with, "That's how I got the scholarship. I now play on U of M Gopher's hockey team."

Red extends his hand saying, "You were great. You scored 59 goals that year! No one in our High School has even come close to that."

David takes Reds hand and pleads, "Thanks. How about the job Sir?" Red pauses, then he asks, "Can you weld?"

"Yes sir," David replies smiling, "I had three years of metal shop in High School. I also helped my Dad build his Airplane. I did all of the welding on the frame--it passed the FAA field inspection. They liked what I did."

Red's impressed by what this kid has said so far, but-- can he weld here?"

"Ok--then follow me," Red says, "I want you to show me what you can do. You say you can weld, we'll see."

So, Red leads the way to the welding area with both Joey and David following.

Red takes them over to the bench where they do all the welding.

Picking up two pieces of iron and placing them on top of each other, Red tells David, "Use the electric arc and run a bead down the length of those pieces."

David goes and clamps the metal pieces to the steel bench, so that the job doesn't move and connects the ground lead to the job; next, he chooses a rod from one of several piles of welding rods and inserts it into the active holder.

Red is impressed that David knows which rod to use, and then Red tells Joey to go outside and not to watch.

David goes to the welder, sets the amps and grabs two helmets, after handing one to Red, he puts the other one on; Red puts his helmet on and nods that he's ready.

Dave strikes an arc, gives a quick nod, which lowers his face piece and begins to lay a bead.

After he finished, Dave raises his face piece and chips the slag from the job; Red examines the work and is now really impressed with the very smooth bead.

Red now needs one more example; can David weld using a torch?

Red points to the two gas cylinders saying, "Do you know how to use those?"

David looks around, spying a small pistol shaped torch laying forgotten on the shelf, and picks up the small torch and connects the hose's from the gas cylinders to it.

Red started to stop him, but he figured to let him make a fool of himself, as no one in the shop knew how to use this stupid thing.

Dave then looked around for something to weld and spied two pop cans sitting on a shelf by the break area, so, he goes to fetch them.

Red starts to laugh when Dave returns with the cans

"Hay-Kid!" Red exclaims, "You've got to be kidding! You don't intend to weld those together--they'll be a pool of metal."

"Sure do--just watch," Dave replies with a smile.

Dave carefully places the two cans end to end.

He goes to the refrig' to get a can of flux and selects a rod for welding aluminum.

Then Dave turns the gas on, sets the regulator pressures and returns to the bench, and as he picks up the small torch, Red puts on a pair of goggles.

“You won’t need those,” Dave tells him smiling, “this won’t be that bright. It’s going to be more like soldering then welding.”

He then ignites the torch and adjusts the flame to a very small blue tip, and then he dunks the wire rod into the flux powder and starts to weld the two cans together.

Red watches wide eyed with amazement, as he’s never seen anybody weld like this; Red says to himself, “This Kid is incredible! He’s got the job! He’s going into the wrong profession! With his skill at welding, he can get a job anywhere.”

David finally finishes and turns the torch off saying, “This is how I welded Dad’s Airplane frame.”

Red pats Dave on the back and extends his hand, “You’ve got the job--Kid.”

Joey comes in hearing Red giving the job to Dave. “You’re hiring the cake eater?”

“You bet!”

Red looks at Dave’s shoes and remarks, “You can’t wear those in here. Hot metal will burn right through and burn your feet. Get a pair of leather boots with steel toes. I’ll inform the office that you’re hired. So, I’ll see you Wednesday at seven. We start early here--Kid.”

“Oh--thanks,” David replies, with a big grin, and then he says, “one thing--please don’t call me kid. I’ve got a name;” Joey piping up, “Yeah--Cake Eater.”

David laughs and messes up Joey’s hair, saying, “No--just call me Dave--ok.”

## CHAPTER 9 - - YIKE

“And speaking of names, where did you get this Mister Brillion stuff? My name is Red Jolson to you, and also around this company.”

“So, Ma told him about this job--isn’t that alright,” said Joey.

“Sure is, but tell her to get my name straightened out in her mind.”  
Dave looked at him, questions on his face.

“Just don’t pay it no mind, but do as I say,” said Red.

“Whatever you say, and thanks again for the job, Mister Jolson.”

“You earned it by your own doings, so take the full credit for yourself. And to Joey, get the heck out of here before you get hurt, and learn your mechanical skills from Dave, not me. Go build an Airplane or something. And tell your Mother I’ll be over for supper cause I’ve got something to pick thru with her.”

Promptly at six PM, Red was knocking on the door and Joey let him in. Red could smell supper cooking.

He put a big package down on a chair by the table.

“This is for you poverty stricken people, oops, ah’ blacks, I should say. Joey is calling the best hockey player in Lanesboro a cake eater, so tonight he is going to eat cake till he gets a big bellyache. Cause I got his favorite,” Red elucidates.

“Oh boy, chocolate cake,” breathed Joey.

“Joey, are you sinking to racism, when Dave is a good friend of yours?” Inquired April of Joey.

“So you mean, if it’s not a good friend, it’s alright to sink into racism,” Red shot in.

“Come on, what’s this turkey you want to pick with me. What did I do now?” This from April.

“We are picking cake, cake eaters and name mixer uppers, how’d you get to know a rich lawyer, amateur psychiatrists and kids hanging around dangerous work areas,” Red elucidates again.

“And would you like to see the color of my tongue this evening too, Mister Brillion alias Jolson?” She stuck her tongue out at him.

Red busted out laughing.

“Best humor I’ve had all day. My gosh, your tongue is pink, not black! I bet if I could open you up inside you would be red-blooded and a part of the regular human race after all.”

“Humph!”

Supper was eaten, including half of a big chocolate cake, soaked in some evaporated milk; Red brought a can along, because it was the way, he liked it.

All subjects were discussed thoroughly.

April had legal work done by the rich lawyer at very reasonable rates, where the government had left her hanging, proper names agreed on, and Joey with a long face learned, he would no longer be allowed inside the company chain link fence.

"Ifn' I hadn't been there, that guy would a shot you in the head with his arrow," Joey protested.

"Joey, that's enough of that now," said April sternly.

"Well, that doc thinks he is going to fix that problem, so we will leave it to him then," said Red, and then he came up with a brilliant idea, "you said you hire out to these sportsman fellows for like fifty dollars a day, right? So, here I've got fifty dollar bill all ready to go soon as I get another fellow hired, that is as good as Dave. They won't need me around them anymore, because I'm waste of money."

"Mister Red, I'm not taken non o' youse' money just for my company."

"Darn, it looks like the same green stuff the other guys give you. Hmm, well, guess I might as well tear it up then," Red said, tearing the bill in half and throwing it towards the wastebasket.

"Just what do you expect for youse' fifty dollars Mister Jolson?"

"Same as the other guys get, your company, woods and stream lore that I ain't got of my own, a nice tan from being outdoors for a change instead of in a dirty greasy ole shop--"

"Youse' red headed white men never tan, youse' just burn, an just how long is this going on?" April inquired with a sardonic expression.

"Well, I'm taking two months off. Fifty dollars times sixty days equals like only three thousand dollars, which is a pretty cheap vacation I'd say..."

"Three thousand dollars, Ma, and all day to spend with Red!"

"Youse' forgetting, youse' have a medical leave, not a woods and streams leave, plus the medical bills, an..."

"Medical bills being paid by my workman's insurance after they've been riding free for what some twenty years or so already. About time they pay. When I'm lying on the psychiatrists couch you can hold my hand and see he don't pull some big bunch of bologna on me, with your common sense

outlook. Wouldn't it be great if the little man came in and tried to shoot him in the butt while I'm in session?"

"Ma, he tore a real fifty dollar bill in two like it was just paper!"

"It is just paper, Joey," said Red.

"Not to us ole' poor folk, it's our living," said April.

"Think about the three thousand bucks, and see if that convinces you," said Red.

"What about my other customers?" Asked April quite bluntly.

"What about them?" Red retorted.

"Red, I'se not going to get totally dependent on youse', no how. Remember, youse' is a white man!"

"You don't let me forget. You said yourself we have to get this problem down in black and white. You're black and I am white, and I'm getting you into it head over heels," said Red pausing.

"I'se meant on paper, I'se got the idea from the lawyer, once youse' gets it down on the paper, youse' can see's what youse' are looking at," replied April.

"Is that how you found out his boy was looking for a job?"

"I'se solve a lot of problems in this town, even if I'se am cut out of the social gossip, thru my own sharp ears and putting two and two together, if I'se do say so myself," April said defiantly.

"Well, we'll get it down on the charts at the hospital, oops, loony bin."

"Now youse' getting the idea, in black and white writing, not skin."

"C'mon now April, what the Sam-hell do you all think he's going to be able to write in his charts, except that I am nuts, and see non-existent little men. Then they will come to get Joey, cause he sees them too--so he's nuts too... Then they'll be after the fortune teller, and she is a good kid with some unusual talent so they'll lock her up, and pretty soon we'll all be case history in little charts--and all down in black and white! I like my black and white solution lots better. I feel safer around you. I think the little man is real afraid of you an getting your dander up, cause you'll broomstick him out of existence."

"Wal' ifn' you feel safer around me, I'se spose I'se could give it some serious consideration," said April thoughtfully.

"Well, I'll wander on home then, and leave you with your thoughts."

"Take youse' fifty dollar bill along Mister Jolson, I'se not going to be beholden to youse' till I'se makes up my mind by myself."

“Its tore in two, no good. Joey can have it for a souvenir.”

“I’s knows better than that, Mister Jolson. Just youse’ tape it back together again”.

“See Joey, --nobody pulls anything on your mother. She’s got real down to earth common sense. That psychologist is going to have a battle on his hands with his mumbo-jumbo.”

Wednesday morning, Red was laying out the weeks coming work for Dave, and telling him to go at it the best way he could get it done efficiently.

“We don’t go for riding bosses and minute men inspectors. We do our job right, or go back and do it over right, or know the reason why. Been years doing it that way and it seems to work. When I’m away, I don’t want to have to worry about what you are doing right or wrong. Ask the old timers here if you need info on something. They are aware of the procedures and have a pretty good guess of what will work and what won’t.” He walked away from Dave and a tall man came in the door.

“Boss up in the office sent me down to have you test me to do your work.”

Red looked him up and down, thinking he looked familiar, must be some of the bosses relation.

“Well, we shall see what you can do. Can you use a welder and weld that broken drawbar out there while I attend to some other pressing things?” Red asked of the tall man.

“Sure can, and I’ll find my own stuff, so to your needs,” the tall fellow said; he pulled a welder out the door of the shop, grabbing a handful of welding rods as he went.

Red went to the far end of the shop to talk to a waiting driver and when he came back, the tall man was sitting down inside the shop smoking a pipe.

“Problem?” Red asked.

“Not much of a test. Got something harder?”

Red walked out to look at it. It was done neatly and without flaw.

Hmm Red thought, must be a lot of welders out, and good ones, maybe I won’t have a job when I come back, and then he remembered Dave would quit in October and he felt better.

Red picked up a couple of old pieces of cast iron from a farm machine and handed them to the tall man. “Here, weld these. Mind if I watch?”

“Not at all, always glad to teach,” the tall man chuckled good-naturedly.

The tall man set the job up at a table height where he did not have to stoop, dropped the mask over his face welded a bit, then stopped to tap it while it cooled; he proceeded to do the job in small bits, tapping the weld as it cooled.

“Best way to weld cast iron of this type, weld and tap it while cooling, weld and tap it while cooling so the stresses let up or it will crack.”

“Very good,” Red said, “guess you’re hired. When can you start?”

“I’m here now. Ready to go to work,” Red saw he was appropriately clothed, so he said, “Here’s your next job.”

Red went into the office and told the Boss the guy knew his business and he had put him right to work.

“Send him in at noon for the paperwork, and you’re one lucky guy the way this is all working out,” said the Boss.

Red went back out and assigned the tall man more work than he could ever possibly do, so he could be with his own thoughts about the upcoming medical examinations.

With Dave and this guy, the work would be well done and he could fully forget about work and concentrate on his ‘problem’, and also, if April went along with his idea, he might just enjoy a whole two months’ vacation in the busy summertime; something he had never had a chance to do since he was a young kid on his first job.

About 3 PM, the tall man came up to him at break, and said, “When break is over you can lay me out some more work.”

“What! How could’ve you possibly gotten all of that done!” Exclaimed Red looking astounded.

Going out to look, sure enough, everything was done and done beautifully, with not one possible flaw for him to criticize; Red was astonished!

He had more work of course, but the shop had always been behind.

The faster they repaired stuff, it seemed the faster the men on the job broke stuff; they really needed drivers as talented as his present repair crew.

Going back in the shop, he said to the tall man, “How could you possibly have welded all the work I gave you in that length of time?”

“I’m a speed welder. Can whomp up a few trophies for you if you

need something material to convince you, instead of my work," he grinned at Red's disbelief.

"A speed welder?" Said Red unconvinced and shaking his head.

After break, Red went out and laid out another batch of work that would have taken an ordinary welder a full day.

"We have no quotas here," Red said, "I'll lay out the work so you can choose to do it in your own good time, makes life seem a lot more independent. Us small town folks like it that way, keeps the ole' idea of freedom alive back in these back country areas anyway."

Red selected an old timer who deserved a break and said, "From now on you're the Foreman here. Your job will be to lay out the work for these two new comer's, same as I've been doing for years, think you can handle it? They are both a couple of hot shots."

"So I've noticed. Be a pleasure to have everything been done by top-notch people. Even you and me were never able to do a perfect job, every day, every time, for every Boss, were we?" The new Foreman asked.

"You got that right. Maybe there's hope for America yet. Only thing, we've got to quit reading the newspapers, or we'll lose our high hopes," Red laughing.

"Speaking of newspapers, that tall guy was out behind the shop reading the newspapers every time you went up to the office. That work just seems to flow out from under his torch like magic. But shouldn't he be kept busy?"

"Don't ruin a good thing. Give him more than any man can do, and be satisfied to let him get it done his own way, which seems awful dang speedy to me, but I can't find a thing wrong with it. He says he is a speed welder, and has some trophies to prove it," Red finished, shaking his head.

After supper, Red called April on the phone, his feet propped up and really feeling kind of dapper.

"Guess what dear, I've got all my work lined up, two men hired, and I'm free for some quality time off. So have you made a decision about my offer?"

"Just why are youse' quitting two weeks early. I'se thought youse' was to catch up first on youse' work."

"Well, I hired a speed welder today, appointed a shop foreman, laid out the two months program, AND, decided I would follow Doctors orders and take some time away from work. It has been a good twenty years I've

been working here, I got to thinking without even a vacation break, cause I had no use for one really. This was where I wanted to be so why leave."

"So's why are youse' leaving now, in such a sweat?" April asked.

"Doctors' orders, dear! See what a good patient I am?"

Finally, Red said into the phone, "April dear, are you still there?"

"Yes'm, I'se still here, but what's all this dear stuff, and sudden change of plans, and where am I'se going to leave Joey while I'se is gallivanting off about with youse' all day?"

"Oh, I figured we'd take him along. Its school vacation now and soon I'll be lying around on a couch after school starts so I'll be sticking close to home base. But we got a couple weeks, we can all have a ball, and I insist, all at my expense, seeing as I'm hiring you, as an employee or whatever you want to be, if you got better ideas," explained Red.

"Well, youse' willing to take Joey eases my mind enough, I'se willing to give it a try, just for two weeks or so, providing there is no monkey business in the plans."

"Oh, but April, have I tried any monkey business with you, except maybe in my dreams!"

"In youse' dreams, huh, well maybe the Doc will get rid of them ideas too, while he's at it," April said in a huffy tone.

"You were always gorgeously thin in my dreams. I really don't go for the fat ladies like most other men, so you shouldn't have to worry about monkey business, should you?"

"How come I'se wasn't white in youse' dreams?"

"I dun know. Why should I dream a white April Brown?"

"That shows youse' mind is messed up. Youse' should be dreaming white like the world intended," lambasted April.

"Don't you ever dream?"

"Yes, of course, everybody does," returned April in agreement.

"Am I black in your dreams?"

"No!"

"But a ha', you do dream about me, don't you?"

"I'se should have seen that one coming. Youse' sneaky man, youse'! But now that youse' brought it up, I'se did dream about youse' the other night. Youse' were hiring men for youse' shop, and one of them was the devil himself, getting closer and closer to youse', so he could do his dirty work on youse', and I'se was screaming for youse' to come up here with me,

so's he wouldn't touch youse'. I'se guess I'se call it more a nightmare."

"Well, --I guess I'd just call it coming from worrying about me and not wanting to admit it. So admit it April, we're more than good friends, but we're both old enough and have common sense enough to keep it in good taste, both for our own wishes, and for Joey's sake. Discipline is what keeps us up in our own good self-esteem," Red pontificating.

"Now, youse' is talking good sense. Maybe all youse' need is a good vacation, away from youse' work. Am will in to go along with youse' idea, same as with any customer, ifn' youse' is goner look at it that way."

"Well thank you April, I'll try to keep my place, so we all have a grand time, and you can tell Joey to pack a few things, so he learns self-reliance and gets some experience in making decisions."

"He's done had enough experience in leaving town. He knows what he be needing. Goodnight now," the phone clicked, and left Red with a frightened, empty feeling.

Now he remembered why that tall man seemed familiar; it was the face of the little old man with a younger cast!

## CHAPTER 10 - - QUALITY TIME

Red thinking, "I really do need to see that head shrink! Now I'm starting to see that old man in other people! This is nut's, how can that new tall guy be the old man? That old man's got thirty years on him!"

Red smiled to himself at the thought of spending some time with April, and went to bed that night with a smile on his face.

The next morning, he started to pack for the stay in Rochester; he figured he really didn't need to pack much, because April was coming along, as she could do the laundry for him.

What a vacation this is going to be, not only will he have time away from work, but some of the time will be spent with April and Joey; to him she was special, with all of her southern ways, and he didn't care that she was black, but that she was a human being and a great woman.

He would also rid himself of the old man, once and for all.

This is going to be some real quality time, "Yeah--real quality time."

Later that morning, Red knocked on April's door; April opens the door and asks, "What are you doing here today?"

"Come to get you and Joey. We're going to Rochester so I can get rid of the old man, remember!"

April say's with a surprised look, "Today! I thought we would be going next week!"

"I need a week to find lodging for you, Joey, and myself. I'm not staying in no loony bin. Besides, with you and Joey, it might take all week!"

April said, looking stern, "You suggesting that wes' will pose a problem in youse' finding a place to stay!"

Red sensing trouble with this race thing, tries to smooth the waves, "No--I didn't mean it that way. Rochester is a hi-class city and everything is expensive there. We'll need time to scout around for some good rooms close to the Clinic."

April nods and sighs, "I suppose youse' are right. I'se needs to pack a few things for Joey and me. Why don't you come back tomorrow, I'se be ready then."

Red nods, "Ok--I'll be back tomorrow, bye now," he turns and goes to his pickup, gets in and drives away.

Red stops at the shop to see how the new part-timers are doing.

Red walks into the shop and looks for Mike Simon, the Foreman he

made, and found him working with Dave on the broken front loader in the back of the shop.

Mike sees Red coming and goes to meet him saying, "What are you doing back? I thought you were going to Rochester!"

"Yeah--not until tomorrow. How are the two new men doing?"

"These guys are unbelievable! Tom, the tall one, he welds so fast, we'll never be behind again. For the first time in ten years this shop is caught up, can you believe that! That Kid, now he's not bad either, he's real good with the light work. That small torch which no one could use, well, he's a wizard with it, I've got him welding all of the pot metal and aluminum work. To bad he's leaving in the fall."

Red responds, with a little concern for his job, "Does the Boss know how good these men are?"

Mike catching Reds concern, and now he too, begins to worry. "I'm afraid he does! I don't think he's going to let Tom go, he's just too good of a welder. The same for Dave, but Dave's in college, so there's nothing he can do to keep him here."

Red responds, with real concern for his job, "What about us? He's not thinking of firing us?"

Mike shrugs his shoulders and replies, "I don't know? He hasn't mentioned a thing about us. I don't think he'll fire us. You know how he's talked about hiring another man to pick up the slack, I think Tom's going to be that man, so we might as well get used to seeing him around here."

Red responds, with a sigh of relief, "Yeah--I guess you're right, we could use them both. I've got to be going before the Boss comes and thinks I'm back."

"Yeah--you better disappear. Say--we've got the ball field reserved for us tonight, how about coming out to practice. You know we got a game with Rushford on Sunday. If you are still around, maybe you could play with us on Sunday."

Red thinks for a moment and then says, "Sure--why not. Say--how about asking the two new guys if they want to play. Dave's a hot shot Hockey player, maybe he's also a good ballplayer."

"Good idea, Dave's an athlete. I'll bet he's a real good ballplayer. After practice, let's go to the Red Dragon for some drinks. This will be some real quality time."

Red smiles and says, "Yeah--real quality time."

Red leaves the shop and heads for his apartment.

At six that afternoon, Red pulls in and parks at the ball field.

He gets out of his pickup and walks over to the other players carrying his mitt.

There they were, all of his friends and the two new guys from the shop.

This was the local Lanesboro Baseball Team, 'The Dragons', as their sponsor was the local pub, 'The Red Dragon Inn'.

Now everyone had a position, except for the two new guys.

The coach was Bill Appleman, because he played in college.

Red, now he plays right outfield and Mike was the catcher.

Bill asked Tom, one of the new players, where he would like to play; Tom told Bill, he could play either right infield, or second base.

Bill told Tom to play second base, because up to now they didn't have a full time second baseman, as they used the infielder to cover second base, and then Bill asked Dave, where he would like to play.

Dave noticing that all positions were filled says, "There doesn't seem to be any position left, so I guess I'm not playing."

Bill asked, "Have you ever played ball before?"

"Yes--I was too short for basketball, and I didn't have time for football while I was playing hockey, but in the spring I did play some baseball, I pitched for the high school team."

Bill raised his brow, saying, "You can pitch?"

"Yeah--sure can," replied Dave with a nod, "but--I'm not a very good batter though."

"Great--you're our relief Pitcher, and don't worry about batting, nobody else is any good either."

"Hey--what ya' mean we can't bat," the other players chorused in response to Bill's remark.

"You can't!" Bill exclaims, "We haven't beaten the high school baseball team yet! You should see yourselves swing, screwing yourselves into the ground."

A school bus pulls up and stops, and out steps a bunch of high school ballplayers and their coach, all dressed in baseball uniforms; they are the other team that the Dragons practice, with.

As one of the older kids walks by he says, "Hi Dave, you playing with these old timers?"

"Yeah--just for the this summer;" the Kid stops and asks, "You're

not pitching, are you?" Dave nods; the Kid looks shocked and then goes running, to catch up to the other high school ballplayers blaring, "Dave Banks is playing for the Dragons and he's pitching!"

After hearing that Kid, Bill eyes Dave and thinks, "Now what was that all about? Why are those high school players so concerned if Dave is going to pitch? There may be more to Dave then meets the eye, I think, I'll start him and see what happens."

The two coaches toss a coin to see which team will bat first; the Dragons win the toss, so they will be batting.

Bill takes his players to the dugout and assigns the batting order, and when he gets to the ninth player, he informs Dave that he'll be the starting Pitcher.

Dave looks at the other pitcher and says, "Me coach! I thought I was backup!"

"Yes--you! Now you and Mike go and get a few warm up pitches before we play."

Both Mike and Dave walk over to the side of the dugout to warm up, and then Bill walks over to the other dugout to have a few words with the high school coach before they start playing.

When he gets to the other dugout, he says to the other coach, "If we win--I'll buy the drinks. If you win--you buy."

The other coach smiles and says, "You guys haven't beaten us yet! Deal--I'll be looking forward to some quality time at the Red Dragon after the game."

After Bill heads back to his dugout, the Kid tells his high school coach, "Dave Banks is pitching!"

The coach stands there looking stunned, and then the coach says to his team, "We got our job cut out for us tonight. We can still beat these old timers. Banks or no Banks, he's just one man. Anyway--he can't bat any better than others, so if we can out hit them, we can beat them."

One of the other kids speaks up, "How can we out hit them with Banks pitching?"

"We can do it," The Coach responded, "some of you juniors and seniors, who have batted against Banks before got hits off of him--you can do it again. So, get out there and play to win."

The high school team then took the field.

Meanwhile back at the Dragons dugout Bill tells his players, “Ok guys--let’s beat these kids. Somehow tonight I think we’ll beat them good.”

The first batter from the Dragons went to the plate and got ready for the first pitch; it came as a fastball and he swung and missed.

After two more fastballs, he goes down swinging; the next two batters singled for base hits.

Now, there were two men on base for the Dragons, with one out.

The fourth batter singled out to the shortstop with still a man on first and second, and now it was Red’s turn at bat.

He gets ready, the pitch, an inside curve; Red swings and misses.

The next pitch comes, a fastball; Red swings and connects with a loud crack, and the ball sails high into deep left field.

The two runners on first and second, make it home with Red left on third; the Dragons were now two to zero, and now it was Dave’s turn.

Again, the pitch, and he swings; it connects with a low drive into center field.

Red come’s home and Dave makes first base, now the Dragons are three to zero and this is only the first inning!

As Dave is standing on first, the First Baseman says, “Hi Banksy, how’s college?”

Dave looks at him and responds, “Feldman! Hay--nice to see you again. Senior this year--right? Hey--we’re playing ball again! Different teams though! Remember when we played on the same team?”

“Yeah--how about that! You know, we would’ve beaten Winona and went to the playoffs, two years ago, ifn’ you hadn’t quit to play hockey.”

“Sorry, but I was needed to play hockey. We won the state championship. I didn’t have time to play baseball too,” affirmed Dave.

The next man went down swinging, leaving Dave marooned on first!

Now it was the Dragon’s turn in the field, and the high schoolers are at bat.

Dave walked to the pitcher’s mound and threw a few pitches to Mike, to warm up.

Finally, he was ready, as the first batter came to the plate.

Mike signaled Dave for a fastball to the inside.

Dave wound up like a coil spring, and then, he let it fly!

The ball sailed by the batter so fast, that he never saw it!

It hit Mike’s glove with such force, that it knocked Mike into a

sitting position; Mike sat there stunned!

The Umpire called the strike.

As Mike got to his feet, he removed the ball from his glove; the ball had a brown stain on it from where it hit the glove.

Then he threw it back to Dave.

Mike was now a little apprehensive about asking for another fastball, so he signaled Dave for a curve ball; Dave gave the nod of approval and wound up and let sail a beautiful curve, it went right pass the swinging bat of the batter and neatly seated itself into Mike's glove for strike two.

Mike once more signaled for a curve, as he was a little scared of Dave's fastball, and as before, Dave sailed another curve pass the batter for the first out.

Dave tried a breaking ball on the next batter, for strike one and the next two pitches were curves for the second out; the next batter followed the first two and never made it to first.

The first inning was done and the Dragons were three zip on the high school team.

Now, as Dave and the rest of the team came into the dugout from the field, Bill had the biggest grin that you ever saw, and as Dave walked past Bill, he patted Dave on the back saying, "Good job Banks! Best pitching I've ever seen;" now Bill knew why, that high school Kid was concerned, when he found out it was Banks who was going to do the pitching.

Bill just kept smiling for he could already see the shot glasses sitting there before him on the bar in the Red Dragon Inn, because now they got a real good chance, for the first time, to whop these kids, but good.

As the innings came and went, the Dragons never got another run.

But, they did manage to get several men on the bases.

Dave, he did give up several runs, but they never made it home; he couldn't get a no-hitter, but he did manage a shutout, and for the first time, the Dragons finally beat the high school baseball team!

Now this really was, quality time of the highest order, for the Dragons!

As the high school team boarded the bus for the trip back, everyone in the Dragons dugout was laughing, yelling, and patting each other on the back.

The one who got the most whops on the back was Banks, because he was their miracle man!

Red expressing elation, "Are we ready for Rushford or what!"

Bill, trying to bring some order said, "This was only one game and with a bunch of kids. Wait until we play Rushford, then we'll see how much celebrating we'll be doing!"

Red retorted, "What are you doing? Raining on my parade?"

"Hey--it's getting to be ten! I'm meeting the high school coach at the Red Dragon for a few drinks that he owes me. If anybody wants to join us, I'll see you there," with that, he left the dugout and went to his car, backed out and drove off; the rest of the players, followed suit.

Twenty minutes later Red walked into the Red Dragon; there, he found Mike, Bill, and the other Coach talking, laughing and drinking at the bar.

Red moseyed up to Bill and said, "What ya' have, I'm buying the next round."

Mike, Bill and the Coach told the bartender that they'll have the same as they've just had, and Red ordered himself a scotch.

Bill suggests, "Let's go find an empty table where there's more room."

The four men left the bar and went over to an empty table and there they sat down to enjoy their drinks and talk.

Ten minutes later, in walks Dave and sees Mike, Bill, Red and his old Coach seated at a large round table, so he walks over and points to a fifth empty chair and asks, "Hi--is this chair taken?"

"No--but aren't you a little young to be in here," Red responds.

"Only to drink the hard stuff. I'll be twenty one next year, and then I'll be legal."

After he sits down in the empty chair, he motions for the Barmaid; she comes to the table.

"Give these guys another round and I'll have a coke," Dave tells her and hands her a five, and then she leaves to get the drinks.

The Coach looks at Dave and says, "Banks here, two years ago, was our star player. That is, until he left to play Hockey. We almost went to state that year. All we had to do was beat Winona, and we would've been in the playoffs. Without Banks, we couldn't hold em'. They out hit us, we were counting on Bank's pitching!"

"I'm real sorry Coach, but I was needed on the Hockey team. I can't be everywhere. There's only one of me. I had to make a decision. I

had a shot at a Hockey scholarship so I went for it. I was playing for my future. I want to be a Doctor," Banks explains dolefully.

"You're right Banks. You have to be thinking of your future. You did the right thing, and I'm proud of you. So--how's college?"

Dave feeling good that his Coach isn't upset with him answers, "Its real tough, but I'm doing ok."

Red patting Dave on the back saying, "With ole Banksy here, we're going to beat Rushford on Sunday, to bad I won't be there to see it. I'll be in Rochester going through the Clinic."

The drinks finally arrive and they spend the next two hours talking, laughing, and having a good time.

It was after one in the morning when Red finally got to bed.

All the scotch and the thought of seeing April tomorrow made him feel warm and happy.

With the thought of his baseball team finally beating the tough high school team, he fell off into dreamland, saying to himself, "Today was indeed quality time."

## CHAPTER 11 - - MISS JONES, SEND IN ....

Red woke up with a headache; the jangle of the phone didn't help it.  
"Yeah?"

"I'se all ready to go, whenever youse' are, Red? Are youse' there?"  
"Barely."

"Sure, drank yourself into a hangover. Youse' won't be fit to drive--  
Men!"

"I'll be over. You can drive," said Red and hangs up.

He didn't need this headache and a woman's nagging at the same  
time.

It was going on noon before he could make it; lucky he had been  
packed yesterday, and everything lined up.

April and Joey came out all bubbly and excited, which only made  
him feel worse; he crawled in the back seat, and left them to load their own  
suitcases.

He dimly heard April comment something, and he drifted off to a  
slumber.

He then heard her again, as she woke him, "Wes' in Rochester, so's  
now where do wes' go?"

"To get breakfast and hot coffee."

Silence, and then the car started again, moved, and finally, "Wes' is  
at a fast food."

Rousing himself, he crawled out the door, letting the wind cool his  
brow.

"What a price to pay for victory!"

April returned with, "Ifn' yo' is victory, I'se hate to see the others."

"Dey was feeling awful, they so figured on this game," Joey said.

Finally inside, Red began to pour down the black coffee.

April dumped a packet of something into the second cup, and the  
world began to clear up.

"And where were you all my early years?" Red complained.

"Learnin' the ways of men. So's, now where do wes' goes from here,  
with me driving." She said pointedly.

"Find a motel with a swimming pool near the clinic."

Red was sitting up, a last cup of coffee, in his hands, when April  
stopped at a pretty motel; they all went in, and Red approached the desk,  
and asked for rooms.

**“Do you plan to use the swimming pool, Sir?”**

**“Of course, why?”**

After looking through his paperwork, the desk clerk said, “I’m sorry but we have nothing for you today.”

After this worked its way through Red’s mind, he asked the desk clerk if he could talk to him over by the window; Red had a Twenty Dollar bill in his palm, but the desk clerk said, “Sorry, no amount will change things.”

**“What’s the real problem then, for Twenty bucks?”**

**“If that big black lady gets in our pool, everyone else will get out. I can’t risk that.”**

The desk clerk slipped the Twenty Dollar bill from Red’s hand and walked away.

Red’s mind finally comprehended, and he left with April and Joey. April had comprehended before him. “Want to call the whole deal off?”

**“No ways. Drive out of town on 52 and try some without swimming pools!”**

They found a nice one with a view of farmland, out the back windows, two bedrooms and a living room entrance.

Red booked it for a week at a time, and settled down in a sofa in front of the TV.

A telephone beside him gave him an idea.

**“I’m calling the Doc to verify my appointment times,” Red announced and he did.**

A lady questioned him, finally, she said, “Would you be open to moving your appointments up to starting at 9:00 AM?”

**“How come?”**

**“Well, a patient passed away and the time could be filled by you very nicely.”**

“Sure,” thought Red, “I’m next to go, but, what the hell, the way I feel, I’m ready to!” But he said, “OK.”

After Red hung up, he relayed the information to April and Joey, “I’ll be in shape to go tomorrow at 8:30 AM, so be ready. I want you both there with me,” and so it was left.

They went out for supper late at Wong’s, and Red was becoming his old self.

**But it was early to bed, when they returned, for tomorrow would be**

a challenge.

They were walking out the door before 8:30 AM and were in the Doctor's office at 9:00 AM; no one else was in the waiting room, and the Nurse said, "You may go right in, Mister Brillion."

Red waved to April and Joey, and as they got up the Nurse said, "Just Mister Brillion, --please."

Red said, "They are part of the problem so in they come," the Nurse surprised, relented.

The office was neat as a pin, there was not a single paper on the desk and Dr. Tibs rose to greet them. "First let me say that, I'm from the old school of Doctors, and hardly to be classed with the young Doctors who make up today's school of thinking. They have tried to retire me, but I'm too successful, and in desperate problem's they come running to me anyway, and have to admit their new ideas don't always work. And, secondly, I've ordered some brain scans and other heavy tests for you, to convince you, not me, that there is nothing physically wrong with you to wonder about. I've gone over your case very carefully, and know all the details, unless there is something new you wish to add," he looked at Red, then to April, then to Joey.

No one said anything, and so Dr. Tibs continued, "If not, then, will you each state your goals in coming here?"

Red cleared his throat, "Mine is to get rid of seeing this little old man, I am sure I see, and the threat to my existence."

Looking at April, Dr. Tibs said, "And your goal?"

"To get my little boy from seeing them little men, and to help Mister Red get over his problem with them."

Dr. Tibs turned to Joey, "And why are you here?"

Joey looking scared weakly said, "They brought me along, but I know what I sawed and it was real," his lip quivered.

Dr. Tibs leaned forward and put his elbows on the desk.

"And so, now for the solution," Dr. Tibs firmly announced.

"That quick!" Red said unbelieving.

"Yes. First, there are no little six inch men in reality, no Dragons, no medieval swordsmen, as such. So, you three people are existing in fiction, where of course, anything can be created. You three people are three very much charming characters. But, I am here to solve this problem of yours, so I'm going to solve it by going to the reality of this thing. I am bringing in

the authors of this--fiction--and make them return the whole story to reality."

Speaking into the intercom Dr. Tibs said, "Miss Jones, send in Mister Maurice Storm."

Through the door came a sorry looking character in work pants, loafers and shirt with pockets fully stuffed.

His big nose, sleepy eyes, big ears, and nearly baled head gave no hint of the fantastically developed mind hiding behind that exterior.

Mr. Tibs stood up to welcome him, "Beside this man I am hardly a Doctor. He has been through more mental wars and psychotic battles than any man in this clinic, creating his tools of curing from scratch, in the absence of social support and training. What have you to say to them?"

"That it was wrong to put them through such turmoil, so that is why I am using Doctor Tibs to clear the air. It is dangerous to even recognize the existence of a nether world, in fiction or reality. I had forgotten that, but lately I have remembered what it actually did to me, a horrible result that belongs better explained in one of my other books. So, I hereby pronounce you totally free of any further appearances of unreal characters, from my typewriter. The speed welder has quit and disappeared, like all things that seem to good--reality at work again."

"But what about the little man I seen," said Joey?

"He will never return by my hand," Maurice replied.

Relief spread over Joey's face.

"And," Maurice continued, "April never fell for this stuff and stuck to the reality of life, so she needs no cure of any problems. But--Mister Brillion--is another matter. He was created by the other author--one Dayon Storm--, and dealing in horror fiction and academic puzzles. I've decided to let him meet the full terror of that field by putting him face to face with self-analysis, the most terrible battle of a writer's life."

"You mean you're going to leave me in the hands of that man, who had me out there trying to solve puzzles far beyond my ability, with my very existence was dependent on it?" Red said incredulously.

"I got you out of England and in your own bed in Lanesboro, and under the watchful eye of April. That's all I can be expected to do for you. You are his imaginative character. But really, he is not so bad. He is an excellent sports writer, see, how he helped you beat that kids team. You adults should be fully ashamed of yourselves, letting snotty little kids beat you. No wonder the teen world is getting out of hand, and going to the dogs.

**But, a goal has been reached. No more little men!"**

**"But what if he comes in with a total reversal of what you just did?"**

"Well, he doesn't speak Aprils language well enough so he can't put too many words in her mouth. I'm not sure if he graduated from the 8th grade even, as he spells college with an A, and very with an A, maybe he has no E on his worn out computer, but, whatever, he compensates by typing A so much cause he tries to outdo the teacher giving him so many F's for reading electronic books instead of his assigned lessons. But, there are cases of created characters teaching their writer a thing or two. Just like the Deep Blue Computer turned around and beat its human inventors. Or a tractor runs over the guy that is supposed to be driving it! So stay in there, you do have a fighting chance."

April spoke up, "Just why are you writing this story in the first place?"

Dr. Tibs groaned, "This guy is like a toy, once you get him wound up, he won't quit--and you just got him wound up!"

Maurice took a deep breath. "There is so much garbage on TV, that we need a new class of writer. A writer who is dedicated to the public good, not to getting a laugh every so many seconds. To this end, I have come out of retirement and tackling what is described in every writers text 'as the hardest work in the world'. I should have done this years ago, but life was easy, so I just coasted along. At the turkey plant I worked at, I marveled at all the old people at work in the last few years of their life, cause they had frittered away their good years smarting off and refusing to be thrifty, or disasters had struck and wiped out their retirement plans. But, I learned nothing, letting life go by and enjoying the moment, till, like at later dates life changed, as change is the only real permanent law. The changing moment took away the easy life and left me with no visible means of support. Here I am caught in my own chapter, trying desperately to solve another result of negligence, a constant character defect of mine, begun in childhood due to chronic illnesses, one behind the other, till I was hardly expected to do anything, or else expected to do too much, at which I necessarily failed. So either way, I was left with nothing as a reward, a result not very conducive to energetic action. I knew--but failed to apply. The spirit was willing but the flesh was weak. So really, today I am beginning to do what should have been done years ago. Around me are rivers that should have been kept clean, farms that should have practiced soil conservation, drug gangs that

should have been met with elimination, politicians that should have been prosecuted earlier, etc. etc., 'Should have' is the continuous ring of for whom the bell tolls. At this late time in my life, will they elect me to the Presidency, permit me to install martial law to eliminate crime, tear apart the corrupt Federal Reserve Bank System, reform land ownership so everyone can only own three acres. Build an invincible army with the generals at the frontlines, and the privates at the back support lines, and well, there are an endless parade of ideas coming from my research, my ideas, and my studies."

Maurice pausing looking at them and continues, "So, I'm a little late at starting all this, and you have become the first victims of my actions, for only those who never do anything--never make mistakes! Don't be too concerned--I'll change your position with one word or sentence. You're much safer in fiction than being in real life, where change or correction of any mistakes comes much slower and much more difficult. But, in answer to your question, why am I writing this story, it's to hone my skills at writing the far more important books to follow, so forward march, you are the first to be chosen!"

"Hardly to be considered an honor, in my opinion," said April.

"C'mon, think of all the adventures lying before you."

"And why make me into a big fat woman, instead of a beautiful slim one?"

"I'm leading up to that, so you emerge triumphant and beautiful."

"No, --you are going to get him in such a complicated plot, he can't figure a way through it, due to your longer experience in writing, so he will lay it aside, so we will be stuck as we are, indefinitely."

"He could end it with everybody living happily forever," Maurice quipped.

"You Storm's don't give up that easy."

Red broke in, "Doctor Tibs, you are supposed to be in charge here. Why are you letting this--this--author do all the talking? What are you going to do next?"

"Avoid any chance of getting Mister Storm wound up again for one thing. From now on I will only wish to read his books so one can lay it down when one becomes over whelmed."

"I think we have discussed enough of my personality," said Maurice, "I shall leave now and leave you to your devices," with that he exited through another door opening upon a hall different from the entering hall.

**“So now what happens,” said Red?**

**Dr. Tibs picked up the intercom, “Miss Jones, send in Mister Dayon Storm.”**

**The knuckles of Red’s hands turned white on the armchair he was sitting in, as everyone turned to see this new surprise to the problem, and then the door opened.**

## CHAPTER 12 - - STORMS

In he walked, went over to the same chair that Maurice had sat in and seated himself.

He looked over to Red and then to Joey and smiled.

Red's heart skipped a couple of beats and Joey froze with terror!

Dr. Tibs seeing their reaction, responded, "Why are you both afraid? This is Dayon, the other Storm."

Red exclaimed, with fear showing in his face, "That's the little old man!"

Dr. Tibs responded, "No--he's just a harmless middle aged man. Mister Storm, will you please explain to them that you mean them no harm."

Dayon arose from the chair, to address them, he then, raising his hands, as he has this bad habit of using hand gestures, and began to speak.

Joey screaming, "HE'S GOT THAT BOW AND ARROW AND HE'S GOING TO SHOOT US!"

Red staring with fear as the light shining from the arrow tip is blinding, and then a crack of loud thunder follows; Red awakes and another flash of lighting lights up the room followed by a loud thunder roll.

Red, in a sweat, uncovers himself and sits up in bed, as the rain and wind pelt the window along with intermittent lighting and thunder.

Red looks around, as his surroundings are unfamiliar; he then remembers the rooms that they got, a little way out of Rochester on highway 52.

He remembers the 9:00 AM appointment in Dr. Tibs office.

He looks at the clock, it indicates 3:00 AM, and exclaims, "O' God--it's three in the morning!"

As another flash of lighting illuminates the room, Red remembers the dream he just had, says to himself, "What a nightmare! Where did I drug up these Storms! Must be the weather we're having that triggered this Storm thing! That first Storm, what a confusing mess of mumble jumble. If I have to decipher any of that, I sure would end up in the loony bin for sure. I'm not going to mention any of this to Doctor Tibs. Sounds to me like he needs to see Doctor Tibs as well, but I dreamt it so it must be me who has the messed up mind. Well--Doctor Tibs will get it all straighten out, I hope!"

Red gets out of bed and heads for the bathroom, as he needs to relieve himself; he turns on the bathroom light and closes the door.

The light from under the door illuminates the hallway and Red's shadow shows from under the door.

Finally, the sound of the toilet flushing and then water running in the sink; after Red has finished, he shuts off the light, opens the door and heads back to his bed.

He lies back down and starts to recall that dream again.

That first Storm, he really got to me with his ramblings.

What nonsense, what gibberish!

Computers turning on Humans, tractors running over their drivers, all by themselves!

Anybody with half a mind would see the insanity of it all, and this thing about the invincible army, or was it the invisible army?

Soon Red is snoring soundly.

Red awakens to the sound of the alarm clock going off, rolls over and looks at the time; it's indicating 6:30 AM, and then April calls from the living room, "Red, ars' youse' up yet? I'se and Joey ars' already and waiting on you. So's hurry up."

Red gets out of bed and goes to the bathroom to shower and shave; fifteen minutes later, he returns to his room to get dressed.

Its 7:00 o'clock, when Red joins April and Joey in the living room.

They all leave in Red's pickup and the first stop is for breakfast at Wendy's, after filling themselves with hot egg rolls, pancakes, coffee and milk for Joey, Red pays the bill and they are off to the clinic.

After taking the elevator to the 11th floor, which Joey thoroughly enjoyed, because he had never been on one before, they walked up to the desk.

Red said to the desk clerk, "I'm here to see Doctor Tibs at nine."

The clerk responded, "Your name is?"

"Red Brillion," Red replied.

The clerk typed on the computer and said, "Yes--you're scheduled for nine. Please have a seat until your called," she then handed him a small envelope with his appointment schedule and clinic number, they then went and sat down to wait.

The waiting area was large with twenty to thirty chairs in rows.

Most of the chairs were filled with people waiting to see other Doctors like Dr. Tibs; it was a long wait, so they read magazines to while away the time.

It was five after nine when a nurse walked up to the left side of the large desk and called several names; Red's name was the fourth one called, and as he got up, he said to April, "You wait here. I'll be back in a little while. If you needed for anything, the nurse will come and get you."

"I'll be here, waiting," She said smiling at him.

Red then went over to the Nurse and joined the other Patients.

The Nurse smiled as she led them down a hallway with rooms on each side.

When they came to an empty room, a Patient was taken inside; she closed the door and flipped a switch that put on a colored light from a row of colored lights and then, she went to the next empty room and repeated the same procedure.

Red sat by himself on a soft couch next to a desk, waiting for Dr. Tibs.

There was a cot on one side of the room with a chair next to it, and there was a bookcase filled with large and small books on the other side of the room.

As Red waited, he looked at all of the diplomas and certificates which were framed and hanging behind the desk on the wall.

At the window, grew a potted fern and soft music came from an overhead speaker, mounted in the ceiling.

The wait seemed to take forever and as he waited, many things went through Red's mind.

Dr. Tibs walks into the room closing the door behind him, and says, holding his hand out to Red, as he walks over to him, "Mister Brillion--how are you. It's such a nice day especially after the big storm we had last night. I hope it didn't keep you awake, we do need the rain as the lawns are drying up."

Red took his hand, replying, "I'm just fine and the storm didn't keep me up."

Dr. Tibs smiles and says, as he walks to his desk and sits down, "I'm glad to hear that, as you need your rest if we're to solve these nightmares."

He then opens a folder and pages through it; Red sits there watching

him read the contents.

Dr. Tibs makes a couple of entries, and then he looks up and says, "I'm going to ask you some questions about your family, friends, the kind of work you do, how you feel about yourself and life in general. Today we'll begin with your background. Once we find out things about you in general, we'll go from there. By background, I don't mean your age, where you were born, etc. I want to get to know you better, what you like to do for recreation, hobbies, your hates, fears and yes what your thoughts and feelings are on religion. In a nut shell, for today all we are going to do is visit."

The atmosphere had become very cordial and Red became relaxed.

"So where do we start?" Red asked.

"Where ever you want," Dr. Tibs responding, "what do you like doing for fun? I like to go camping, how about you?"

Red smiled, as he thought of the game on Sunday. "I play baseball and we got this game with Rushford this Sunday, but I'm going to miss it."

"Why, --aren't you playing?"

"No--not this time, because I'm here in Rochester," Red telling him.

"What's the name of your team?" Dr. Tibs asking.

"The Dragons," Red replies with a smile, "the local bar, The Red Dragon Inn is our sponsor."

Dr. Tibs writes on a tablet as he asks Red about the ball team, "Have you won many games? How good is your team?"

Red now looking a wee bit embarrassed says, "Only three last year, but we'll beat Rushford on Sunday. We got two new players and one of em' is a fantastic pitcher. With ole' Banksy we'll beat em' for sure."

Dr. Tibs looks up from the tablet that he's writing in and asks, "Just how old is this pitcher?"

"Nineteen or twenty."

"Oh," Tibs remarks and continues to write, and then he asks, "Why do you call him old Banksy? As he's a very young man--a Kid!"

Red shrugs his shoulders, replying, "I don't know. He's just ole' Banksy that's all."

Dr. Tibs changing the subject from ole' Banksy to the team. "Tell me more about your ball team. How long have you played with them?"

Red now thinking, for it's been a long time. "I've been on the team for about eight years. We started the team way back in 89. A bunch of us from work were in the 'Red Dragon' haven' a few drinks when Mike, he's

my co-worker, thought it would be fun to play baseball. So, one thing led to another and before too long we're the official Lanesboro baseball team. The Red Dragon Inn became our sponsor. As we needed new equipment and such, to be competitive, because we now played other towns."

"So--you're one of the founding fathers of your team. You mention earlier that you never won too many games. Why do you think that is?"

"We won some games. We beat St Charles, Spring Grove and even beat Winona once. But, --it's Rushford that we never could beat. They got some real good players. If only once--boy--that would be great to beat them. Now with Banks, we got a real chance for the first time to beat them."

"So--they have better players," Dr. Tibs said, now smiling, "is that why your team hasn't won any games with them?"

Red nodding and looking embarrassed said, "We'll beat them this time. We got Banks pitching for us and they'll never get past him. All we got to do is hit, and I think we can get enough runs to win. That was our problem with Rushford, we didn't have good pitching and we could never hold them. Now with Banksy, we got real good pitching."

Dr. Tibs still writing, asks another question, "Your Coach, if you have one, tell me something about him. What do you think of him? Is he any good at coaching your team, and would you like to see another coach?"

Red again thinks and then replies, "Well--his name is Bill Appleman. He's retired from our shop, about sixty eight years old and a small man. In his younger days, he played for the U of M so, he makes a fine coach, but he's a real pusher, never lets up. He was a pusher on the job as Forman and now as coach. You can't satisfy him, he always wants it better or more. I think--if we could find another coach, --yes I would like to see another coach for our team."

Dr. Tibs looking at the clock on the wall says, "This session went real good today. I think we got some very interesting information from this first sitting. It looks like we may be on the way to solving your problem. Now--I want you to play ball on Sunday. I think your winning over Rushford will help in winning over your nightmares and little old men. I'm setting your next appointment for Monday after the game with Rushford."

"But--I've got rooms for the whole week," Red exclaims!

Dr. Tibs responds, as he closes his appointment book, "That's fine, use the rest of the week to relax. If I remember, didn't your Doctor want to have you take some tests here, to determine why you had that stroke?"

Red nodded as he and the Dr. got up from their chairs, and as they head to the door, Dr. Tibs says, "Well then, until Monday, get lots of rest and win that game on Sunday," then they both smiled as they left the room.

April asks, when Red returns, "Well--how's did it go? Youse' done get cured, so's you not sees no more little men?"

"I don't think so," Red laughs answering her, "all we talked about was the baseball team. I've got another appointment next Monday at nine."

April exclaims, "NEXT MONDAY! Youse' mean wes' got to stay another week!"

"You got it, --another week," Red said nodding, "the Doc says that I've got to play ball on Sunday."

Red mumbles to himself, as they walk to the elevators, "I wonder why it's so important that I play ball on Sunday?"

They take the elevator to the main floor and leave the clinic.

As Red drives back to their rooms, April firmly says, "I se thinks that Doctor is taken youse' for a ride. He's not a helpin' youse' in the least. Youse' say all he's talks about is youse' baseball team. He's not even asks about the little old man youse' say youse' been ah' seenin'. Ah's say he's doesn't know how to cure youse'. He's just after youse' money."

Red looks over at her stormin' face and smiles, because she looks great to him that way, and then he turns to look down the road as he continues to drive.

## CHAPTER 13 - - YOU CAN COUNT ON ME

April continued to ramble on, "Now we got a whole week wasted, why can't he take you ever day? Wes' got to get this thing over with. It ain't onlee' you, it's Joey's problem too. Youse' both in trouble. And besides that, youse' having nightmares again--ain't youse'? I'se heard you up lass' night agin'. Youse' goner' tell me all about that again too! The onlee' one around here getting anyplace with anything is me, an I'se gotta' get in a stew to do it--" Red had only listened, not saying nothing.

They turned in and parked at the motel, and all walked silently into the motel, settled into the overstuffed furniture in the living room.

Somewhat tired, soon to be lunchtime, each with their own thoughts, the phone jangled; Red picked it up. "No, there is no one here by that name," he said replacing it.

"Who dey want?" April said suspiciously.

"Somebody called Violet Toussaint."

"Ma!" Shrieked Joey in fear; April turned white.

"Deys after me. Dats my old name. Deys up here to get me! Red--run outside and see who is out there calling me. Get their license number! Do something--run, run--fast!"

Red came out of the chair, tore open the door and ran outside; April slammed it behind him.

After looking both ways, he spied a red car beside an old telephone booth at the far end of the motel.

He began running toward it as it was slowly pulling away.

It stopped as the driver saw him, running and waving his arms.

Red ran up to the driver's side.

A well-dressed man sat in the driver's seat, one hand under his open coat; Red was thinking fast. "Did you just call on the telephone?"

"Who wants to know?" The Driver asked.

"Well, someone called and asked for a lady. I wasn't thinking at the time, but I do know her--now I remember," replied Red.

"How do you know her?"

"Well," Red stopped to get some breath, "you see--she is a cousin of my wife. She don't live around here. We seldom see her or hear from her, so it wasn't fresh in my mind. Sorry--, what's her name again--Violet Toussaint? Is that the person you were calling for?"

The man studied him carefully before answering, "So, where is

she?"

Red continued to breathe heavy, "What do you want with her? Remember, you are the stranger here!"

"I need to see her. It's very important. Can I talk to your wife?"

"No--she's had a hard day, and is lying down. I don't want her disturbed. Maybe tomorrow. Hey--this is a beautiful car--a BMW--wow!"

Red walked around the front of the car pretending to admire it, but noting the Louisiana license number.

He came back to the driver's side and said, "Not a scratch on it--wow!"

"Better not be," the Driver said.

Red had the feeling he had a gun on him the way the driver kept his hand under his coat.

"Oh, well, what am I thinking? I'll never be able to afford one," Red sighing.

"You're in the wrong business," the Driver replied.

"I'm just a dumb welder, too dumb to run a business."

"It depends how badly you want big money."

"But how did you find us in the first place?" Red curiously asked.

"I saw you leaving the Mayo Clinic. Your wife looked familiar. So I followed you here."

"Yes, I guess they do look something alike. They both have young boys, but that's where the similarity ends. Violet is skinny, my wife is fat. Violet is calm and practical. My wife is mentally unstable so she gets upset easy. Violet has some kind of a job. I really don't know what she does. My wife just lays around complaining a lot, bit of a burden to me. So--can you stop out tomorrow in the forenoon?"

"Looks like I'll have to. Be seeing you." He started the big engine and slowly pulled away.

Red walked back to the motel, he entered to find April holding an ugly big 45 in her hand.

She closed the door quickly behind him, asking, "Which way did he go?"

"Back towards Rochester, on highway 52. Why?" Red asked.

"Get in the car. We are goner' follow him. Youse' drive. I'se be in the back seat with Joey. Quick, so's we don't lose him."

"But, but," Red started, but April pushed him towards the door,

Joey following closely.

In a moment, they were on highway 52 and Red was saying, "There's his car topping that second hill. He's not driving very fast for a BMW. Why do you want to follow him anyway?"

"Cause I'se want to know where he is, I'se don't want him knowing where I'se am."

On the way she questioned Red about everything he had said, "So, I'se mentally unstable, huh?"

"Gee April I was trying to cover up for you and didn't have time to do much thinking about how to do it. Did I make a lot of mistakes and blunders?"

"We will discuss it later. Right now--Joey, youse' gets down out of sight. I'se goner' get down out of sight too, except to look out between these two seats. Red, youse' follow him into town and sees where he parks, and turn off on this side, and look for a telephone not out in the open, but sort of protected, where I'se can make a phone call."

"He drove into the parking lot of the Radisson Plaza Hotel," Red said.

Red pulled to the shoulder and parked saying, "He walked in the back way into the hotel."

"Now for a telephone", April repeated.

Red found one, six blocks down and he could pull up close to it with the car; April got out, put a coin in and dialed.

"Mister Mac, this is April Brown. Yessuh, I'se in big trouble. Wes' is about six blocks down the Radisson Hotel, at a crossroads booth in a red Tudor. I'll be waiting on you."

Red looked at her questioning, as she crawled back in the backseat.

"Mac is my contact up here ifn' I'se got into any trouble, and am in trouble of all kinds with that guy up here," She gnawed on her lip, finally saying, "I'se don't know where to start right now."

Red saying nothing, as he didn't want to pressure her.

A big black car pulled up behind them, a big man got out of the car and came up to Reds side of the car and said, "Hi--April, Joey."

"C'mon, get in on this side", April said.

He slid easily in beside Red and turned to talk to April, but April said, "This here is Red Brillion, and Red, this is Mister McPherson. Mac,

I'm thinking Slippery Elm Dell is in town and he's on my trail, an I'se is scared!"

"Well, --I'm here now, so fill me in on all the details. If it's him he is big game for me and we want him bad."

April recounted all the details from the moment of the telephone call and finishing as to why she was in Rochester, and how she had met Red.

Mac listened in silence, pulled a phone from his pocket and called his office, telling them to put a tail on the BMW in the Radisson parking lot.

"Is you goner' pick him up there right now," asked April?

"We tried that twice, both times he got away. I think now, that he registers there, and then goes to another place to sleep, so if we try to surprise him he is never there. Last time he had a black BMW and that was all we got. Later a guy came along claiming it had been stolen and he got that back too, I'm sure."

"So's what is youse' plan then?" April asked.

"I'd like to surprise him when he comes to see you in the morning. I'll have four cars waiting, one on every escape route, more if necessary."

"But we need your car there for bait."

"No way--no way--no way," repeated April.

There was silence for a while, and then Mac said, "How about this plan? We'll find you a motel on this end of town for tonight. About 4 AM, I'll come and pick up you and Joey in my car and Mister Brillion will drive your car up to the other motel and park it for bait. We will stay here until Slippery leaves town to go see you, and then we will follow behind him on way back. You two will always be with me, no matter what happens."

"But, I'se want Red with me too," said April, "No way will I'se leave him there for bait!"

"Well then, I'll have a plain car pick him up and bring him back to us here."

"That all sounds better. I hope Red's car don't get all shot full of holes."

"We've got to protect you and Joey first of all," Red spoke up.

"Good thinking," Mac responded.

Mac led the way down to another motel, made arrangements, and said he'll call and have meals sent in, stay inside and watch TV or something, and I'll see you at 4AM.

"Call me again anytime if you're in trouble. I won't sleep tonight

anyway.”

“Thank you, agin’, Mister Mac, ever so much,” they were left alone. Joey said, “I’m really hungry.”

Looking at each other they realized it was nearly 4 o’clock, so a big pizza was ordered, much to Joey’s big eyes and hungry look.

After eating, they all napped in their chairs, the door chained and bolted, and the shades drawn.

It was 8 PM when they stirred awake, turned on the TV and re-ordered another meal for supper, with dessert.

Joey was making the most of it, but Red and April were tense and quiet.

A murder mystery on TV did nothing to make them feel better.

Red was thinking, what an amazing woman this was, who took charge so well in the middle of a surprise challenge; other women would have folded under into whimpering frightened victims.

He looked at all sides of the problem and could think of no better way to handle it; his admiration must have shown in his eyes as April said once how sorry she was he got into all of this.

“Adventure!” Red replied to which April scoffed, “Don’t give me’s that, I’se scared stiff!”

“Me too,” said Red quietly.

“Why don’t one of us sleep, the other one sit up and guard, ok,” April said.

“Wake me at 12 AM then,” said Red and went into one of the bedrooms.

When April woke him at midnight, Joey was asleep on the couch, the TV was off and April’s eyelids were droopy.

“Been some day,” she whispered, “now, wake me’s at 3:30 AM so’s we can be ready when Mac comes.

At 3:30, Red woke everyone; they had all slept in their clothes so it was a matter of getting fully woken up.

At 4 AM a big car pulled up outside of the motel, and a knock on the door, Mac entering and announcing, “Morning everyone. Red, best you get your car back up to the other motel. When you get there, go inside and check it out, then come out and a plain blue car will be there to pick you up and bring you back here. I’ll stay here with April and Joey. It’ll probably be a long four or five hour wait for all of us, but I don’t want nothing to go

wrong."

Red drove back to the other motel and parked the car.

Warily he went into their rooms; all was empty, and as he was turning the lights out again, he heard a car outside.

Peeking out, he saw it was the blue car, Mac had mentioned, so he locked the motel door and got in on the passenger side.

The driver was a big man like Mac, and introduced himself as Frank Teas.

They rode in silence, Frank with his eyes on the rear view and side mirrors, Red beginning to follow suit.

As they pulled up to the motel, Frank let out a sigh of relief, "Well, I hope he didn't have an overnight man watching your motel. If he did, he didn't follow us here."

They both went into the motel.

Mac rose and introduced April to Frank, saying, "He will be a machine gunner riding with us. You're now in good hands April!"

Mac sent Frank out for breakfast for all, and everyone was feeling better with food in them.

Conversation got going, TV news and weather, and the time did seem to go faster.

At 8 AM Mac's phone buzzed, it was the lookout reporting that a short squat man had got into the red BMW and drove it away, down the street to another motel, where Slippery came out and replaced the driver, and then the red BMW went to a restaurant.

"I've learned he doesn't sleep where he leaves his car," Mac said to Frank, "and, I learned it the hard way!"

About 8:45 AM Slippery came out and proceeded up highway 52.

"He is going up there," said Mac elated, "time for us to go!"

Mac made several calls on the phone.

They all got in Mac's car.

Frank pulled an ugly snub-nosed heavy gun from a case under the front seat and adjusted the seats and seat belts.

Mac drove slowly up Highway 52 in the direction of the motel and as they neared the place, he told April, Red, and Joey, to get down as far as they could so they wouldn't be seen.

He pulled over and parked in a driveway about half a mile from the

motel.

Mac turned to April and said, "You all can sit up a while, but be ready to squat at a moment's notice. I have troopers north of the motel, one car of my men behind the motel and one car of my men coming behind us. There they go now. They will slowly cruise by and turn around to be ready to follow him if he comes this way. If he comes this way, I will follow that car. There are also troopers that are now parked on side roads south of us."

His phone by his ear, they all sat tense and waiting.

Mac's phone buzzed.

"Slippery is phoning the room, from his car, and not getting any answer. He has restarted his motor, as he waits," said the voice on the phone.

April shivered, her stomach crawling; She reached for Joey' and Red's hand, gripping them tightly.

The phone spoke again, "He has drove slowly to the entrance and is sitting there, looking up and down the highway. He seems to be redialing the number. Now he is going out on Highway 52 and turning south, he has let all traffic go ahead of him."

"Close in, all cars," Mac barked into the phone.

"Down, back there," and Mac turned north until he found a cross over and pulling into it, stopped to let first the red BMW go by, now followed by Mac's second car on the job.

Mac said into the phone, "Car 3, stay in the motel driveway in case he crosses over and goes north. I'll follow him south now."

Slippery, now well aware of what was going on, stomped on the gas pedal and sped away.

But, there was traffic ahead of him, and two semi's side by side on the highway approaching a bridge together, forced him to drop his speed to theirs.

A trooper, his red lights flashing, sped by both Mac and Mac's second car and pulled directly in behind the red BMW.

The two semis were a problem for Mr. Slippery, even after they cleared the bridge, as one began to pull ahead of the other and to get back into the right lane.

Mac moved into the left lane to keep following traffic from getting involved, so he was beside car number two, which was following the trooper.

"The trunk!" shouted April.

The BMW trunk slowly rose, and double spurts of flame shot out; the troopers engine blew up.

When the hood went up the trooper put his brakes on.

Car number two plowed into the back of the trooper, spun sideways and went over the bank.

“Get me up beside him,” said Frank quietly.

Frank’s window went down, the barrel of the black gun slanted at the red BMW, still ahead of him, but Frank pulled the trigger anyway; the gun coughed.

Armor piercing bullets sped into the car door and the window of the red BMW, going on through and out the front windshield. The BMW began weaving and went off the embankment, and end over end over end, then beginning to roll sideways.

Mac slowed and pulled over, stopping on the edge of the road.

“Slippery will never bother you again, April, and how come you are all up here watching? I told you all to stay down,” they all looked at each other.

“How did you know about the trunk, April?” Red asked.

“I’se know’ed too much about his business, that’s why I’se was so scared--death is a common thing to them.”

They all sat there a long time.

Mac walked back to see how car number two had fared.

April laid her head on the front seat back and trembled, Joey and Red put their arm around her, sitting quietly.

Mac came back. “Boys got bruised and slammed around, but nothing serious.... How are you April?”

“Could I’se just go back to Lanesboro?” She said, “I’se don’t like Rochester.”

“No reason to stay,” said Mac, “we picked up the short guy who drove the BMW this morning, and he’ll do some talking and sitting, I’m sure.”

“I’ll need to get my car and we will head right out,” promised Red.

“I’ll take you back there right now, and I sure appreciate what you have done for us April. You played it as any smart crime stopper would have, being one step ahead of the criminal,” Mac went on and on, praising April, and her good sense of fortitude.

“Mister Mac,” she said, as they got out of the big car at the motel,

"I'se not that great. I'se was just protecting me and what's mine. I'se wish none of this had happened, and I'se never come to this clinic. What will be the repercussions back in Louisiana now?"

"April, Slippery was rebuilding everything we had torn down, with your testimony. If problems develop--well--you can always count on me."

"And me," said Red.

"And me," said Joey.

"And me," said Frank!

## CHAPTER 14 - - TROUBLES

They walked into their room at the motel and sat down on the sofa to catch their breaths, after the hi-intrigue that they all just went through.

April scared and very upset, sternly tells Red. "It's dangerous fo's me and Joey here's. I'se wants to go back to Lanesboro today--not tomorrow."

Red nods, "Ok--I'll check us out and we can leave. The Doctor wanted me to play baseball on Sunday anyway."

Red gets up and leaves to check out; April goes and starts packing her and Joey's things.

When Red returns, he goes to his room and packs his things as April finishes putting her things into Red's car.

By ten that morning they were ready to leave, and so they all get into the car, leave the motel and head out of Rochester and on to Lanesboro.

It was almost noon, when they pull up in front of April's house and stopped.

April says, as she gets her and Joey's baggage from the car, "Ah's back and ah's not leavin' again. Ain't nobody's or no-things going to make me ah' leaving. Ah's home for good!" Red smiles at her as he follows her into the house.

"It's almost noon. Youse' stays for lunch. It won't be much, just cold cuts and such. Maybe some of that left over cake," again, Red nods.

And so, April goes and puts together a quick lunch of various left-over's from the refrig.

For most of the lunch they sat there eating in silence, until finally, Red breaks the silence, "April--now you must tell me all about this mystery. Who was this Slippery fella and what happened in Louisiana?"

April biting her lip responds, "Sorry, but I'se can't tells' youse' notin'. This is ma' problem and ah's don't wants youse' involved."

"After this little fracas this morning, I'm already involved. There may be more men like Slippery, and who knows, he may have already told people back in Louisiana about finding you here. If I would've known about this, I wouldn't have taken you to Rochester. So please April--tell me about your problem."

April sat looking at Red in silence, thinking that maybe he's right.

Fear and worry began to show on her face, but she remained firm in her convictions; this was her problem and she wasn't going to get anyone else involved.

April shakes her head saying, "No--I'se can't tells' youse' notin' and that's that."

Red tries once more to get her to tell him the story. "April—you've got to put your trust in friends, that's what their there for. Now more than ever you need friends to help you through this. Look what happen this morning. Without your friend, Mac and his friends, you would be in very deep trouble now. You can't solve this by yourself, you need your friends. I'm your friend, a very close friend and I want to help."

April with a tear on her cheek, slowly replies, "I'se can't--not now, maybe later. I'se don't wants youse' to get hurt or dead," She then gets up from the table and goes to her room, leaving Red sitting there, watching.

Red gets up and loudly says, "I'm leaving now. I'll be back in a few days. You think over what we talked about, so when I return maybe then you'll want to tell me about your problem in Louisiana—bye," Red walks out of her house, gets into his car and drives off.

As Red heads for his apartment, he thinks, "I wish she would tell me what happened in Louisiana. She's one stubborn women!"

The next afternoon Red goes to the ball field to practice with the team; as Sunday is now only a few days off and they need all the practice that they can get.

When Red walks into the dugout, everybody is there except Banks.

Red, looking around and not seeing Dave, asks Bill, their coach, "Where's Banks?"

"He's home sick with the measles."

"The measles! That's a kids disease!" Red exclaims, "You get the measles in the first grade! Banks is not a little kid, and he's in college! So how can he be having measles?"

"Yeah--but he's got em' just the same," Bill responding, "I guess he didn't have em' when he was a kid, so he's got em' now."

Red asks, as he is now real concerned about Banks not pitching on Sunday, "How long will he be laid up?"

"I don't know maybe a week, whatever it takes to get over the measles. Remember--he's not a little kid and this is a children's disease, so it

may take him longer to recover.”

“Well--if he’s not going to be in the game on Sunday, then we’re in big trouble,” Bill just stares at Red, not saying anything.

Mike walks up and asks, “Who’s in big trouble?”

“Banks is sick and he won’t be pitching on Sunday.”

“Yep--we’re in big trouble. We might as well chalk up another loss to Rushford.”

“We’re not beat yet! I just know we can take em’ this time. Say--I’ve got an idea, how about asking some of the high school players to play on our team. You know how good they are and we practice with them all the time. They’ll be here in a few minutes to play with us. So how about it, we could use some new players?”

Bill shakes his head, “These are kids. This team is for adults only.”

“Banks is only one or two years older than some of those so called kids and he’s playing. Remember--those kids keep beating us. Anyway--most of em’ are between sixteen and eighteen, and almost adults in my book. How about if we just ask the seventeen and eighteen year olds, the high school seniors to join. We just might pull a win off, without Banks.”

Bill still unconvinced, shakes his head, “I don’t know. I’m still against using high schoolers on our team. I don’t care how old they are, their still in high school.”

Red tries again to get Bill to give in. “I know--but, just this one time. For the sake of the Dragons, how about it? Just use one of em’ to replace Banks until he’s well again.”

Finally, Bill gives in with a sigh. “Ok--just this one time, and only one of em’ to replace Banks.”

“You won’t regret this and we’ll beat Rushford this Sunday without Banks,” Red responds smiling with his victory.

Ten minutes later, the high school team arrives; Bill walks over to the high school dugout and asks, the high school coach, “Carl--I need a little favor.”

Carl looks at Bill, “What kind of favor?”

Bill then lays the hard luck story on him, “Banks--our star player, well, --he’s laid up with the measles So, I I mean the Dragons need a replacement, just for the game with Rushford. We thought just maybe, we could borrow someone from your team. I been watchn’ your team and if you wouldn’t mind, could we, now just for the Rushford game, borrow Jeff

Feldman?"

Carl laughs, "The measles! You guys really are a bunch of losers. Jeff Feldman is one of my best players. Just what makes you think I'll give him to you?"

"OK--then forget it. I knew it was a waste time to ask you. Just remember--the Dragons are the Lanesboro's team and you're from Lanesboro too. Ask your team if they like seeing their hometown team keep getting beaten by Rushford. And another thing--Feldman is only going to be with you for one more season, he'll be graduating next spring."

Carl stands there quietly, looking at Bill as he contemplates. "OK--you win. You can have Feldman, but only for the summer. When school starts this fall, he comes back. You got it?"

Bill smiles. "Got it. You get him back in the fall and thanks."

Carl motions to Feldman to come over, and when he arrives, Carl tells him, "Feldman--you're playing with the Dragons for the rest of the summer. This is the Dragons Coach Bill Appleman. He'll be your new Coach for the summer. I'll see you back in the fall."

Jeff exclaims, "THE DRAGONS! But Coach!"

Carl retorts, "No buts! Just do as I say."

Bill offers his hand to Jeff, "You can call me Coach Appleman, Coach, or just Bill--ok."

Jeff says, as he reluctantly takes Bill's hand, "Ok," and then Jeff and Bill walk back to the Dragons dugout.

After Jeff and Bill walk into the Dragons dugout, Bill introduces Jeff to the Dragons; the Dragons are happy to have this hotshot high schooler on their team.

They all take turns shaking Jeff's hand and patting him on the back, because now, they once again have a chance to beat Rushford; Bill assigns Jeff to right out field, as this is where Bill has seen him play at his best.

Finally, Bill tells them that it's time to play ball.

The game that afternoon ends in a tie, because of Jeff's great hitting and two of his home runs; this is now the second time, this summer, that the Dragons didn't lose to the high school team.

Red asks Jeff as they walk out of the ball field, "You know anything about welding?"

Jeff shrugs his shoulders and replies, "Sorry!"

"Thought I'd ask," Red says and gets into his pickup; he then drives

back to his apartment.

He no more then gets inside, when the phone rings; Red thinks, as he goes to answer it. "Ah"--It must be April. She finally decided to tell me about what went on in Louisiana."

He picks up the phone and says, "Hello..." The party on the other end responds, "Is this Mister Red Brillion?"

Red puzzled, because it isn't April and thinking maybe it might be more trouble for April, so he cautiously answers, "Yes--whom am I speaking to?"

The voice on the other end replies, "This is Doctor Tibs office. We have been trying to get a hold of you all day. Your appointment for next Monday has been changed to Wednesday. Doctor Tibs has a seminar on Monday so he can't see you."

Red relaxes, "Ok--Wednesday will work fine for me. I'll put it down on my calendar and I'll be there then," they both then hang up.

The last few days of that week went uneventful, the Dragons practiced each afternoon and even won a couple of games from the high school team; Jeff was making the difference for the team.

Now with him, the Dragons have a fighting chance on Sunday. Sunday, the day of the big game with Rushford.

Both teams are in their respective dugouts and the pitchers are warming up in the bullpens.

Red, now he's very nervous, as well as the other players.

The bleachers are full of towns folk to root for their hometown teams, and as game time draws near the Umpires go out on the field.

The Coaches for each team meet on home plate with the Umpire, and toss to see who bats first.

The Dragons lose the toss and take the field, could this be a sign of trouble ahead?

The first batter puts one deep into right field; Jeff is on it and makes the catch for out one.

The second batter hits a bouncing ball right past second base for a single.

The third batter hits one to Red, who makes the catch to put the batter out.

The fourth batter's bat connects with a resounding crack that sends the ball over the fence, for a homer.

The Rushford runners round the bases as the Dragons hopelessly watch the ball sail out of sight; the game is now two zip for Rushford.

This totally knocks the enthusiasm from the Dragons, as this once again looks like business as usual.

Red thinks to himself, as the next batter steps up to the plate, "We're in big trouble! We don't have any pitching. Even with Feldman, I don't see how we can win this. We need Banks!"

The next pitch--and the batter send's the ball heading towards Jeff.

Jeff run's to intercept it, and makes a running catch, and then without stopping, he hurtles it towards first; the ball smacks right into the glove of the first baseman for the third and final out.

As the Dragons file into the dugout, their hopes of a win are now dashed.

When Jeff enters, Bill pats him on the back, "Great job--Kid. If it wasn't for you we'd still be out there."

Red sounding worried, tells Bill, "We're in trouble. I don't see how we can possibly win. Even if we get any runs, we don't have the pitching to hold em'. Without Banks this game is a washout!"

"It's just like the game we played with Winona," Jeff comments, "without Banks we couldn't hold em' either."

The first two batters for the Dragons strike out; it's now Jeff's turn at bat.

He gets ready, the pitch, he swings and with a very loud crack he sends the ball sailing out of sight, and as he runs the bases the Dragons have their first homer of the game and the first run scored.

Now its Reds turn; he gets ready, the pitch and Red stands there as the ball streaks by for strike one.

Red is now more determined than ever, for he's not going down as the third out.

Again the pitch, Red swings and nothing happens, as the ball lands in the catcher's mitt for strike two.

Red is in trouble and sweating, he grits his teeth, scratches the dirt with his feet and gets ready for the final pitch, it comes as a knuckle ball; Red swings in despair, and then by some miracle, the bat catches a piece of the ball, sending the ball bouncing right by the right infielder who tries to stop it, but the ball keeps going into the outfield.

Red stands at home stunned, watching the ball go bouncing into the

outfield, as his team mates holler at him to run.

Red realizing what's happening starts for first along with the shouts from his teammates in the dugout.

The outfielder grabs the ball and then abruptly drops it; by the time he can again pick it up and throw it to first, Red is already there.

This is Rushford's first error and just maybe, the Dragons may still have a chance.

Red feels elated as he stands there, because he's the tying run for the Dragons; a cheer goes up from the bleachers and from the dugout.

The next batter quickly steps up to the plate and just a quickly he goes down swinging for the third and final out; Red once again feels despair as he walks to his position in the field and the Rushford team heads for the dugout.

After the first inning, the Dragons are down by one run; the score is two to one in favor of Rushford.

As the next three innings come and go, the point spread grows.

After the fourth inning, the score is now eight to five in favor of Rushford; it could be a lot worse if Feldman wasn't playing.

Short of a miracle, there's no way the Dragons are going to win this.

As the final player leaves the dugout for his place in the field, Banks walks in wearing sunglasses and his uniform.

Bill seeing Banks exclaims, "Banks--I thought you were sick! What are you doing here?"

"I got up this morning and the spots were gone! So--I called my Doctor and he told me to come over, so I did. I asked him if it was ok to play. He said that I could, as long as I felt ok and wore these shades to protect my eyes."

"Are you sure you're ok?" Bill asks, being a little concerned.

"Yeah—I feel fine," Dave reassuring him, "I can play--honest."

"Ok then--we're in deep trouble. Go with Jerry and get warmed up. As soon as you're ready I'm putting you in the game and I hope it isn't too late!"

As Dave and Jerry go to the bullpen to warm up, Bill says to himself, "This is the miracle, that we've been waiting for. I just hope it isn't too late."

The Dragons are in real trouble now, as the bases are loaded and Rushford's best batter walks to the plate with no outs.

Bill motions to Banks and together they walk to the pitcher's mound.

Red and the other players are very surprised and elated when they see Banks walking to the mound with the coach; the pitcher is also surprised at seeing Banks coming towards him.

"I'm taking you out," Bill says to the pitcher, "you've gone far enough, now it's Banks turn."

The pitcher nods and says to Banks, as he hands him the ball, "You look kinda' pale Kid! I've got five bucks that says you'll pass out on the mound and be carried off."

"Oh yeah--I feel fine--you're on! Nobody's carrying me off the mound."

"We'll see. Good luck--Kid," heckled the Pitcher.

Both the pitcher and Bill leave the mound and walk back to the dug-out, leaving Dave on the mound throwing several practice pitches to Mike.

Finally, it's time for the game to resume.

The batter moves up to the plate.

Mike knowing the team is at stake calls for a fastball and prepares for the worst.

Dave winds up, and just as he had done the last time he threw a fastball to Mike, lets sail the deadly missile; the batter never saw the ball as it smacked into Mike's glove with a loud thud.

The batter looked at the catcher with surprise as the strike is called.

Mike again prepares, as he calls for another fastball.

Dave gives the nod of approval and sends another missile to Mike; the poor batter just stands there as strike two is called.

The batter now moves in closer to the plate, as he isn't going to let the next one go by.

Mike prepares, as he gives Dave the sign for the final fastball; Dave again gives the nod of approval.

Dave winds up and sends the last missile to Mike; the batter now prepared, swings, but to no avail, the ball ends up for the last time in Mike's glove for the third out.

Rushford now has one out with the bases still loaded; Bill thinks that, just maybe, there might still be a chance to pull off a win. "If we can get some runs in the next five innings without giving up any runs to Rushford, then just maybe we can do it."

The next batter comes to the plate, Banks sends this guy back to the dugout with no problem, and now it's beginning to look bad for Rushford, as maybe the tables have turned.

As the last batter for Rushford walks to the plate there are smiles on all the Dragons faces; Banks screws this guy into the ground with a combination of a slider and two curves.

Rushford takes the field with their men left stranded on all three bases.

As Dave enters the dugout, the other pitcher waves a five spot at him and smiles; Dave grabs for the money saying, "I'm feeling great! I'll take that now, thank you."

The Pitcher says, as he pulls it back in nick of time, avoiding Dave's quick fingers, "That's only one inning. There are four more to go, and then we'll see. So--how do you want to be carried off? Feet first or headfirst? You still look awful pale to me!"

"I'm going to make it through this game and nobody is carrying me off the mound! Then I'll be five bucks richer."

As the rest of the players file into the dugout, they pat Dave on the back; for he's their miracle man.

As Jeff enters the dugout, Dave exclaims in surprise. "Feldman--you playing with the Dragons!"

"Yeah--they needed someone to help win. I got volunteered! Cool-huh! But I'm not all that good! Anyway--now it's just like old times, me and you playing ball again, and on the same side too."

Dave taps the top of the bill of Jeff's cap, with his finger, knocking it down over Jeff's eyes. "What ya' mean you not that good! If it wasn't for you, the Dragons would be eight zip. You're a good ballplayer and don't be too surprised, if you don't get yourself a baseball scholarship. I've seen scouts watchn' you play. Anyway--we're playing together again and that's cool," Jeff smiles as he straightens his cap.

It's the bottom of the fifth and the first batter for the Dragons is at the plate, waiting for the pitch.

After a couple of foul balls, he nails one pass the second baseman for a single; the next batter fouls out, and things are starting to look up.

The Dragons have one out and a man on first, with Jeff coming to the plate; he takes the first pitch for a strike.

On the next pitch--he nails it but good, as it sails into center field and rolls up against the fence for an inside field, home run.

Now its Reds turn, he clobbers it high into right field and into the mitt of the right outfielder.

The final out to end the fifth inning comes with a bouncing ball to the second baseman who then throws it to first.

As the Dragons take the field for inning six, they are now only one run down, as the score is now eight to seven.

For the next two innings neither side scores, as they now seemed deadlocked, things once again are looking bad for the Dragons; if they can't get another two runs, the game is either lost or tied.

With two innings left to play the Dragons must break this deadlock and score!

Now it's the bottom of the eight, and the score is still eight to seven.

The Dragons are up to bat with Jeff coming to the plate; it's got to be now or never, as Jeff may only get one more chance to bat.

Jeff says to himself, as he awaits the first pitch, "I know I can do it. I know I can do it."

The pitch--and Jeff grunts, as he puts everything he can muster into the swing; it connects--the bat splinters and the ball is on its way to heaven, it's GONE!

It's the tying homer and the Dragons have broken the deadlock and tied the game--finally!

As Jeff rounds third and heads for home, the shouts and cheers go up in the stands and from the Dragons dugout; now it's Jeff who's the miracle man.

Dave is waiting for him as he enters the dugout and comments, "I thought I heard you say you weren't all that good."

Jeff blushing, "Yeah--I did it."

Bill goes over and hands him the splintered bat, "Looks like you're going have to buy a new bat--huh--Kid!"

The whole team laughs as Jeff takes the broken bat from Bill.

"Keep it Kid--as a souvenir," Bill tells him smiling.

As Red walks to the plate, he hopes that he can repeat Jeff's homer.

Wouldn't that be great, but no luck, it's the same old story as Red's ball is once again caught in left field for an out.

The second and third outs follow and the Dragons head to the top of

the ninth with the scores tied; either team can now win.

All is needed is one run-only one run!

Just as things are starting to look up, Banks pitching is starting to slip, as the first batter slams one deep into right field for a double.

Dave removes his cap, wipes his forehead with his sleeve, and replaces his cap.

The other Pitcher in the dugout noticing this comments to Bill, "The Kid's had it! He's tiring fast, this is too much for him. If you don't take him out, we'll be carrying him off the field."

Bill then call's time out and walks out to the pitcher's mound.

He say's to Dave, "You don't look so good. I think it's time you call it a day. I'm taking you out of the game. I don't want to be responsible for putting you in the hospital."

"I'm fine--you can't take me out now! This is the last inning! If I can hold em' and we can get one run, we win. I've got to play!"

Bill thinks and against his better judgment, he leaves Dave in and returns to the dugout.

The next batter comes to the plate; Dave sends three fastballs his way and sends him back to the dugout.

Dave is tiring now, as his breathing has increased and he feels a little lightheaded.

Another batter is now at the plate and ready.

Dave looks to Mike for the signal and gets a call for a slider.

He winds up and slides it in just under the swinging bat for the first strike.

Dave is now starting to sweat, and he's starting to feel a bit weak.

Dave now knows that, he's in real trouble and tells himself, "I've got to get five more strikes, just five more!"

The call from Mike is for a curve; Dave winds up and lets go a sloppy curve as he stumbles.

The batter is out smarted as he was prepared for another slider and he swings for strike two.

When Bill sees this, he again calls the game and walks out to the mound.

Bill looks at Dave, shaking his head and firmly commands, "You're through! I'm taking you out! Don't tell me you're ok, because you're not. Just look at yourself, you can barely stand!"

**Dave hangs his head as Bill motions, for the other Pitcher to come to the mound.**

**When he arrives, Dave hands him the ball saying, “Don’t screw this up!”**

**Dave then leaves the mound, and as he, walks back to the dugout the people in the stands give him a standing cheer.**

**After a few practice pitches, the game is again ready to resume; the batter is again ready with two strikes on him.**

**The pitch--he hits it out to the shortstop for the second out.**

**One more out to go and the Dragons are up.**

**The batter comes to the plate, the pitch, he swings, it connects for a bouncing ball past second; the man on second runs to third, and now it’s two men on with two outs.**

**As another batter comes to the plate, the Dragons are again in trouble as the picture starts to look bleak!**

**He’s ready--the windup and the throw; the batter bunts!**

**The ball rapidly scoots towards the Pitcher.**

**The Pitcher runs and scoops the ball up and lobs it to Mike at home.**

**The runner on his way to home changes his mind and heads back to third.**

**Mike sails the ball to the third baseman, but the runner beats it by sliding in.**

**Now the Dragons are really in big, big trouble!**

**The base’s are loaded and once again, Rushford’s best hitter is on his way to the plate.**

**Now some of the people in the stands start to leave, as they can’t stand to see what looks to be shaping up, as another loss.**

**The Rushford batter smiles and tells Mike, “I’m gonna’ send the next ball all the way to Rochester. This game is ours twelve to eight!”**

**He gets ready with very high confidence.**

**Mike calls for an inside fastball; the pitch, the batter swings with all his might and connects, sending the ball high into the sky towards the right field fence.**

**The runners start running, as this looks like the killer homer.**

**Jeff sees the ball and races for the fence.**

**The ball starts descending for the other side of the fence.**

**Jeff, with a running climb, mounts the fence, and stretches his arm**

and glove towards the descending ball; plop, the ball is in his glove!

The third out, and Rushford has just been robbed of their homer and goes down in this inning scoreless.

Now the cheers really go up, as Jeff runs in with the ball.

Once again, its Jeff, who's their miracle man, for he's now turn a certain defeat in to a possible win.

In the dugout, Jeff is mobbed by his teammates; they're ecstatic, as Jeff has pulled them from the jaws of defeat.

After all the hugging and backslapping, Jeff goes and sits by his friend, Banks.

He asks, as he is concerned about his friends health, "Banksy--are you ok?"

"Yeah--I think so. You did great, Jeff. See--didn't I tell you how good a ballplayer you are? You're a hero."

"Banks—you're the real hero," Jeff humbly replying, "it was your pitching that turned the game around. We were going down until you showed up. Thanks Banksy."

Dave looks at Jeff and says, "It's in your lap now, Feldman. Go out there when you turn comes and get us that winning run. You're now our only hope, so go and be that big hero."

The bottom of the ninth and the Dragons are up, it's now or never; all they need is one run to win the game.

Because of the importance of this last chance to win the game, Bill changes the batting order; he puts Jeff third in the batting order, with Red second and another top player in first.

First player goes to the plate and fly's out to center field; the Dragons are now down by one out and no one on.

Now it's up to Red, as he makes his way to bat.

He takes his time and gets himself ready, as the pressure is now on him.

All is quiet, as he's now ready and waiting for the pitch; it comes as an inside fastball, he swings and misses, strike one!

He's sweating as he strains to outguess the Pitcher; again the pitch!

Red puts everything he has into the swing; it connects with good line drive into center field.

He strains to run as fast as he can, because he knows Jeff is up next,

and he needs to make as many bases as possible, so he can be in scoring position.

As he rounds first, the ball sails in from center field.

Red madly heads for second, trying to beat that ball; second base is just a few more feet!

The ball is on its way to the second baseman.

With one foot on second base and stretching with his glove for the ball, the second baseman awaits its arrival.

Red going as fast as he can, throws himself on the ground with hands out to feel the base as he slides in.

There's the base, his fingers have found it, as it seemed to take forever to get there.

He looks up and the second basemen is holding the ball, but the Umpire has called him safe; Red is overjoyed and relieved as he gets up, and dusts himself off.

Now it's all up to Jeff, as he walks to the plate swinging several bats to warm up; he selects one from the group, dropping the others and walks up to the plate.

With bat in the air just over his shoulder, he's poised and ready.

The Pitcher winds up--the throw; Jeff fixates on the ball as it rushes at him.

All he now sees is the rapidly approaching ball as it seems to get bigger and bigger; he zeros in and swings, the bat cracks and vibrates as the ball reverses direction and heads for the fence.

Jeff drops the now second splintered bat and makes haste for first.

Red is already on his way to third.

The ball hits the fence and bounces back past the surprised outfielder; the ball is now rolling away from him as Red rounds third and on his way to home, and Jeff is well on his way to second.

The outfielder scoops up the ball and hurls it to the shortstop who in turn sends it towards home.

Red's running as hard as he can.

There's home, only a few more feet and the games won.

The ball and Red are coming in to home together!

Red strains to get that extra bit of speed to beat the ball.

Red thinks, "I've got to do it!" As he throws himself at home plate, it again seems to take forever to get there, until finally, he feels the plate.

**“Did I make it in time?” He thinks, as the dust settles over him. He hears the towns folk cheering as he gets up.**

**The Umpire with arms out has called him safe; he’s done it, the winning run, and the game is over, the Dragons have beaten Rushford!**

**As the Rushford players leave the field, the Dragons run on to the field.**

**Bill walks over to the Rushford dugout and extends his hand to the other coach saying, “Great game. I’ll be seeing you next year.”**

**The other Coach takes his hand, returning the gesture, “Yes it was, and congratulation. Until next year, then.”**

**The team is rejoicing at home plate, and now the towns folk come on to the field and join in on the celebration, Bill now goes and joins the team.**

**The celebration lasts for about twenty minutes after which they start leaving the ball field for home, as it’s now late afternoon.**

**As Jeff and Dave walk together to leave, a stranger, who’s been waiting over by the infield fence, walks over, and say’s, after stopping in front of them, “I’m a scout for North Western University and I liked what I just saw. You two have great potential. We could use the both of you. I would like to set up a meeting to talk to you about your baseball futures. Here’s my card, give me a call tomorrow,” and hands them each a business card, and then shakes their hands saying, “Don’t forget--give me a call tomorrow--Ok?”**

**The scout walks away leaving Dave and Jeff looking at his cards.**

**Dave and Jeff look at each other, and then Jeff exclaims, “ALL RIGHT! Can you believe this?”**

**Dave adds, “Is this cool or what?”**

**Both boys let out a whoop and head for their cars.**

**Red is awakened on Monday morning by the ringing phone, he answers and it’s April, and she’s hysterical!**

**Red trying to calm her down, “Slowly--tell me what’s wrong?”**

**She’s sobbing as she explains, “Ah’ gets ah’ call from another man, who’s in with Slippery,” and then she shouts, “HE KNOWS WHERE AH’ LIVES! AH’S IN BIG TROUBLE--LORD HELP ME!”**

**Red responds, “Calm down and stop shouting. You’re hurting my ears! Ok--enough is enough. You now must tell me what happen down in Louisiana. I’m on my way over. When I hang up call your friend Mac and have him, come over. Don’t answer anymore phone calls and lock your**

door. Don't let Joey go out to play, and don't let anyone in except me and Mac-ok?"

April still sobbing, nods agreeing, "Ok--Ah's do as youse' says and Ah's be waiting."

They hang up and Red heads out the door.

## CHAPTER 15 - - NO REST FOR THE WICKED

On the way over, Red is trying to put together what events could have led to the discovery of April's identity; it was not only the chance meeting of Slippery seeing April at the Clinic.

Either he must have told someone his suspicions, as a continuous defensive ploy, or he must have sent word back to his headquarters in Louisiana.

Red could not make intelligent decisions without more information from April; he would have to convince her of that, for sure.

He had to know more about how Slippery's operation worked.

He had to know how far Mac would go in protecting her.

Was there anyone else directly in government whose job it was to supply continuing protection, or was it turned over to Mac now?

At her house, and after he was inside, he had more problems.

He had never seen her so hysterical.

Joey was crying.

The shades were drawn.

The lights were off, and the two were sitting on the floor in a corner, where there were no windows.

"Why all this?" Red asks April.

"Thas' tha' way Slippery works. He calls from right out there. He's in town and ready to erase me."

"Slippery is dead," said Red matter-of-factly.

He saw April get a hold of herself, and now faced with this information again, as a fact plus perhaps, --him being there.

"Get up you two. Just don't get in front of a window. Get some chairs so we can all sit down. Do you have a gun April? I forgot to bring a firearm."

April pulled her big .45 from out of her blouse.

"Are you a good shot," Red asked her?

"From shooting water moccasins wen' I'se was young, --I'se am."

"And Joey, can he shoot?"

"I'se taught him when he was little already. Yo' don't live back in da' swamps lessen youse' prepared for surprises."

"Calm down and speak English," Red said.

"It's just, I get upset when I have to go back to liven' with guns

handy."

"I know, I know, --all because of my stupid nightmares, or you'd be all right!"

"I've been a lot more all-righter since I met you, so, don't taking on any of blame to yourself. Nothing that's good comes without some troubles," April speaking slow and careful, selecting her choice words.

"You sound like your back in English class somewhere," Red kidded.

"They made me do an English speech class as part of the Witness Protection Program."

"Yes, if you had been talking clear English when Slippery saw you, he might not have given you any further thought."

"I wish Mac would hurry up," said Joey; his first words since Red had come.

"Why not call him again," said Red, "they might transfer it to his car."

"Good idea," said April as she headed for the phone, crouching beneath the window levels.

But the lady who answered said, "I won't put you on the wireless phone cause it can be picked up and intercepted and they'll know whatever he tells you and where he is. Be patient, unless you are in immediate danger--are you?"

"No mam, I'll wait it out, and thank you," April hung up and told it all to Red and Joey.

They had not long to wait when Mac was knocking on the door, and Mac and Frank entered; Frank was carrying a large valise.

After greetings and all, Mac sat down at the table.

"I have another car circling the house so you can feel safe to sit here and discuss our predicament. So let's all grab a seat at the table. I'm sorry this got away from us, but you know April, what a tough gang we are fighting and to what lengths they will go to. They run their dirty business like the best corporations would. First, we need to find who called you. Did you recognize the voice, April?"

"No suh, I'se was too surprised and then too scared."

"From now on let's fight this thing again the way we did before, remember. We stay cool--and we stay cunning--and always try to think ahead as to what he might be trying. Right now, I'd say he is not in Lanesboro, Cause I'm not sure he knows for sure you are Violet. What do you think?"

“He knows for sure I’se is Violet, I’se sure of that.”

“Just exactly what did he say,” Mac Asked?

“He said, ‘We need to have a talk Violet’.”

“Just that one sentence,” Red broke in, “and you got that excited!”

“You don’t understand Red, that one sentence is all ah’ needs to know somebody from Louisiana knows exactly where I’se live--exactly where I’se live.”

“Couldn’t you have had real friends that loved you enough to keep on looking and looking for you just as hard as Slippery would, or even harder?” Red asked.

“Well, you see Red, Violet had a funeral, and was properly buried back in Louisiana. A mannequin was made up to look like her, was put in the coffin with glass over the body. The rumor was given out that she had died of AIDs so that no one would touch her body, as they sometimes do in back-woods customs. Also, April wanted to worry Slippery that he might have contacted AIDs, being Violet worked in his office as his private secretary. Leading up to all this she had mentioned to Slippery that the Mayo Clinic in Rochester was the best for any treatment of AIDs... You see, --I was being transferred to Rochester area and after testimony by Violet. I wanted to be in the area where the ‘new’ April would be living. I wanted to be where Slippery might come for tests, as he had slipped thru our fingers and we went to trial with only his office staff. Violet turned states witness after we proved to her that Slippery had, had a cousin of hers gang executed for a minor slip-up. Slippery was cold blooded, and strict that way, and deserved fully what you saw us do to him there on the highway,” all this from Mac as he patiently explained some of the background to Red.

Turning to April, he said, “I presume Red is in this as deep as all of us or he, --he would not be here, am I right?”

“I’se didn’t want him to get involved, I’se don’t want him to get killed. I’se don’t want Joey getting killed over something his mother--thas’ why Slippery knew who I’se was. I’se had Joey with me an though he’s bigger now, he’s is still recognizable as my boy--it didn’t do me no good to get fat and talk clear English--Joey will always give me away...” April quit as she and Joey beginning to cry.

“It’s not your fault honey. It’s just that the pieces of the puzzle are coming together,” said Red in a soothing tone.

“Right,” interrupted Mac, “we got to figure this out Joey, and any ideas you come up with just interrupt us and tell us.”

“But where was Joey during Violet’s--April’s, this is goner be confusing--where was Joey during Violet’s funeral?”

“He was with me,” Frank broke in, “I escorted him to the funeral and we had official papers made out that he was in my custody. He hugged his Mom that morning, so he knew she was alive. We left her with an armed guard in a hotel room and told him to cry and carry on, as if he thought she was dead. He did a good job of it!”

“When I saw the coffin with the ‘lady’ in it, --it looked so real I got real scared all over again and thought the lady in the hotel was making it all up and Ma’ was really dead.”

“I’se know dear, youse’ went thru’ so much, for a little boy, --I’se is so sorry,” and April began to cry.

“Don’t cry Mom, you did the right thing, you had to do it, I’m just so glad you’re really here, and we are staying alive--somehow.”

“Now to get on with solving this problem. Red what did you write down in the motel registry?” Inquired Mac of Red.

“Just my name and address.”

“Hmmm,” said Mac; he took out a small notebook, reached for the phone and called a number.

“Has anyone been in checking on someone staying at the motel, this is the police,” he added, “what did that one look like that asked about room twelve?”

Mac wrote fast in his little notebook.

“And there is no way you can tell me anymore about the people that stayed in room twelve? Thank you then, --you’ve been a real help.”

“He would have had to come to Lanesboro and get April’s address from the locals and from local gossip,” Mac said to everyone in the room.

“You know Slippery always worked with a pocket of bills to get information as he moved around,” April said.

“But Slippery is dead, April,” Red said with emphasis.

Mac leaned back, commenting, “Slippery put together a new staff after we imprisoned his first staff, and he moved to a new location. We totally lost contact with him after that, and this was our first awareness of where he was. Our investigation now, is to find his new headquarters, new staff, and new organization. We know someone picked up his outlying drug deliveries, but of some we run down we found he had sold them and so we didn’t have Slippery, only the knowledge he was still active and eluding our

leads. In short--we have nothing at all to go on," again, he said all this to Red.

Then Frank spoke up, "We now have one staff member. Plus the one in jail, his car driver."

"But remember, the leader is dead, so how permanent will that be," said Mac.

"If Slippery was that thorough--wouldn't he have dug up Violet's--grave to see if there was a real body in it or to see if Violet was in it, before he went off halfcocked chasing that--fat--lady to a motel up the line?" Red asks.

"Hmm," mused Mac, "he didn't have time, but he may have issued an order to down there--good idea Red."

Mac reached for the phone again, leafing thru his notebook, and to the phone he said, "Hi there, glad to hear you, this is Mac again. Will you have someone go out to see if Violet Toussaint's grave has been dug into and if not, put someone on to watch it, including at good hours like the night time--. Sorry--but it could be important--it's our first lead on Slippery's new operation. And check into who might have been the one to inherit Slippery's operation, property, next of kin of his, etcetera, etcetera. You know, keep the pressure on," Mac hung up.

Turning to April, Mac said, "We didn't get a lot out of Slippery's car driver, but we are keeping him locked up. Slippery's body will be kept in the morgue till someone comes to claim it and that will give us another lead. Are you afraid to make us some lunch? Frank, go with her into the kitchen."

April went into the kitchen and Mac cleared the table, moving chairs about it.

"We got to make this a home again. We can't let criminals run our lives," said April.

"But how can we live here when they know where we are," said Joey?

"I think I'll have Frank stay here in your home with you and April--would you feel O.K. about that? Red can come over to give Frank sleep time and be here to keep watch. I know I'm using you for bait, Joey, but you're a brave kid and been thru the ropes, and the sooner we catch these guys the sooner your mother will be safe."

"I heard all that, an I don't like it," said April coming in bearing food.

“Frank is a number one man, been with me for years and has never slipped up,” said Mac.

As they all sat around the table, the phone rang; April answered it, and then handed it to Mac.

“Excellent, excellent, just in time you say.”

Mac listened a long time, and then he said, “You know what to do.”

Hanging up Mac said to Red, “Well, that was an excellent idea of yours, at the right time too. When they drove out there, there were three guys digging into her grave. They had fake papers to have the body exhumed. Two of them were just local labor, but the third man is Slippery’s number three staff man that we know about, so now, we can see how much we can get out of him. Good work Red. Want a job with the department?”

“I wouldn’t stand a chance beside April, she just seems to always know how to do the right thing,” said Red looking at her.

“That’s because I’se was Slippery’s private secretary and knew his whole ways and how he’s handled things--. I’se had a slippery teacher, not only at escaping from the law, but also at finding traitors and new recruits--. Oh--what an awful life I’se lived when I’se was young and foolish--.

“Well,” Mac said to April, “want to stay here with Frank till we get further into this case? It seems to be breaking, thanks to you, and you’ll have Red handy as well...”

The phone rang again, April answering it, “Yahsuh’, he’s be here,” and she handed the phone to Red.

Red frowned as he listened, and then said, “I thought I was on an extended vacation--or medical leave--or whatever. And now, you expect me to come to work when I have appointments scheduled and... Yes I know I was playing ball all last week, but that was Doctors orders--I have other important things going, well, give me some time to catch up with everything, O.K. Thanks, bye.”

Red looked unhappy. “That was work calling. That speed welder quit, just seemed to vanish one day last week--never even gave notice or came back for his pay. So now, they want me to come to work, as they are getting behind. What do you know about that? No rest for the wicked.”

## CHAPTER 16 - - SON OF A GUN

That afternoon Red walks into the office at his job and asks the office clerk if he could speak to the Boss; she picks up the phone and speaks, and then she hangs the phone up and tells Red, "You can go right in. He's waiting to see you."

As Red heads for the Boss's office, he thinks, "I'll bet he wants me to start working right away."

As Red enters the office, the Boss says, "Come in Red. I'm glad you stopped by--we need to talk. Have a seat," as he pulls a chair over to his desk and points to it; Red walks over and sits down.

The Boss walks to his chair behind his desk, sits down, and is the first to speak, "I need you to return to work. We are falling farther and farther behind, and with several new contracts that we just signed, we need you back on the job."

Red sits there with a worried look, and doesn't know how to tell him that he's got an appointment in Rochester tomorrow, then there's April and Joey; they need him.

Now Red doesn't want to tell his Boss, that he can't come back to work, and he doesn't want to miss his appointment or turn his back on April; what is he going to do?

The Boss sits there patiently waiting for Red to answer.

Red finally responds, "I've got an appointment in Rochester tomorrow and other commitments. I can't come back just yet."

The Boss with a very serious look returns, "You do like working here, don't you? If you don't want to return to work, then you leave me no other choice, but to replace you. I need full time dependable people. So what will it be--return to the job or end you stay with us?"

Red bites his lip as he's now caught between a rock and a hard place.

Now he's got a ultimatum, either come back to work or lose his job.

Red tries one other angle, the only one left, and says, hoping this will work, "How about if I work half days? With Banks helping for another month, just maybe you can get by. By the time Banks leaves for school, I should be done with my commitments--I hope."

The Boss sits there looking at Red, like, maybe he's going for it, and then he speaks, "Ok--Ok--we'll try half days, but if we get really back logged, then it's full time or goodbye. I can't be playing games with you. I've got company contracts to think about."

Red says, feeling relieved, "Thanks--it's only for the next thirty days. I'll be back full time right after Labor Day. I can work this afternoon."

The Boss gets up and walks towards the door; Red also gets up and follows him.

The Boss opens the door and tells him, "Remember--if this doesn't work," Red nods. "I know--its full time."

Red then walks out and the door shuts behind him.

Red smiles as he walks to the shop where he punches in for the day; as he doesn't have anything else to do, and he doesn't want to push his luck.

Red walks over to where Mike is working; Mike looks up surprised, and asks, "What are you doing here?"

"The Boss had me come in to work half days until after Labor Day."

Mike laments, "Tom's gone."

Red sighs, "Yeah--that's why I'm working half days. What happen?"

"Last Wednesday two men in black business suits came in and he went with them. That's the last I saw of em'," Mike explaining.

"Did I hear you say, men in black suits?" Red asked surprised, and to confirm what he just heard, Mike nodding.

"That's what I said, two men in black suits. They also had a big black car in which they left with Tom."

Red is perplexed by the news, and why would Tom leave with these guys?

Is Tom in trouble?

What connection does Tom have with these guys?

Then Red had a revelation; could this have anything to do with April?

Are these G-men or some of Slippery's henchmen?

Red comes back to earth hearing Dave asking, "Are you back?"

"Yeah--part time, like you."

Mike is laughing because of Red's daydreaming.

"What's so funny?" Red asks.

"Oh--nothing."

Mike then walks away to his welding job.

Red looks at Dave standing there listening, and commands, "Well--don't you have anything to do?" Dave nods and walks to his unfinished job and starts welding.

All day the strange events surrounding Tom kept running through Red's mind.

That day seemed to drag by, because Red wanted to ask Mac about what he had heard.

Finally, five o'clock arrived; Red punches out and heads to April's house.

As Red pulled into April's driveway, he was hoping Mac would be there.

He walks up to April's door and knocks; the door opens and there stands Joey with a big smile.

"Hi Joey--is your mother in?"

"Yeah--she is. Where's yo' thinks she's be?"

Red smiles and enters the house, messing up Joey's hair on the way in.

As Joey fixes his hair, with his hand, April comes in from the kitchen asking, "Who's be here?"

"It's Mister Red."

April smiles and goes over to give Red a hug and a kiss.

After the mushy welcome, which Red enjoyed, he asks, "Any trouble today and is Mac coming over?"

"He be coming by later. Youse' stayin' fer' supper?"

"Thought you'd never asked. What are we having?"

"Ah's went shoppin' with Frank this afternoon. Frank takes me to ah' store with all kinds of foods from back home. So's ah's buys us supper. Wes' has black eye peas with potatoes, possum gravy with wild onions, frog legs with mushrooms, and smoked crawdads."

Red kinda' lost his appetite, but Joey's mouth was watering.

Joey say's to Red, "Ma' makes the best smoked crawdads in the whole world."

Red half smiles. "I bet she does."

April tells Red and Joey to sit at the table, and so reluctantly, Red seats himself at the table across from Joey.

Red thinks, maybe he was a bit hasty in coming so soon; maybe he should've come after he had eaten supper.

Red looks at the bowls and platters of food that April places in the center of the table.

The look and aroma coming from the hot and steaming food isn't too bad; in fact, it looks and smells good.

Finally, April seats herself and they all bowed their heads in prayer, giving thanks to the Lord for the food before them.

After they finish, it's Joey, who reaches for the food first.

April scolds and shakes her finger at him, "Joey--Guest get first helpin'."

Joey pulls back, saying, "Sorry--Mister Red, youse' go first."

"Thank you, I'll think I will," says Red, and helps himself to the black eye peas, potatoes and spoons some possum gravy over them without thinking.

April hands him the platter of smoked crawdads; he takes several and hands the platter to Joey.

Joey says, as he takes several and places them on his plate, "These are the best. I'se can eat hundreds."

April again scolding, "Don't youse' make a pig of youse' self, by taken them all. Leave some fo' me and some more fo' Mister Red," Red just smiled at Joey, and then at April.

Red looks down at his plate with the strange looking meat.

The potatoes and peas look ok, so he starts to eat them first.

The gravy and potatoes were very good, better then he thought.

The gravy had a smooth creamy texture with a slightly spicy, tantalizing taste, almost like pork gravy, but much better; he closed his eyes, as he savored the potatoes with the gravy, now this was the best potatoes, he had ever eaten.

Now it was time for the meat!

He again looks at them sitting there on his plate; they looked like a cross between a lobster and a big spider with lots of legs.

How could he possibly put this thing into his mouth, much less eat it!

April and Joey stopped eating and looked at him.

April inquired, "Is somtin' wrong with youse' food?"

Red returned, as not to hurt her feelings, "No--this looks real good. I don't know where to start."

She answers, "Youse' start with the tail. Then youse' eats the little legs."

Red poked at the thing, and it looked like a large insect; he flipped it over and it looked really gross.

Joey started to laugh. "Look ma' he's scared of it. I'se bet he don't even take one bite."

Red looks at Joey with a scowl. "You wanna' bet? Just watch me, I'll show you who's scared."

Red using his knife breaks open the tail and body shell, exposing the fine white meat, and then without thinking, forks a piece of the meat into his mouth and eats it; the taste isn't too bad, in fact, it's pretty good!

This is better than he thought it would be!

This isn't so bad once you get by the ugly appearance.

Red thoroughly enjoyed the rest of the meal; he was full when he pushed himself away from the table.

April, she sure knows how to cook; this was the best meal he had in a very long time.

He smiled at the thought he had, about being afraid to eat her cooking.

How wrong and foolish was his thinking; if he'd only knew that she could cook this good, he'd been over sooner.

It was after seven when April came into the living room and sat down. Red asked, "When is Mac coming?"

"He's said he's be here about seven thirty."

April had no more then finished with the answer when there was a knock on the door.

Joey jumps up and runs to the door. "I'se gets it."

April saying to Joey, as she tries to catch him, fearing who it might be, "Wait Hon!"

But it was too late, Joey was already there and starting to open the door.

April held her breath in fear while Red arose from the sofa.

As the door swung open, there stood Mac, everyone felt relieved.

Mac asked, "Can I come in?"

April went to the door to greet him, and after Mac comes in, they all go and sit at the table to discuss business.

Mac began to fill them in on the day's events, "The guy in jail still isn't talking much or he doesn't know anything. He keeps saying, he's innocent, and was paid two hundred dollars by two men in dark suits to drive several men around."

"One of em' wasn't a young man in his early twenties?" Red asked.

Mac surprised, replied, "Why yes--how did you know?"

Red began to fill them in on his discovery, "I found out today that, one of our part time welders just upped and left, last week, with two men in dark business suits."

Mac remarks, "Well--what ya' know. It sounds like this could be some of Slippery's men. Maybe they're part of his Southern Minnesota drug ring. I'll have some men look into this."

Red smiles at April, "See--Mac's hot on their trail. It won't be long before he has them all rounded up."

April replies, with a hint of discord, "I'se bet!"

Mac continues, "Slippery's body was claimed today by a young man who signed for it as next of kin."

Red remarks, "Young man--you say? I wonder--could Tom be this guy?"

Mac begins to get very curious. "Tom? Tom who? Describe him?"

Red replies, as his curiosity is aroused, "Say--I don't even know his last name! We all called him Tom. He's a tall man, a little over six feet. Slight build with light brown hair, almost kid like. Blue eyes and now come to think of it, he had a slight southern accent. I never gave it a second thought, because it was so slight."

April exclaimed, with fear, "LORDY--youse' just described Slippery's blood kin. Dat's his SON!"

Mac and Red are surprised and looked shocked.

Mac surprised exclaimed, "His SON! Slippery has a SON! I didn't think he was married. So--where's his wife?"

"She be in Monroe Louisiana. She's calls him at da' office several times. I thinks dey's maybe separated, as she's never comes da' see him."

Mac gets his note pad out, as all of this new information maybe important, and starts jotting all of this new data down.

April adds, "Slippery's name is John La' Camp, his Son's be Tom--Tommy La' Camp."

Red remarks, "Son of a gun. Wonders never cease!"

April smiles for the first time saying, "Yes'm, he shu' be dat' gun's son." They all laugh at Aprils little pun.

Mac looks at the clock and says, "It's getting late. With all of this new information, I've got a lot of work to do tomorrow, so--I best be getting on back to Rochester. I'll be back again tomorrow, to fill you all in as to what else turns up."

"I've got an appointment in Rochester tomorrow as well. So I've also have to be going," Red announces.

They all get up and head for the door; Mac leaves first.

Red gives April a kiss on the cheek and says, "Bye now. I'll stop in tomorrow after I get back from Rochester," he then leaves as April stands in the doorway with a smile as he gets into his car; she watches as he backs out and drives away, and then she walks back into the house and finds Joey sound asleep on the sofa, picks him up, carries him to his room and lays him on his bed.

She undresses him, covers him up and gives him a good night kiss, and then she leaves his room, shutting off the light on the way out; she goes to her room and retires for the night.

Red was up early on Wednesday morning, because he has an appointment with Dr. Tibs in Rochester.

He quickly ate breakfast and was on his way by six o'clock; his appointment was scheduled for nine that morning.

He arrives in Rochester a little after eight thirty and finds a parking spot in the parking ramp next to the Clinic.

After taking the elevator to the eleventh floor, he walks up to the desk, and just like the last time, he was told to wait in the waiting area until the Doctor was ready to see him.

Finally, he was called, and once again, he was led down the hall with all the rooms on each side.

After waiting in Dr. Tibs office, for what seemed like hours, the Doctor walks in extending his hand. "Good morning Mister Brillon. How are we today? Did you have a good week?"

Red gets up and takes his hand saying, "Good morning and I'm fine. Yes the last few days were just fine."

The Doctor goes and sits down at his desk saying, "Go o o d."

Red also sits back down and waits for the Doctor to start the session.

The Doctor opens the file folder and reads his notes and comments from the last session.

After making a few more entries, he looks up and begins, "We had a very good session the last time. I'm beginning to get some insight into where you're getting the little old man. I also feel your nightmares are a form of frustration and inability to cope with a problem or problems. These are manifested in these strange dreams. For example, all or most of your

dreams have you trying to solve a puzzle. I feel this is a product of your inability to solve a problem in your life. Maybe it's a nagging problem at work or with a personal relationship with someone. Any questions so far?"

Red shakes his head.

The doctor continues, "If you have any questions or want to interject something, please feel free to do so at any point in the session. Ok--let's examine some of your dreams. If you feel more comfortable lying down we can use the cot," Red indicated he was just fine where he was.

The Doctor began the examination by having Red describe the nightmares in detail.

As Red played out each dream in detail, the doctor recorded what was said on tape as well as making important notations in the file; after about an hour the doctor stopped the examination.

"Mister Brillon you did just fine. I think I'm finally getting some sense of an understanding, as to where your dreams are coming from. I think I know where you came up with the location in your dreams. Your first dream started in a pub in Old England, but I think it's the bar, that you frequent, as it has the same name and its name is obviously English. But I think the whole nightmare sequence has its roots in your ball team. That's why I had you go back home to play that game. Your team has that same name, and you have this psychosis with trying to win over the Rushford team. This, I believe, is obviously the problem you were trying to solve, thus the puzzles."

Red sat there listening to what the Doctor was telling him, and was amazed at how such simple everyday things and events could cause so much problems.

Red would've never connected the Inn in his dreams with the real bar, he and his friends go to, or the name of the baseball team.

This thing with beating Rushford, he never thought that this could cause these nightmares!

The Doctor asked, "I think after today's session we're well on the way to solving you problem. I think we can bring this to a solution in the next couple of sessions. Any comments or questions?"

Red replies, "Well--son of a gun! I didn't think it would be this soon or this easy. I just hope you're right about the reasons for the dreams."

The Doctor responded, "I'm very sure about my diagnoses. I'm setting up your next appointment for next Wednesday. I'll see you then, so

**have a nice week.”**

**Red and the Doctor get up and they both leave the office.**

**After getting his next appointment scheduled at the desk, Red leaves the clinic, and goes to his car and heads for home.**

## CHAPTER 17 - - MIGHTY INTERESTING!

Red picked up some food at McDonalds and munched on it on the way home.

He punched in at work, and it wasn't until Mike said, "Did you get promoted that you come to work dressed up."

"Got too many things on my mind, forgot to even change clothes, well, --guess these are a goner' be old slacks by tonight. I got a telephone call to make, and then we'll get at some of the problem jobs."

He phoned April to see if things were all right.

"Sure are," She responded, "So's how are things with you?"

"I'm ok, but I'm working late tonight, so don't wait up for me. Got a lot of problem jobs and I need to stay on top of them. I'll be over in the morning when I wake up and catch up on things, so good night."

The Boss was coming in the door and looking at Red, asking, "You aren't planning to work today?"

"Sure am, why?"

"Dressed pretty fancy," the Boss remarked sarcastically.

"Got a lot of thinking to do and forgot to change clothes--sure be glad when I get back to the routine of the shop, with only shop problems to think about."

The Boss grinned. "Just don't let the help get mixed up as to whose boss around here."

"No problem, they'll all be crossed eyed if they have to watch out for two bosses. But how come Tom quit? I thought you would make a special effort to keep him around, he was so fast and good at the work."

"Don't understand it either. He just walked out, never even asked for his pay," said the Boss with a disappointed expression.

"Sure glad I had nothing to do with him quitting," Red said.

"The best are hard to keep, --always," the Boss said as he walked out.

Red walked around, stopping at the jobs that were hung up, and getting at them to the extent that an ordinary welder could again move it ahead.

Going from job to job that way, he knew it would be late before he got everything moving again; it looked like he would be putting in full hours, but all after one o'clock, and so, one by one the men checked out till Red was working by himself.

Red was lying under a machine welding, when he felt the blast of cold air; which he had felt each time someone had left the building, but there was no one left to leave, that meant someone had come in!

He stopped welding and waited.

He could hear no one.

He waited some more; his skin began to crawl.

Someone was in the building, that didn't want him to know, they were in there.

The machine he was working on had a long tube for part of the frame.

The tube was open at both ends, one end near him and the other about twenty feet down from him with a curve near the end.

He very quietly moved to this end of the tube and placing his mouth he spoke into the tube, "I know you're in here. Show yourself over by the desk or I'll blow you away," a volley of shots rang out.

Bullets pinging off the machinery at the end of the tube.

Red had pulled his mouth away after speaking and just in time as one bullet ricocheted out the end of the tube, and then all was silence again.

Someone was out to get him, why and who?

And how was he going to get away?

He was protected by heavy metal on three sides, but he was vulnerable on the fourth side, the way he had crawled in there; his only hope, first of all, was to be completely quiet.

He would need to play it by ear from there, and so he lay quiet, even keeping his own breathing quiet though his heart was racing.

He heard movement over on the other side of the building.

They could not be as still as him, evidently.

It sounded like more than one.

Another fifteen minutes went by.

He heard them talking in low tones he could not make out.

He stayed quiet, and then the phone rang.

"Oh my God, I hope it isn't April and she comes down here," he thought to himself, but Frank was with her and he would not let her come.

If the phone wasn't answered here and at his room, Frank would call others in.

The phone stopped.

Another five minutes and it rang again, and this time a spotlight shone on the door, a bullhorn spoke, "COME OUT OF THERE—

**IMMEDIATELY!"**

All was quiet inside.

Soon other car lights were coming and surrounding the building....

Again, the bullhorn.

Again, silence.

Again, the phone.

Again, the bullhorn, this time by the door, which had been pushed open. "Red?"

Red decided to take a chance. "Ya', it's me, don't shoot, but there's two guys in here somewhere, be careful."

The Lanesboro marshals dog came thru the door, sniffed the air, and trotted over to Red; Red said Hi and the dog sat down.

The Marshall came thru the door and said to those behind him, "When he sits down there's no strangers in here."

Red came crawling out of his cramped quarters and rubbed his legs and arms.

"You should know better than work in here without telling me..."

"Would you have checked on me then? It's a good thing you were careful as someone threw a bunch of bullets at me."

The men looked around.

"Wow, look at the things those slugs shot up!" Red exclaimed.

There were dripping oilcans, windows with round holes in them, puncture holes in thin sheet metal.

Red told his story, then called April to see if she was all right; she was and Frank also answered, and Red told him what happened.

He got on it to Mac right away, and it was decided the two had escaped by a rear window and the Cop with his flashlight said, "Don't nobody touch the window so we can get finger prints, and dig me out some bullets boys, where ever you find them."

The Boss walked in having been called by the Cop before he approached the building.

He looked at Red, at the damage to the shop, and said, "I'm not sure I want you working around here if this is going to be what happens, an never again after hours."

Red hung his head sheepishly and remarked, "It is a mess, better leave me on leave."

"You are from this moment on," said the Boss.

The phone rang and the Cop answered.

The Cop listened awhile then said, "Who do you think you are?"

The Cop got quiet and said, "Yes sir, I'll be waiting."

"Some FBI guy is coming down, and he don't want nothing disturbed. I'm to take Red over to an Aprils and then come back here and wait for him. You boys get your cars and escort me just in case that killer is still around," and to the boss he said, "Lock it up and give me the key for tonight."

Red walked out and slid into the passenger side of the Cop's car, and two cars went ahead and three behind followed over to Aprils.

April's door was open, but no one was in sight.

Red jumped out, and ran for the door and was inside.

He then sat down and breathed a sigh of relief. "What a night."

Frank, his gun cradled in his arm said, "Good thing you flushed those guys out. We didn't know they were hanging around in Lanesboro even. It seems funny they would know you were going to be working there. Are they following you around constantly, and why haven't they hit you before this if they wanted you?"

April frightened and sitting at the table said, "Yes why do they want to kill Red--he has nothing to do with this drug ring?" She was close to tears.

"They were afraid to try and get you, I'd say, it was because they thought it would flush you out so they could get at you. They respect me and old Molly here," said Frank patting his gun, then went to set it in the corner.

"Where's Joey?" Red asked.

"Still sleeping. There was no commotion here," April replied.

"You're talking out plain English for being upset?" Asked Red.

"Made up my mind that I'm going to speak clear English to cover my trails better from now on."

"And you got to especially remember that when you get upset," Frank added.

"I bet you haven't eaten no supper," April said to Red.

"No, but I don't want much on this nervous stomach."

"Coffee would help, I'm sure," chimed in Frank.

April went to get coffee and came back with it, and some rolls and the butter dish.

After a while, a car was heard outside and Frank from a curtain said, "It's Mac--unlock the door, Red, and backed away."

Mac entered, pistol in hand and holstered almost immediately.

"Well, --haven't we had a busy evening?" Mac tried to say lightly, but April wasn't buying it, "We almost got Red killed in this business of ours, and Joey's sleeping, so be on the quiet side."

"Sorry," says Mac, lowering his voice, "so, let's go over it all again, so we can get it all straight."

Red told his side of it all, then Frank what he knew by calling around, then April with her bit.

"How do you suppose they knew Red was to be in there?" Frank asked.

Red says he made up his mind after he saw all the broken down machines sitting around.

"Who all did you tell you were going to work late?"

"Just the last foreman who left. And I called April about it."

"Blabbing at the bar--or--a phone tap on April's phone," he said thoughtfully.

"We have no secrets from them," Mac added.

The two men sat thinking over what that could mean; it was obvious they were appalled by the thought.

Finally, Mac said, "I'll send a couple men down to trace down the tap and get it removed, tomorrow. I'll go over to the shop now."

"Can I give you some ideas?" Asked April.

"I'm all ears," said Mac pulling on his ear.

"Take Red with you to the shop, and give him a gun. I'm sure those two are hanging around in Lanesboro. They might hit you Mac, but with Red handy, it means two so stay apart from each other. I'm feeling safe here with Frank, and I'm armed too, and Joey can shoot too if necessary. Slippery never..."

"Slippery is dead, April!" Red broke in.

"Slippery's system," she paused, "was to never take chances. But also, he never wasted his people, and he seldom ran from a failed attempt. Those two will wait and follow you back to Rochester, Mac, waiting for a slip-up on your part. So maybe you should have somebody watch your tail as you leave Lanesboro, it could be a break. They know what car you are driving now, cause you are parked in front of me, but you don't know their car. The Lanesboro Cop's dog is part bloodhound so let him smell where

they were parked. Get an infrared camera and take a picture of the spot and you will know the shape of the car at least. Remember, thru all of this, they can be watching your every move from somewhere in town. They have already gone to elaborate efforts to get me now that they have found me, and they--there could be more than two, cause they want me dead so badly. I am a terrible threat to their system--especially that I'm working with you now."

"I can certainly see why," said Mac, "Where did you learn this about infrared cameras?"

"The--system--," said April, her speech was slow and laborious and tired one to listen, but she was trying to break her accent, "Slippery was on top of every new development, and used it to the hilt. He had, as he said, unlimited funding in contrast to law enforcement agencies. So how could the law possibly win--so, Apr--Violet, always stay on my side of the law, he would say."

"But Slippery is dead--isn't he?" Red firmly asks.

"But it took all four, no all five of us to do it, including Joey, working as a team to outsmart him," said April.

"Us four took him the first time, working as a team, thanks to you April, and we can do it again. This time with five on our side," said Mac.

"I feel mostly kooky bait that I am," said Red.

"We just have to keep out act together to win," said Mac.

"Well--Red--lets go, but hmm--where will I get an infrared camera?"

"I have no idea, but you can't phone from here or from your wireless. You will have to go out in the country and phone from some farm, that always foiled Slip..."

Mac, with drawn pistol, went out the door, turned around and backed up the driveway and Red made a dash for the open car door.

Nothing happened, and April put her head in her hands and wept from the stress; Frank stayed by the curtain...

Mac said to Red, "You know this country, I presume, so I'll go out in the country and look for a farm to phone from."

He took the first road up a hill as he left town, going around curves till at a field road among trees he pulled in and waited.

A car spun by, Mac backed out swiftly and followed.

At the top of the hill, the car has slowed down so Mac could easily catch up.

Mac rolled down the window, and put a magnetic red light on the roof of the car and turned it on; the car pulled over, Mac right tight behind them.

Mac spoke into his built-in bullhorn, "GET OUT OF THE CAR AND WALK BACK WITH YOUR HANDS ABOVE YOUR HEAD," he ordered; it was a young couple, looking scared.

"BOTH OF YOU--TO THE DRIVERS SIDE OF MY CAR."

To Red he said, "Watch the back seat of their car for any movement."

The young couple now beside his door, Mac said, "What are you doing out here?"

The young man looked embarrassed, "Just going out a ways to smooch," he said.

Mac studied them for a while, his long years of police work sensed something was not just right, and then he guessed it, young people would not have admitted so readily to their intentions...

Then Red beside him said, "Something is moving in the back seat!"

"Who you got in the back seat?" Mac asked them.

"Just our dog."

Too easy the answers come, thought Mac. "Want to go see," he said to Red, "there is a gun under the seat."

Red got the gun and Mac showed him how to cock it.

"Can we put our hands down?" said the young man.

"In a minute," Mac replied.

Red walked cautiously to the car and looked in the open front window.

The dog growled and lunged for him but was too big to get thru the window; Red went back and reported to Mac.

"You two turn around with hands behind your back," as he handed Red two sets of handcuffs.

Two headlights appeared coming over the hill behind them; the two young people dove for the ditch, rolling out of sight in the dark.

"Get in fast!" Mac shouted at Red.

Red jerked the door open, jumped in and Mac backed up then drove around the car and sped up the road to a field road.

He turned in and backed out, snapping his lights to bright at the on-coming car.

"It's their back up, not ours, he said to Red and shoot out the tires of the car of the kids," Mac ordering, as he pulled up close head on to the car, as the other car slowed to a stop.

Red fired at the tires, one, two, three, four shots.

"Hold it," said Mac.

Mac's red light was still flashing, the other car pulled alongside the kids car and suddenly a bright spotlight hit Mac right in the eyes and he could see nothing.

A car door slammed and the car roared past Mac's car and sped on down the road.

By the time Mac could see, the car was long gone.

"That car door we heard slam was them picking up the kids," said Red.

"Figures," said Mac, "all we got is another one of their cars."

Mac called on his phone for local police and troopers and said, "Guess all we can do is wait up here till help comes to take in this machine. We will search it for drugs. Find out who's that dog's owner and such," he said to Red.

Eventually help came, a wrecker had to be called, for the car that had two flat tires, and no one could get in the car because of the dog.

Mac and Red abandoned the farm phoning idea and went to the shop.

The Lanesboro Cop had stayed at the shop and got out of his car only when he saw Red.

Inside they tried Aprils idea and the dog led them to a parking place in front of a house two blocks from the shop.

They went in to question the local people, but all they learned was that it was a small car, dark colored and probably just kids.

"Kids all right," Mac muttered, "trained kids, trained in narcotics, and more energetic, daring, and athletic than us old timers!"

Back at the shop Mac laid out a plan of action for tomorrow's work at the shop, took a pad and told the Cop to make out a fair list of damages to recompense the owner, and they returned to April's house.

Mac sat down disgusted at himself for letting all of the culprits get away. "All we got is a car and a dog, and a lot more wary bunch of crooks. I should have nailed them, at least the first two."

April listening quietly, finally said, "Well, you have gained something more. You have gained me. It's no use me staying here no more. I'se might as well join up with you in this battle. I'm going back to Louisiana and start from scratch to wipe out the whole gang cause there I'm on home territory. I can't run all my life--we have to catch this whole gang right down to the last member."

"Good thinking," said Mac, "and you are welcome with open arms, a paid salary, full support, and me and Frank will follow you all the way."

"That way," said April, "Red can live his life in peace here."

"Won't work," said Red, "the Boss just fired me for good. They'll get me easy just to tie up loose ends, if I'm up here all by myself. I'm going with you all. Remember it took five to get Slippery, you four let him slip away, you said."

"You ain't got no job!" April wailed. "What have I done to you and your life?"

"Made it mighty interesting and different," Red replied.

## CHAPTER 18 - - THE FARM

Red lies in bed that night, thinking about all the intrigue that day; more so then the time before, when they killed Slippery.

He fell asleep, thinking about the trip to Louisiana with April and his new friends.

It was almost dawn, when Red sat up in his bed, as three men burst into his bedroom, one of them flicked on the light.

Red was now looking down the bore of a 357 Magnum; he froze with fear and sat there shaking, figuring he was dead!

The older of the three commanded, "Don't move an inch--don't twitch, scratch your head, or sneeze! You're coming with us. The Boss wants to see you," with that, he motions to Red to get dressed; Red slowly gets up and heads for his clothes.

The thug who looked to Red to be about twenty five, said with a grin, "Don't try being a hero! You dress slow now, or you'll find a slug tickling your liver," and shoved his 45 into Reds ribs very hard and it hurt; Red fell off balance against the chair, where his clothes were hanging.

Red heard the three guns click as they were cocked; he held his breath, waiting for the fatal shot!

The oldest of the three thugs, who seemed to be in command, sternly told him. "Come on--times ah' wastin'! The Boss is waitin' and he gets real mean when he's kept waitin'. No more funny business--get dressed," Red then slowly got dressed.

When Red was dressed, the thug who was in command firmly told him, while pointing his gun in Reds face, "You're going to walk out of this building with us. No funny moves or you're dead meat. We have three guns on you and the slightest wrong move and you get it. You got it," Red nodded and they headed for the door.

They exit the building and walk across the parking lot towards a large black car, which was waiting with the engine running.

As they walk, the three men walk very close to Red; he could feel the hard muzzles of the three guns, poking him from three sides.

When he approached the car, the passenger door opened, and he was quickly and forcibly shoved in, followed by the large young twenty five year old.

The second man, who looked even younger, quickly went around and got in on the other side; he slid up next to Red on the other side.

The oldest of the three, the one in command, got in the front passenger seat by the driver.

Red looked over at the small young man on his right, he looked to be no older than eighteen.

Red remarked to him, "You're just a Kid! How did you get involved with these thugs?"

The Kid stuck his gun in Reds cheek, forcing his head and cheek back, barked, "I'm not a Kid! You shut up or I'll blow your goddamn head off!"

The Man in command, turned and ordered, "Cool it! Tie, blindfold, and gag him," and then he turned and motioned to the driver.

As the car started off, Red's hands were tied and his mouth was covered by a piece of duct tape, and then, his eyes were covered by a blindfold, so he couldn't see where they were taking him.

It seemed like an hour as Red sat there in darkness listening to the sounds as he traveled, to who knows where.

No one spoke, only the sound of the engine and the whine of the tires on the pavement were heard, until finally, the car slowed!

A right turn, followed by a large bump that caused everyone to rise out of their seats.

Now, Red could hear the sound of the tires on gravel, as they continued to travel for what seem like another hour, when again they slowed and made a turn; this time the car moved very slowly, and then it stopped.

Red could hear a dog bark and cows bellowing, and as the door opened, he caught the scent of manure; he was out in the country--on a farm, but where?

The Kid removed the blindfold and the tape from Reds mouth. "You make one sound and this tape goes back on," Red nodded and he was then roughly removed from the car.

He was indeed on a farm, in a valley with steep wooded hills on three of the four sides.

The road that they came in on ran between the farm house and large long building; the road continued through a gate, and up the valley past rows of tall corn.

Red figured, the only way in or out of this place, was through this

valley.

Red didn't have time to look things over closer as he was quickly forced into the farmhouse.

Once inside, Red was shoved into a chair and tied to it, then gagged; there he sat, wondering what's going to happen next.

An old woman in her mid-seventies, was making bread, the smell was wonderful; it has been years since Red had smelled the scent of fresh baked bread.

She smiled at him when she looked his way, but Red could only stare back, as he was tied and gagged.

Red sat there watching the old woman work in the kitchen and the large old clock on the wall; it chimed on the quarter hour and on the hour, when its bell tolled the hour.

Red sat tied to the chair from nine, until the clock chimed quarter to twelve then, in came the three thugs and the old farmer who lived here.

Now--this sure was strange!

These thugs knew the old farmer very well as they talked and joked with him.

When the old farmer sees Red, he walks over to him; the three thugs follow.

The farmer stops in front of Red.

He puts his hands in his pants pockets and remarks, "Well now--what do we have here?"

He bent down and looked Red in the face asking, "Are you the law?"

The oldest of the three thugs answered, "Could be--been seein' him hanging around them G-Men"

The old farmer moved in closer to Red and asked, "You be a G-Man too? After ma' crops--huh. You'll never find em'! You know what we do with Fed's, we use em' for fertilizer," and then the four laugh.

The old woman finished setting the table and placed hot dishes of food in the center.

She said, "Seat yourselves. Get it while its hot, else I throw it to the dog."

The four men then sat down and ate dinner; Red was hungry as he sat tied, watching them eat.

The old farmer looked at Red and asked, "You hungry?" Red nodded.

The farmer pointed to the youngest of the three and said, as he then pointed to Red, "Fetch him something to eat."

The old woman got a plate and scooped a large mound of mashed potatoes, then forked a large chunk of beef from the skillet on to the plate.

Finally, she ladled dark brown beef gravy over everything, and then she placed a fork on it and handed the plate to the Kid.

The Kid set the plate on a card-table next to Red and told him, "No funny stuff or you're going hungry," Red nodded in agreement.

Once Red was untied, he began to eat the plate full of food.

The gravy was so dark brown it was almost black, but--it was good.

Now the meat was another thing, it was so well done that it was black, hard, crusty and very greasy; trying to eat this tough meat without a knife, was a chore.

When Red had finished, his jaws were sore and very tired trying to chew this meat.

After having a large glass of warm milk, he was retied to the chair; the four men left the house leaving Red and the old woman.

There he sat again, watching the old woman work and the clock, ticking and chiming off the hours.

It was late in the afternoon when he heard a car drive up and stop, and then he heard men talking, but couldn't make out what they were saying.

By now, Red was wondering if Mac and April were wondering what happen to him.

Several scenarios ran through his mind; one had Mac and his friends busting in, freeing him and arresting the four men.

Another scenario had April and Mac leaving for Louisiana without him, figuring that it was best to leave him out of this mess.

How could Mac ever find him way out here?

This place is so well hidden, no one but these people know about it; even Red doesn't really know where this place is, and then, in walked the three thugs, the old farmer and--Tommy La' Camp!

Red was totally taken by surprised, as he never expected to see Tom.

When Tom sees Red, he stops short; he turns to the oldest thug, "What's this? Some kind of joke?"

The thug replies, "No joke! He's the Fed we've been tailin' for the last three weeks."

Tom scolding, "This is no Fed! He works in the welding shop in Lanesboro! He's the damn Forman! You idiot!"

The thug stammers, "S Sorry--w we were sure he was the Fed!"

Tom throws his hands up, "You three can't get anything right! I ought to blow your damn brains out--all three of you. I told you I wanted the Fed who killed my Dad. Look what you bring me. A goddamn welder!"

Tom turns to Red and ponders. "Now what I'm I going to do with you? I can't just let you walk out of here you've seen and heard too much."

Tom turns once more to the older, of the three thugs, commanding, "Tomorrow--get rid of him. I don't care how you do it, just do it! If you fuck this up, and I'll personally put a slug in your head," he taps his finger on the thug's forehead, and then he turns and starts to leave, then stops, turns and says, to the three thugs, "after you take care of the welder, bring that double crossing black broad and her two bit Son here. I'll take care of the Fed personally," Tom then walks out of the house.

A moment later Red hears the engine start and the car drives away.

The three thugs look at Red and the youngest retorts, as he points his finger at him, "Your dead meat! I'm going to enjoy this. Say your prayers, welder. For tomorrow, you're going to meet your maker."

The four men laugh.

Red's heart skips a couple of beats, as he's now very scared, because he just got the death sentence; somehow or someway, he must escape--tonight, while they sleep.

At eight that evening, Red ate his final meal after which he was taken to the spare bedroom; his hands and feet were tied to the bedposts.

The farmhouse was old and so was most of the furniture.

The bed, in which Red was tied too, was old; it had old style head and footboards with ornate posts in each corner.

The door to the room was closed, but not locked, and like the rest of the old house, the lock was old and the key to this ancient lock was lost years ago.

There Red lay, watching the Sun, as it sets and trying to get at least one hand free.

The bonds on his left hand didn't feel as tight as his right, because the teenager had tied this hand.

Just maybe, if he worked at it long enough, he might be able to free it.

By midnight, the house was very quiet, the only thing Red heard was the old clock in the kitchen strike twelve; tonight Red wouldn't sleep, because he must try to free himself as his very life depended on it.

All night Red worked and worked on the knot on his left hand, until by one in the morning, his left wrist was hurting very badly, but he felt sure that the knot was getting looser.

Just as the clock in the kitchen struck two, his left hand slid out of the binding and was free.

Red now figured he had no more than two maybe three hours to free himself and high tail it for the woods.

With his painful left hand, he worked on the knot on his right hand; a few minutes later, it too was free.

Next, he untied his feet; he was now free!

Red very carefully got off the bed and softly made his way to the door.

Holding his breath and praying that the old floor and old door wouldn't squeak.

Luck was with him, as he made his way out of the bedroom and to the kitchen.

Slowly, he made his way, hoping that the old house wouldn't give him away; it seemed like forever to get to the kitchen, but he finally arrived, and now for the door and the escape from the house.

On the way to the door, he picked up one of the large cloth napkins, which was neatly folded and lying on the table and warped his bloodied and painful left wrist with it, and now for the door, and as he slowly opened the door, he held his breath.

As the door slowly opened, and to Reds surprise, it didn't make a sound; there was freedom and Red smiled.

Just as he was about to exit, he thought of something, so back into the kitchen he goes.

He goes to the counter and opened the top drawer, and there in front of him were several large knives, so he selected one large butcher knife; he placed it in his belt.

Next, he opened a cupboard door and not finding what he was looking for, he closed it; he tried another, there it was.

Red reaches in and withdraws the box of ground black pepper; he

also removes the nutmeg.

Then he opens the door below the sink, and there, he finds a plastic bag; seeing a bottle of ammonia, he smiles and takes it as well.

He puts everything on the table, and then he says, to himself, "One more item, if I can find it," and so, he goes back and opens another counter drawer; bingo--he hit the jackpot!

There Red found, not only the last item he was looking for, but also one other handy item--a squirt gun!

He stuck the first item into his pants pocket, and went to the table and laid the squirt gun down by the other stuff.

At the table, Red emptied the black pepper and nutmeg into the plastic bag then, he shook it, to mix the contents; when Red was satisfied, he laid the bag down.

Now for the squirt gun!

He pours the ammonia into the squirt gun until it could hold no more.

Finding a shopping bag, Red places the plastic bag, of his deadly mixture, and the squirt gun into it, now he was ready, and dashes out of the house and quickly runs across the road and over to the long building.

Now he thinks of something else, so, Red makes his way to the door on the far end of the building, near the gate.

Red opens the door, it makes a little noise, but not loud enough to be heard in the house.

Red enters the building, it was full of bails, but they smell funny; not like clover or alfalfa bails, but sweeter!

This puzzled Red as he looked and finally found the last item.

Red removed from a big nail, several long used twine strings.

Red carefully rolled them up as not to get them all tangled, and puts them into the shopping bag with the other items.

Now Red had everything, except food; too late to go looking for food now, hopefully, he'll find something on the way maybe in the woods.

Red was now ready to make his escape.

When Red turned to head back to the door, he was stopped dead in his tracks.

Fear now grips him at the thought of his failed escape attempt!

For there, just inside the door, barring his escape path was pair of glowing eyes and a low growl; Red knew what it was--the DOG!

If it barks or makes any loud noise, it's bound to be heard in the house, awaking everyone and he would be dead for sure.

Red slowly, with his injured left hand, removes the small penlight from his pocket.

Putting penlight into his mouth and holding it with his teeth, Red slowly reaches into the shopping bag.

Finding the squirt gun, he removes it.

Now slowly, Red sets the shopping bag down, so he can use both hands; the Dog starts to move in closer.

With his left hand, Red removes the penlight from his mouth and hits the switch.

Luck is still with him as the penlight illuminates the scene; as he forgot to test it back in the house.

The Dog, now baring its teeth, moves even closer; ready to lunge at any moment.

Red aims the squirt gun at the Dog and--squirt--squirt; the ammonia hits the Dog in the nose and eyes.

The Dog jumps back whining, as the solution burns its eyes and stings its nose; the Dog runs out of the building with its tail between its legs whining, leaving Red alone.

Red grabs the shopping bag, runs out of the building and through the gate; he heads for the woods through a cornfield.

The trip was tough, because they had planted something between every other row; it was almost as tall as the corn and it looked like some kind of weed!

Finally, Red got to the edge of the cornfield and made his way into the woods and safety--at least for a while.

After entering the woods and heading up a ravine, Red figures, he only has another hour before the thugs back at the farm awake.

For the next hour, sometimes using the large butcher knife, Red makes his way through the thick underbrush until he finally comes to a clearing, just as the Sun pokes its head above the horizon.

As Red crosses a small meadow, he comes across a cow path, so Red follows this path back into the woods, hoping it will lead to a farm, if luck is still with him, he'll be able to call Mac so he can round up the kidnappers and get him.

He follows the cow path as it leads north, because the Sun is on his

right.

On he goes, not knowing where he is, or where he's going!

By the size of the trees, and look of these hills, Red figures he must still be in Southern Minnesota.

The Farmer and the three thugs are now up, and in the kitchen, eaten breakfast.

The oldest thug tells the Kid, "Go in and see how our guest is doing."

The Kid gets up and heads for the bedroom; a couple of minutes later he comes running back holding one of the ropes, shouting, "HE'S GONE! THAT GODDAMN BASTARD'S GONE!"

The oldest thug replies, as he is now very upset and scared, "La' Camp is going to be real up set. I don't want to be here when he finds Brillion gone."

The second thug exclaims, as he is also very nervous and scared, "We're dead! La' Camp is going to kill us!"

The old Farmer suggests, "Use the Dog! He'll find em' fast. He couldn't of gone far, with all the hills and woods. He's a city slicker--he's probably lost out there in them woods. Seems to me, the fitting place to get rid of em'. Nobody will ever find his body way out in them woods," the three thugs nod and smile.

The Kid remarks, "This is going to work out better than we planned."

They all quickly finish eating, get up, and leave the house.

The old Farmer calls the Dog and he comes running.

The old Farmer gruffly tells them, "I'm too old to go gallivanting up and down them hills. That's the job for you youngin's. Besides--I ain't killed no one, and I ain't startin'! I got the chores and a full day's work ahead."

The oldest thug says to his partners, "Same here. You two can do the job. It don't take all three of us to find and terminate one city slicker. You have the Dog, so's you don't need's me. I'm staying here--got lots to do before the truck comes for the stuff."

They agree, and the two young thugs with the Dog head for the woods; and with the Dog hot on Red's trail the old Farmer heads for the barn and the chores.

The other thug heads for the long building across the road from the house.

**Red is tired and hungry, so he sits on an old stump and rests.**

**Red figures he has a good head start on his kidnappers; he still hasn't found anything to eat and boy is he hungry.**

**That bag of spice in the shopping bag was starting to look pretty darn good and then he froze, his heart skips a couple of beats, for echoing through the hills was the sound of a barking Dog on the run.**

**In panic, Red gets up and hastily starts down the cow path.**

**Red knew he couldn't keep this up for long, as he was tired, and hungry.**

**Now the thugs knew where they were, but Red didn't, and Red didn't know how far it still was to the farm, by this path he was following, for all Red knew it might lead right back to the thug's barn!**

**Red stopped, caught his breath, and thought. "I've got to make a stand. It's now or never, but how? It's got to be on my terms. Somehow---someday---I must gain the advantage."**

**Red started to make his way briskly down the path, looking for the right spot to make his stand, and as he went, he could hear the Dog barking!**

**The sound was definitely getting closer.**

**The Dog, what to do about the Dog?**

**Then Red abruptly stops!**

**There--this could be the place, that he was looking for, to make his stand.**

**There were two tall trees on each side of the trail, with only enough room for a single cow to pass; in fact, both trees were indeed used by cows to scratch an itch, as the bark is worn off.**

**Red smiled, as there was a black berry bush full of berries on one side of the trail, on the other side--thick brambles. "Nothing is going to get through them," He thought.**

**One of the trees had a limb about chest high.**

**Red got a dastardly idea!**

**So, he goes up the trail.**

**Using the butcher knife, Red cuts three small sticks, about twelve inches long, and then he cuts a small sapling about six feet long and strips the sapling of its bark and limbs, now he had a straight stick, about six feet long and an inch in diameter.**

**He returns to the place on the trail with the two trees.**

**He now had to work fast, as the sound of the Dog was getting much**

closer; Red figured he had no more than thirty minutes before the Dog and the thugs arrived.

Red took the limb from the tree on the left side of the trail, and bent it back, then he let it go; it quickly returned with great force, as he had to test his idea.

Quickly, Red cut three round holes in the limb.

Then he sharpened the three short sticks to a sharp point.

After forcing each stick into one of the holes he made in the limb, so it was firmly held with the pointed end facing down the trail, he bent the limb back, all the way behind the tree so it wouldn't be seen from the trail.

Using an old dead stub, that once was a limb, he made a trigger latch; now for the trigger!

Reaching into the shopping bag, he withdrew one of the used twine strings and very carefully unwound several strings, and then after twisting the strings into a small invisible thread, he tied one end of the string about an inch off the ground to the other tree; the free end went to fire the trigger, by unlatching the lethal limb.

Finally, Red gets the bag of the spice mixture, and sprinkles the mixture on the path by the string.

Red smiles as he looks at his trap, saying to himself, "That should keep the Dog from prematurely springing the trap. Now to make a scent trail for the Dog to follow around the trap."

He gets down and slowly and carefully crawls through the berry bush, eating a few berries on the way.

On the other side, he gets his shopping bag and the long stick, and finds a place to hide.

One last nasty detail and he is ready, a weapon.

He gets the last twine string and the squirt gun from the shopping bag.

He places the handle of the big butcher knife on the end of the long stick, then, using the twine string, he fastens the knife securely to end of the stick; wha' la'--a deadly spear!

Hunkering down--with spear and the squirt gun, he was now ready!

Soon the Dog comes running up the trail with its nose to the ground.

When the dog gets to the spice, he stops and backs up.

The Dog begins to sneeze, lies down and wipes his face with its paws trying to get the stinging stuff from his nose, and then Dog gets back up and

heads back down the trail, whining.

A few minutes later, Red hears barking again; here comes the Dog again!

This time remembering the bad part of the trail, the Dog sniffs his way around that bad spot and avoids the spice; the Dog continues to sniff until he picks up Red's sent.

Through the black berry bush, the Dog comes, and right to where Red is hiding!

There they are, eye to eye, staring at each other.

The Dog starts to growl and show it teeth, but this time Red was ready.

Red picks up the squirt gun lying in front of him, and points it at the Dog.

The Dog sees the squirt gun, and remembering the last time, stop's growling.

The Dog begins to whimper, and starts to backup, he then gives one bark, turns, and runs back through the black berry bush and back down the trail.

About a minute later, Red hears the Dog bark again and coming back up the trail.

Now Red starts to get very concerned, as he doesn't know how much longer he can keep fooling this stupid Dog!

Red figures maybe this time he will have to kill it, so Red gets his spear ready, but this time as the Dog came into view, Red held his breath!

For three paces behind the Dog were two of the thugs!

Red hunkers very close to the ground.

He now could see the two thugs, it was the Kid and the twenty year old; Red wished it wasn't the Kid, as he didn't like killing Kids.

When the Dog got to the spot where the spice was, he sat down and wouldn't go any further; he just sat there looking back at the thugs and whimpers.

The oldest thug stopped by the Dog and bent down; he petted the Dog asking, "What's the matter Gaffer? Is the city slicker up ahead?" The Dog whimpers again.

Both thugs look at the place where Red is hiding!

Red now feeling sheer terror is frozen to the ground, fearing the Dog may have given away his plans.

The oldest thug softly tells the Kid, "Stay here. I'm going up the trail to have a look see. If I need you I'll call."

As he starts, the Kid also starts to follow; the older thug turns, commanding, "I told you to stay put and I mean it! You cover me, but stay there."

The Kid readies his gun, as the other thug starts for the tripwire with gun cocked and ready.

Red watches in terror as the older thug slowly comes his way.

"He's coming too slowly," Red thinking, "he's going to see the trap! If he does, I'm dead! This spear is no match for two guns!"

The thug slowly, keeps coming and coming!

Red thinks, "God--he's hasn't seen it yet! He's going to trip the TRAP!"

Slowly, step by step the thug keeps coming, closer and closer to the tripwire, and then suddenly he stops, inches from the tripwire; Red again waits in terror, afraid the thug will spot the tripwire.

The thug looks back at the Kid, asking, "Do you see anything?" The Kid shakes his head.

The thug turns and takes the final fatal step and steps on the string, springing the trap!

Thud--the limb hits the thug, burying two of the sticks deep in his chest; the Kid jumps--the thug stands motionless on the trail.

The Kid walks up to him asking, "Bill, are you Ok?"

No answer comes!

He looks at the horror before him!

The thug is dead, hanging on the limb by two of the three sticks, penetrating his body with blood running down off the sticks and making a puddle on the ground; his eyes are still open, staring with stark surprise, up the trail.

Red feels relieved as now only the Kid is left to deal with.

The Kid feeling nauseated, goes over to the side of the trail and throws up.

Red now seeing his opportunity, gets up, and with spear in hand, confronts the Kid.

The Kid doesn't see Red until he hears, "DROP YOUR GUN AND MOVE BACK DOWN THE TRAIL!"

Then he quickly turns with the gun still in his hand and faces Red.

There they stand, Red and the Kid, like a western movie, facing each

**other; Red with spear and Kid with gun!**

Red speaks solemnly, as he doesn't want to kill this Kid, "Son--please let go of the gun! It doesn't have to end this way."

The Kid just stands there, not moving. Red wait's for the message to sink in.

Again, Red pleads, "Come on Son put the gun down. No harm will come to you--I promise. When we get back, I'll help to get you out of this mess. So please put the gun down."

The Kid starts to let go of the gun, and then suddenly he raised it to fire!

Red sees this, acts quickly and let s fly the spear!

The spear hits the Kid in the chest, burying the butcher knife deep in the Kids chest.

The Kid stands there--looking at Red; on his face is the expression of, "What happen?"

He slowly lowers the gun; his fingers slowly releasing its grip on the gun, until finally the gun falls to the ground.

The Kids legs give way and he collapses, falling to the ground; Red hurries to his side.

There the Kid lies, on his back, face up, with the spear still in his chest.

Red removes the bloody spear and throws it to one side.

He kneels down next to the Kid saying, "Why didn't you do as I said? You gave me no choice."

The Kid coughs and blood comes from his mouth.

Red asks, "Your name--what's your name?"

The Kid whispers, "Mark--Mark Davis. Please Mister--don't leave me here for the varmints to eat."

Red nods and asks, "I'll get someone, but where am I?"

The Kid replies, "Your only three miles from Rushford. Rushford is on the other side of that hill," he tries to point, but the pain in his chest is too great and his strength is going, and then the Kid coughs and is still!

Red with remorse closes the Kids eyes.

As he starts to get up, a growl comes from his right, the Dog!

He reaches for the Kids gun and as he swings it in the direction of the growling, the Dog lunges, Red fires, and the Dog too falls dead.

He has done it, but at what price!

**Red is free at last.**

**Red marks this place in his mind by noting the landmarks, and then he heads toward the direction that the Kid indicated.**

**It was just getting dark when Red walk across the hi-way bridge, that spans the Root River.**

**Red walks into a gas station on the edge of Rushford.**

**Using the phone, Red calls Mac and tells him where he is; an hour later, Mac drives up and Red gets in, and then begins the drive back to Lanesboro, and Red telling Mac, the long story.**

## CHAPTER 19 - - A STEP TO VICTORY

Mac was crestfallen that he had allowed all this to happen, but Red told him, "You did your job. You protected April and Joey, that's what's important to me. I could never live it down if something happened to them."

His voice had weariness in it; was this the strain, April always lived under?

Once you cross the drug trade, there was no place to lay your head safely anymore.

No place to freely roam the streets.

No place to see what nature or God or fate might have carved out for you; were these people writing his future?

What a dirty damn mess the drug trade was.

First, it was slavery for April's people, then antagonism from whites for decades, now the curse of crime overhanging them.

Now he was in trouble, forever, as the blacks had been, forever and forever.

His mind went back to Africa; it was still a jungle mostly, and the continent had little peace.

He wished he could make April white and take her away from all this... "You sleeping," Mac broke into his thoughts.

"Thinking," Red answered, "what a damn mess this all is. Now I got blood on my hands--even on my clothes right now--a dumb kid's death, a man's death, a dog doing what's natural. The old woman will probably go to jail, and she is just doing what her husband wanted, and the old man will go to jail--a hell of an ending for the nice corn he was growing."

"And Marijuana," Mac drawled...

"Ooooh... so, that was what that was," as it clicked in Red's mind.

That long shed was an old time tobacco shed, now being used for a different kind of tobacco!

He had heard jokes at work about growing the 'weed' between corn rows--but he must have been too worried about his way out of his predicament to put it all together.

What a sheltered life he led there, and he thought he was hot shit the day he took on a steady paying welders job!

"They will be after Frank in earnest now--maybe right now," Red said.

They pulled into Lanesboro, and went straight to April's house. Red was glad to see Frank's car there.

Mac looked things over, talked on his phone before getting out.

Red heard the words, 'all clear'; evidently, Mac had the house under scrutiny by others.

"We don't know what car the guy called Tom is driving, so we are vulnerable here. But I'd like to use this house for bait."

Mac looked hesitantly at Red; Red shook his head tiredly and followed Mac into the front door, opened by Frank, his snub nosed gun in the crook of his arm.

Frank said, "Ok April," and she and Joey came out of the bedroom; a look of relief on her tear streaked face.

"Howdy pard," Red tried to say nonchalantly; it didn't work and April and Joey grabbed him and they were all three hugging and sniffing.

Mac went into the far bedroom with Frank and talked in low tones.

When they came out Mac said, "I'll have to go downtown to call in as the phone here could be tapped. Tomorrow, we will take Red by helicopter to find the farm and the dead victims--can't really do much tonight. Frank will stay here to guard you. I have two cars around outside twenty-four hours a day, so feel safe. Bye."

Red sat down dejectedly and said, "Frank is cheese."

"Wha' ever do ya' mean," April said taken aback, Frank also looked startled.

"Frank is bait for Tom who wants him dead."

"Let him come," Frank grinned mean looking and patting his weapon.

"They want us all dead," Red said, "and here we are altogether in one place."

"Have you any defense against a rifle, grenade, or bazooka?" April asking Frank.

"They would use them?" Frank asking April, his face becoming grim.

"Sure do," April said, "You can buy surplus Army weapons many places and Slippery used many of them."

"We are sitting ducks, all here together," Red repeated; it was strained silence as each contemplated the possibilities.

"We have to trust in the two cars out there. We don't dare leave

here," said Frank at last.

"Tom must know by now that something is wrong at the farm. Will he panic or come down here in a rage?" Red asked.

"I would guess he would pack up and run," said April slowly and thoughtfully.

"You know them better than anyone," said Frank, "I'll go by your advice."

"Have you eaten?" April asked Red.

"Not since last night," Red admitted.

"I'se makin' you somthin' right now," April said firmly.

She went into the kitchen and Red leaned back against the sofa.

"I'll watch the biggest part of the night," Frank said, "We don't want to get worn out, need to stay alert."

April came back in to see if Red was falling asleep, and he was, and she gently roused him and said, "Come into the kitchen and talk to me till the food is ready, then you can sleep."

She kept him busy answering questions until she had made toast and cheese and put some other goodies on the table.

"Hot chocolate coming up," she announced to everyone, but Frank said, "I'll take mine out here, please."

Eventually all settled in for the night and the house was darkened.

Red's steady snoring, Joey's quiet breathing, April turning often, and Frank turning pages of a magazine by a tiny light beside his overstuffed chair.

The morning came and April had been right; Tom had not come near the town.

After a good breakfast, and a bit of a wait, Mac rapped at the door, it was time for Red to go with him and the helicopter.

Troopers and sheriffs cars were on the road beneath them as they headed for the farm; the farm was soon found.

By phone, the sheriff reported to Mac that the farm was abandoned; no one was there except some cattle and chickens.

It looked as if a load of 'weed' bales had been hastily loaded and removed.

Because the helicopter could find no place to land, Red gave instructions to where the bodies could be found, and Mac and Red returned to town.

Back into a car and out to the farm, Red guided the second party to the bodies, with stretchers and cameras.

Wild animals had already begun to feed on the bodies and Red sat down sick to look again upon the carnage he had committed.

The bodies were roped to the stretchers; the dog was left where he had fallen.

The long trip back down to the farm began; again, it was night when he finally walked into Aprils house....

He sat down to supper without much enthusiasm, supporting his head with one hand while he ate.

April came over and massaged his neck gently while he was eating, working her way down over shoulders and finally going over to her cup of coffee.

Mac came back later to outline tomorrow's work; Red was to pack and vacate his apartment he had lived in so long, and April, too, was to pack and movers would come for everything, taking it to storage till decisions had been made.

There were reports to file, dispositions to be taken, investigations to follow up.

For the next two weeks, April, Joey, and Red slept and lived in motels, guarded by Frank and one or two cars ever about them.

Red had expressed surprise that the two old people would abandon their farm home, but Frank had said, "Better free than the rest of their life in jail. The drug laws would confiscate the property anyway and they probably were set for life as far as money was concerned, from the profits from the drug trade were immense!"

"We are really the victims of crime then, being kicked around like this," Joey had made as a wise observation.

"Cept the two who are dead," Red said.

"There will be more," Frank said ruefully, "there has to be more, if we all are ever to be safe.

"I really don't want a career as a killer," Red said.

"Neither does any soldier drafted for war time service. Think of yourself as being drafted for a time in this ongoing war against crime," Frank replied.

What Frank said did make him feel better about it, but the visions of

**the two dead bodies would haunt him all his life.**

**Red had been lax; laxity was an invitation to disaster in this business he must ever remain alert, and he could see April understood without them exchanging the thought.**

**They would be leaving for the south soon, to hunt down the lines of the drug organization; instead of being the hunted.**

**They would hunt the mob, and it gave Red some satisfaction to think of it that way, and then he, April, Joey, Mac, Frank and others would call the shots; it was a step to victory!**

## CHAPTER 20 - - FRAMED

Red was awaken along with the others, by a rap on the motel door.

They were still moving around, trying to evade the mob until Mac had arranged for their departure for the south.

As April held Joey, Red arose and went into Aprils room; there they sat in silent fear, as Mac and Frank, with weapons drawn, went to the door.

Mac loudly said, "Who's there and what's your business?"

The answer came quickly, "Minnesota State Police. We have an arrest warrant for Red Brillion on charges of murder," there was silence.

Frank carefully peaked through the window shades to identify the men; Frank nodded that they were as they said.

Mac opened the door and two state troopers and a man in a dark brown suit entered.

The man in the suit displayed his Id saying, "I'm detective Aitkin from the Fillmore County Sheriff's Department. Is Red Brillion here?"

When Red walked into the room, the detective firmly asked, "Are you Red Brillion?" Red nodded.

The detective quickly responds, "I have an warrant for your arrest on the charge of murder."

As Red looks shocked, the detective motions to the two troopers and they quickly grab Red.

As Mac and Frank stand there in shock, Red is frisked for weapons, upon finding none his hands are cuffed behind his back, and he's then read his rights, after which he is asked if he understands them; Red nods responding, "Yes--there's got to be a mistake. It was self-defense they were trying to kill me!"

The detective harshly replied, "We didn't find any weapons except a knife and a booby trap, all with your finger prints. Now it's up to a court to decide."

The detective asks both Mac and Frank to identify themselves; Mac informs the detective about themselves, April, and Joey.

As Red is taken outside, Mac and Frank show the detective their Government Id's.

Mac tries to explain, without giving away secrets, that Red was helping them with a drug case.

The detective asks if Red was employed as a Government Agent.

Mac is silent as he looks at the detective and finally replies softly,

**“No-he just got caught up in this mess, while trying to help April and her son.”**

Mac asks the detective where they were taking Red; the detective replies, as he turns to leave, “He’ll be taken to the Fillmore County Detention Center for processing.”

The two patrol car’s pull away, leaving Mac and Frank standing there stunned, and April crying and hugging Joey.

The next day, Red is visited by a man in a business suit, carrying a brief case.

The door to Red’s cell is opened and he walks in, hand extended saying, “I’m Mark Banks. I’ve been asked if I would take your case and I accepted, so I’m your defense lawyer.”

Red takes his hand, “This is a nightmare. It was self-defense it was them or me. Now I’m the one in jail and those drug criminals are running free.”

Mark sits down and opens his briefcase.

Red asks, “You have a son--Dave?”

Mark nods and gets a notepad and a folder out, and then he says, after looking through the folder, reading and making notes in the notepad, “The police report says that no other weapons were found. Only a large knife on a pole, along with a sprung trap with one of the victims. Your prints were on both the knife and on the trap. The state has a very strong case against you. The location and how the victims were found, indicates that you planed it execution style,” he pauses, and then continues, “It’s going to be hard to prove self-defense. If that isn’t bad enough, the report also states that, four ounces of cocaine was found in your apartment and traces of marijuana were found on your clothes. The charges against you are two counts of first degree murder and having a controlled substance in your possession.”

Red responded, in shock! “I don’t use or deal in drugs. They planted the cocaine and they removed the guns. I tell you they had guns and I acted in self-defense!”

“Who’s they?”

“Tom La’ Camp and his drug mob.”

Mark looks at another page in the folder and says, “This is a deposition from Tom La’ Camp. He says you threaten him after he discovered you selling drugs to some high school kids.”

“That’s an outright lie! He’s the one who’s dealing in drugs. He’s

the one who's framing me."

Mark calming Red down says, "Ok--let's start at the top. Tell me your side and don't leave anything out."

Red then starts at the top with his first nightmare, as Mark makes notes in the note pad.

Two hours later, after Red had finished, Mark sighed, "It doesn't look good. From what you're telling me and from the evidence, it doesn't look good. First--this psychosis that you're being treated for will be used by the prosecution, to try to show how unstable you are. They will have several psychiatrists on the stand to show that you dreamt up this drug thing. Second--until we find the other weapons with the victims prints on them, you have no proof of self-defense. I hardly think that the weapons will be found. Even if two guns do show up, they will probably be wiped clean of prints and Id numbers. Thus--no way to tie them to the victims. What we need to do is get you off the murder charges. Then, there are the drug counts. Once again, it's going to be hard to prove you innocent of the drug charges, but it's not impossible, as I see it, you're on very shaky ground. I think our best recourse is to plead not guilty, by reason of insanity. Or--enter a plea bargain, but that's if the district attorney will accept it. A plea bargain will get you 15 to 25 years with parole after five, if we can reduce the first degree murder charges to third degree, and drop the drug charges. The other alternative is for a trial, and if found guilty--life in prison. It's up to you! It's your life on the line here, you must make the decision."

Red looked stunned and felt angry at the prospect of spending the rest of his life in jail for defending himself.

The thought of how these criminals had framed him, made him burn with anger.

"I didn't do anything wrong! I'm not going to prison! Get me out of here!"

"Ok--I'll see if I can get you out on bail."

Mark gets up and summons the guard.

Mark tells Red, "Hang in there. I'll do my best to get you out of this mess, but you must remain calm and not do anything stupid. I'll be back tomorrow and hopefully you can leave on bail."

The jailer opens the door and Mark walks out leaving Red standing there.

The door slams shut and is locked, the jailer and Mark walk out of the cellblock, leaving Red; Red sits down, puts his head in his hands, and cries.

The house that April was living in was now a trap, to put an end to La' Camp drug ring.

Mac and his government agents were now waiting for La' Camp and his mob to make the next move.

Mac left Frank in charge of the trap and as soon as anything happened to notify him immediately.

Mac, April and Joey were now in yet another motel in Winona, trying to stay one step ahead of La' Camp.

April now refuses to leave for the south without Red.

Mac tries to plead with her, "April--we can't keep moving from motel to motel until Red is freed. You must think of Joey. Look at him! He's all worn out. He can't keep doing this. La' Camp may not even fall for our little surprise, and sooner or later he's going to find us. We have to leave this area and establish a good base down south. We got Red the best lawyer in Southern Minnesota. So please--let's just go!"

April looks at Joey sleeping on the couch and with thoughts of Red in jail, a tear runs down her cheek as she finally gives in and nods yes.

Mac smiles and takes April into his arms saying, "You did the right thing. I just have a feeling that Red will somehow get out of this mess and he'll be just fine. Maybe this was how it was meant to be. By the time Red is freed, we will be gone and out of his life. He'll then be able to return to his former life and safety."

April hearing those words feels heartbroken at how she got Red into all of this; she now sees that this may be a way of getting out of Red's life, and freeing him of any more danger.

She looks up into the hard face of Mac, as tears stream down her cheek; sobbing she says, "Youse' right. Ise must think of Joey. His safety must come first. Wes' all leaven' tomorrow morn'."

Mac looking into her tear stained face softly says, "Tomorrow then. Somehow we'll all get out of this nightmare, including Red."

It was ten to six that afternoon; April had just finished repacking the few things she had managed to take with her when she left her house.

She walks over to the TV and turns it on to get the latest news; she

walks over to a chair and sits down.

The TV is showing the end of the current show, then at six the news comes on; the newscaster comes on with the headlines, "A DOUBLE MURDER AT A FARM NEAR LANESBORO!"

Scenes of the location are shown.

The newscaster continues, "The gruesome murders were done execution style, according to the Lanesboro authorities. The victims are a nineteen year old Mark Davis and twenty five year old Bill Warner, both from the Lanesboro area, they were found brutally murdered in the woods just south of Rushford," pictures of the two men are shown; next, the grieving parents of the kid are shown.

The mother sobbing says, "Mark was a good boy! He never did anything bad. He never even had a traffic ticket. I want whoever did this put away forever!"

The picture switches back to the newscaster. "The authorities have a suspect in custody. He is thirty five year old Red Brillion, a local welder. He is being held in the Lanesboro County Detention Center without bond. The police had found drugs in his apartment and traces of marijuana were found on his clothing along with blood stains from the victims."

A picture of Red is shown; it is a police photo showing Red holding a card with large numbers on it.

Next, the district attorney is shown speaking to the press. "The man we are currently holding, has admitted he has done it, but in self-defense. He has a history of mental problems, and has been at the Mayo Clinic for delusions brought on by drug use."

The newscaster issues a closing remark, "No court date has been set. When we come back, the state police have found a drug farm in Fillmore County," the TV shows a commercial.

April in deep despair gets up and says to herself, as she shuts off the TV, "What has ah' done to poor Red. What will ah's do now?"

Mac comes in saying, "I've got arrangements made so we can leave tomorrow."

Seeing April upset he asks, "What's troubling you?"

"The news on da' TV is bad. Dey's have Red and dey's say dat' he'll be going to jail. Wes' can't be leaving now!"

Mac sensing a change in April's mind, once again tries to persuade her to head south. "Don't get soft on me I've got everything set for

tomorrow. We must leave. There's nothing, that you can do to help Red. He's got a very good lawyer. Don't listen to the TV. They don't know the whole story. Once Red gets into court the truth will come out, and who knows, maybe this isn't all bad. La' Camp may have over played his hand in this one. We just got to wait and see," April nods and Mac smiles, because he has once again convinced April to leave.

Mac smiles at her, as doubts about Reds fate linger in his mind, but he has convinced April to leave with Joey, and that's the important thing.

A knock at the door, Mac draws his revolver and slowly goes and opens the door, and there stands Mark Banks; Mac re-holsters the weapon and Mark enters.

"Kind of jumpy, aren't you?" Mark remarks.

"Under the circumstances, wouldn't you be."

"I guess I would."

April looking perplexed asks, "Whose dat' man?"

Mac reassuring her, "An old friend. He's Mark Banks a lawyer, Reds lawyer, and a good one at that. We were very close friends in high school, which seems like ages ago. When I heard he was practicing up here, I looked him up. So when Red got into this mess I asked Mark if he would take Reds case."

Mark tells him, "We need to talk."

Mac motions for Mark to sit at the table in the corner of the room.

The two men and April sit down at the table while Joey sleeps on the bed.

Mark opens his briefcase, and removes a folder, notepad, closes the briefcase and sets it on the floor.

Mark is the first to open the conversation with his concerns about the case. "I don't have a thing to go on. All of the evidence is damaging. Red has even admitted he killed them. Without witnesses or some kind of physical evidence to uphold his statements of self-defense, I don't see how I can get him off. The prosecution is not buying his self-defense plea. With all the media attention this case is creating, the prosecutor is out to make a name for himself. Mac, I need you to go on the stand and testify about what you know about La' Camp and his drug ring. Without your testimony I have nothing and Red's going to prison for the rest of his life."

Mac was sitting there as the grim reality starts to sink in, while April looks at him with a pain showing on her face.

Mac finally speaks, "I can't break my cover. We're closer than we've been in a long time to digging out the mob and stopping the drug traffic, it's not only here, but it's nationwide. I can't risk losing everything we've gained just so one man can go free. When this is all over and the mob is in jail, we can get another trial for Red and free him, but for now, he'll have to take his chances with a jury. We all pay a price for the drug trade in one way or another and Red is no different."

Mark tells them what he thinks may be the best course of action. "His best choice is a plea bargain. If I can strike a plea bargain with the prosecutor, he'll only be looking at fifteen years with a parole. I don't think the prosecutor will go for it, because he feels he has a strong open and shut case. The other alternative is for Red to plead insanity. I think, he may have a good chance to stay out of prison if I can convince the jury, but he's still looking at a long time under lock and key."

"Do whatever you think is best," Mac tells him.

Mark got his briefcase and placed the folder and notepad back inside, then closed it; he gets up, followed by the other two, and heads for the door.

He turns and offers his hand saying, "Bye Mac and good luck to you. Good to see you again, keep in touch."

Mac shakes his hand and Nods; Mark opens the door and exits.

April goes to bed that night in anguish over the fate of Red; she falls to sleep weeping.

The next morning they leave the motel and get into the car; they head for the airport in La Cross.

An hour later, they're in the air heading south.

April looking out the window seeing the last bits of Minnesota through the clouds below and thinks about Red and how his life is forever change.

She feels remorse at knowing that she had been somewhat responsible for Red's fate and wonders if she'll ever see him again.

Maybe it's for the best that she's now out of his life forever, and if he ever gets out of this mess, she hopes that his life will return to normal.

## CHAPTER 21 - - IS THIS JUSTICE?

“All Rise.”

“The prosecution will state its case.”

Red was glad to be out of his cell--though he felt he hardly had a chance, the way the cops had railroaded him.

The prosecution’s case had not changed.

Red was amazed at how absurd they had put together the same facts of which he would have to testify to.

Even more absurd was Tom La’ Camp seated in this courtroom--an absolute drug lord--and there to lie and lie as to the part, Red played in the killings!

Mark Davis’s mother also sat there, wringing her hands and giving Red hate filled looks; he finally took to avoiding her gaze altogether....

The prosecution also hinted darkly that Red could be responsible for the disappearance of the two old folks who were ‘caretakers’ of Mr. La’ Camp’s property, probably likewise gruesomely disposed of in the same way as the ‘murdered’ victims....

“Objection--speculation....,” interrupted Mark Banks.

“Withdrawn,” returned the prosecutor.

But the dirty work had already been done, with the idea implanted in the minds of the small town jury.

Mark Banks only occasionally objected to the stories given by the various witnesses.

He whispered to Red that he was working for sympathy from the jury to win a large part of the case, so he was betting the prosecution would overstate its ‘case’ and become unbelievable to common folks.

The whole story is absurd, Mark finished.

Red was amazed at the word that came to mind to his lawyer, as well as to him; he took some hope from that... yet wondering if he was grasping at straws in the wind to console himself amid his worry.

Hour after Hour Red heard testimony against him.

Emotions ran thru him; bitterness, hatred, amazement at otherwise sensible people being led astray.

His own boss at the shop testified to Reds absence and to what was now ‘erratic behavior’ since he, “evidently had become obsessed with his drug business.”

Later, how he had stolen the items that caused the two 'victims' to pursue him to their ultimate deaths.

Red's 'weapons' were described and displayed with such graphic description that a chill came over Red himself at their effectiveness.

The mother described in emotional and tearful display how her good boy was working to put himself thru school and often coming home in the late hours to drop exhausted and numb into bed after the 'long' hours of the daily grind. His gruesome death, like a savage, had left her tormented and unable to put the tragic act from her mind's eye and...

The judge was especially sympathetic and permitted her outbursts with indulgent patience.

Red thought at one time it felt like this was a long rehearsed and repeated stage act and had nothing to do with reality, and even the reality was so warped that what he had experienced began to seem as though it was not real.

Three days it went on, and then the judge announced the defense will present its case beginning tomorrow promptly at nine a.m.

That evening when Red was sitting in his cell the police chief came around to taunt him with the words, "You'll be making license plates till hell freezes over!"

The next morning Red noticed two strangers in the courtroom—well-dressed heavy muscled men seating themselves behind him.

Surprisingly, he detected sympathetic rather than the antagonistic looks he received from most of the audience.

He wished April could be there so that he would have had someone on his side--it seemed that even the lawyer was inactive in his defense, but things changed rapidly when Mark Banks took the floor.

He presented Red's background life with school records, sport involvement, and steady work record.

Finally, Red was called to the stand and told his story--subject to loud scoffing by the police chief, till the judge reprimanded the chief, and then Red's story was interrupted by, "Objection" voiced by the prosecutor upsetting Red until Mark told Red to stay calm and just state the facts.

Little by little, Red was able to get his story out, but it too, began to seem unbelievable, as the detail and timing were brought out by Marks questions.

In cross examination Red spoke slowly and carefully so as not to be tricked, thinking thru each answer, and answering in with simple words and with a listless tone.

Once during a recess Mark told him, "You're doing real good--keep up that type of response, the jury is buying it."

Mark brought out the training Red had received in service to illustrate how he had put together his defense of the two men and the dog trailing him.

**Tom La' Camp was not in court the second day of Reds defense.**

**Four well-dressed men sat together in seats by the door.**

**Mark called various witnesses to support various parts of Reds story.**

As Mark indicated he was calling his last witness, one of the men seated behind Red got up and moved with quite grace and power to the chair; his name and position was given as with the Area Drug Enforcement Task Force.

The room got very quiet as he described Red's cooperation and help with a drug investigation in this area.

The prosecution interrupted to say, "Just how helpful could he be, has he been trained by your department? Has he ever worked with you before?"

"No, he hasn't, but the outcome has been very helpful and successful as we are this day closing down the drug organization in southeastern Minnesota."

The agent testified that they watched the hemp plants being cut out of the cornfield, piled in the farmyard, purportedly to be burned by order of the police chief, but then at midnight they had seen them bailed and loaded by light of the farm yard light and had followed them to a destination. "So we arrested everyone at that destination. We got the names of everyone connected, from the bottom of the organization--" and turning directly to face the judge, "all the way to the very top!"

The judge's face turned beet red, and he said, "Why are you speaking to me?"

"You don't know, judge?" The agent taunted.

The big courtroom door opened and a man entered, looking around and walked directly to the agent in the chair and whispered in his ear, then turned and left.

The agent again spoke, "I have just been informed that the police

chief has committed suicide;" the judge's face turned a deadly white.

His voice croaked as he gasped out, "There will be a ten minute recess."

The judge got up and went to his chambers door, and by the time he opened it, one of the four men had gotten up and entered the chamber with him.

Ten minutes later, the judge came out of his chambers and sat at his bench; he looked sick and wilted.

The man who had entered with him went directly to Mark and whispered to him for some time, and then he returned to his seat by the door.

Mark turned to Red and whispered, "The judge is going to finish this case, and call for a jury verdict. He's part of the drug organization taking cash bribes, but the drug task force can't prove it--, but the judge don't know that--yet. They've ordered him to finish the trial and we are taking custody of you under a federal warrant so you're not a sitting duck in this corrupt jail here. So--take heart--all is not lost--even if the jury verdict is against you."

And so, it went on; Mark finished Reds defense and the judge said both would give closing arguments tomorrow, and adjourned the court.

Three of the men by the door surrounded Red as he left the courthouse and whisked him to a waiting car.

From there, to a motel in La Crosse for the night, after a really good restaurant meal.

Red felt better about all things, but wondered if the jury would make him a fugitive forever and what would life be after that.

He was really too confused now to even conjecture.

So, after rolling into a bed in the big suite, he turned his mind off and just surrendered to weariness; the tensions of the day let go and he drifted off to sleep.

The next morning he rolled out of bed and had a fresh shower; his clothes had been laundered in the night and were fresh.

After a full breakfast and good coffee, they all returned to the courthouse.

He was ushered in and seated then, the prosecution began its arguments.

The prosecutor ran Red down from every direction, vehement in his

tirades; blaming Red even for the death of the police chief as grief over the death of a fine boy like Mark Davis in such a gruesome way.

It was two hours of total character assassination; it made Red wince and somewhat frightful, for the district attorney had an overbearing dominant way about him, that made it seem he could not possibly be wrong.

When he had finished the judge set a ten minute recess and it was Marks turn.

Mark's argument was just as dramatic as he sought to return the jury to simple reality.

First he pointed out as totally ridiculous that Red would take the time and effort to steal simple table tools and items unless he were being held prisoner, "Working at fashioning such untrustworthy items as spears and spring traps when the ever efficient gun would be far more easy and dependable, and why go far into the woods to suspend the body from a tree and leave it there to send the law to find it. The whole story is a frame up, because he had escaped and outwitted their planned and intended hit on him. But far, far worse is the drug trade today has eaten itself into every tenet of our everyday lives. Our own people, friends, relatives and work partners, all sucked into its treacherous and ever devouring vacuum. This is your town, this is your farms and villages and this is your schools and traditions. Why the very courtroom permitted a top drug lord to sit in its audience, to testify from its witness chair to lie, lie and lie, and then leave free--to carry on his work of destruction and death to our youth and our society. Mrs. Davis, your son died because of the drug trade, not because of Red's intentions. Red was defending himself from an assassination, your son, sent to execute him and leave him to rot in the woods. Mister Tom La' Camp is not here today, is he? Why--because he was somehow forewarned of the moves of the six agents in this room. He has disappeared right under the noses of the Drug Task Force. The police chief himself has ended his own life, because he was abandoned when the jig was up while Mister Tom La' Camp saved his own hide. Mister Tom La' Camp is the son of the top drug lord of the south. Who, because of the supporting role played by Mister Brillion was killed in a terrible gun battle, set up by using Mister Brillion as bait! What courage he has displayed to risk his life again and again for you people, safely sitting here. So now, you want to put him in prison for the rest of his life after escaping again and again from certain death, if Tom could have his way. How long do you think that life would be in your

**corrupt and criminal run court and jail system--”**

At this, the Judge's face turned beet red and Mark stopped talking to let the jury notice and the effect set in on the whole courtroom...

Then Mark resumed, “When these drug gangs with their endless supply of easy money and their contacts, to the very top of society's well to do people, institutions and social prizes and rewards. No--clear your conscience by setting him free and leave here determined to clean up your own front door, your own back streets and your own main street of the contamination that brought this horrible case before you today. Let your hero walk free to continue to do right. Let this hero walk free from this room--and do it swiftly so that you are not one of the gullible tools of the evil conspiracy that is eating like a cancer into every tenet of American life today. In this court-room, this soldier for your crime free tomorrow is on trial here looking at life in prison for an act of self-defense in a game he had no desire to even play in. He has no badge, no authority, no career, no paycheck and no recognition even--. This man sitting in judgment before you is just your everyday workman--. A welder--who wants nothing more than his freedom, his life back, his peaceful pursuit of sports, his American right to earn an honest living working at a job he is good at. Take that from him and tomorrow you will also be a victim of this cancer, as it eats into your territory deeper. Make him a victim today--you will be a victim for sure, tomorrow! I rest my case.”

The Judge said, “The jury will recess for lunch and come back to retire to the jury room to reach a verdict.”

Red left again with three of the men, after the two sitting behind him had shook hands with and wished him good luck.

“We must get back to Washington D.C.,” One said, “getting behind in our regular work.”

The four ate lunch at the local restaurant then, drove to a local motel to wait out the verdict.

“We think La' Camp has pulled all his men he's going to take with him, and got out while he was safe--so we will only keep an eye open for suspicious characters,” One of the three men said to Red.

But the town was its usual sleepy self.

Red was lying on the a bed watching TV when the phone rang. The Jury has reached a verdict he could hear as one of the trio

answered; Red was off the bed and to the door in no time flat.

Everyone jumped into the car and to the courthouse.

Once inside, Red took his usual seat by Mark and as others arrived; the room quieted and the Judge said, "Has the Jury reached a verdict?"

"Yes we have," said the foreman of the jury.

"Read your verdict to the court," commanded the Judge.

The jury foreman took a deep breath, and then said, "Not Guilty."

Red could hardly believe what he had heard, and realized then what tension he had been under.

He turned and hugged Mark with tears in his eyes, and Mark was all smiles.

There was really no one else in the courtroom at that time that had an emotional interest in Red's victory.

As Red looked around, he realized how fast one can become unpopular, even in one's own hometown.

"The jury is dismissed. Court is adjourned," the Judge said as he brought the gavel down.

As Red got up to leave Mark said, "Where do you plan to go now?"

Red thought for a minute, and then said, "With those four guys over there, I have some important things to do."

Mark shook his hand and taking his briefcase, left the courtroom. When Red got over to the four men, one said, "Where do you want to go now?"

"First," Red said determinedly, "I'm going home and packing my stuff to put in a U-Haul truck. Meanwhile you guys are going to find where Mac and Frank are with April and Joey. They will want to hear the news of course, and I am following them with that U-Haul truck--or there is going to be hell to pay all the way to Washington D.C. I truly appreciate the part you fellows played in this for me, believe me. But, you have that one last thing to do. I'm never going to live in Lanesboro again. So the only life I can have is tracking down the rest of these crooks and wiping them off the face of the earth!"

The head of the group said, "I'll get on it. The rest of you help Red with his things to do."

A rental truck was found with a tow and after Red cleaned out his apartment; his car went on the tow.

By that time, all were tired and it was dark, and all went out to eat.

Red was handed a sealed envelope, and at midnight, he pulled out of Lanesboro, followed by the car with the four men who said they would escort him until their paths would separate, and then he would be on his own.

“Is that Ok with you?” He asked.

Red’s victory and freedom had given him new courage and determination and he replied, “I’ll be just fine, and thank you all again!”