

"Making Friends"

You can make more friends in two months by becoming genuinely interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you.

Dale Carnegie

The next morning, Gib drove around. If you were a serious driver like Gib, you always had to know the best routes. Shortest routes, alternate routes, scenic routes, escape routes, every kind. In cities he had learned, he could have been drugged, dropped off anywhere in the city, and still been able to navigate.

He got to The Space at noon, about an hour before the meeting was supposed to start. The idea had been to case the area a little bit, but as he was getting out of his car, Ruth Radley pulled into the space behind him. She stared at him through the windshield for a second, clearly trying to place his face before she got out. She was wearing grey shorts and a black cut-off shirt that showed off her muscular stomach.

"Hey, you're the narc, right? How were the drugs?" she called out cheerfully.

Being called a narc again made his ass twitch. The way she said it made him feel like he'd just spent five minutes telling her a joke, only to have her ask if he was *sure* he had told the right punchline.

"Relax, man," she said. "I'm just joking."

"That's the thing," he said, trying to think of something clever to say. "You caught me. I *do* have ulterior motives. It's terrible you broke my cover so easily."

"OK, then, what do you want?"

"I'm a writer. I heard about Green Rage and The Space and thought there might be a story."

"You're a reporter?"

"No, no. Just a freelance writer."

"Really? Who have you written for?"

Gib hadn't even considered making up a fake resume. "Well, mostly... I'm just getting started. I used to work in New York, writing ad copy. Freelance."

"Who are you writing for now?" Ruth asked.

"It depends," he said. "Is there a story here worth writing?"

She thought about it. "Tell you what. Come on in. Help me clean up a little and set up for the meeting, and you can ask questions while you do. So you can find out for yourself if there's a story."

"Deal."

She had him get the bag of groceries out of her back seat. While she unlocked the front door, she wagged a finger at him. "You slack off, though, and you're out of luck. And you can't quote me, either."

"As long as I get quotes from Ethan Garrity and the others."

"Ethan'll give you more quotes than you know what to do with." She started up the front stairs. "What's your name?"

He caught himself about to say "Edward Gibson." *Man, I suck at this.* "Gibson Edwards. You can call me Gib."

"Nice to meet you, Gib. I'm Ruth Radley. Hope you don't have a weak back."

They spent the next hour sweeping the floor, brewing two industrial-sized pots of coffee, rolling out a huge -- and ragged -- rug in the middle of the dance floor, and setting up a keg at one corner of it. As they carried the keg, he watched her arm and stomach muscles flex.

"Hey," she said to catch his attention. When he looked up and saw her smile, he knew she had caught him looking. "I thought you had a bunch of questions."

"I thought I'd get some work done first. Build up some credit."

"Tell you what, help me get the rack of folding chairs up from the basement and that'll buy you a beer and twenty questions. How's that?"

They went down into the basement and rolled the chairs into the freight elevator. While they were going up, Gib asked what he figured was a good leading question. "This is a big place. Is it all just for music?"

"Oh, no. This place runs just about twenty-four hours a day, it seems like. The live music is most nights, but we rent space out for about anything. Art shows, theater, whatever. The basement is full of practice space which we rent out, too. But we want to bring in big crowds, so mostly it's music."

"Doesn't everyone want big crowds?"

"Of course." The elevator opened and she grunted loudly as they got the chairs rolling again. "But we're not in this to make money. We're trying to spread the word."

"The word?"

She looked at him curiously. "What were you planning to write about? I thought you were interested in Green Rage and the environmental work they do."

"Well, sure. That's a big part of it. But it's the whole, uh, zeitgeist."

She snorted as she walked over to the bar and found a stack of big plastic cups. "Zeitgeist. Jesus. That's one of *those* words."

"One of *what* words."

"Like post-modern. Every asshole and his brother uses it, and everyone thinks they know what it means." She handed him a glass and had him hold it while she poured beer from the keg.

"I know what zeitgeist means."

"Didn't mean to wound your ego, Hemingway." She blew foam off her beer and took a drink. "So what does it mean?"

"Aw, hell," Gib said, unable to remember. "You weren't supposed to call my bluff."

She patted his shoulder in sympathy. "Thought not."

"The point is," Gib said, "I thought the whole combination of performance space, political activism and so on, would be interesting to write about."

"'And so on' is always the best part of any story."

"What exactly is your job, by the way? You're sort of in charge, right?"

"The only thing better than 'and so on' is 'sort of.'" She looked over toward the back stairs and waved. "Afternoon, Ethan!"

Gib looked over and saw Ethan Garrity -- wearing only a pair of jeans -- walking across the floor toward them. Gib felt oddly comfortable. A cold beer and an interesting new woman had settled his nerves. He was getting the hang of being "Gib, the Amiable Writer Guy". Kind of a fuck up, don't worry about him. Eventually, he knew they'd get

around to talking about monkeywrenching, the state of the trees, and all that crap. For now, though, he just wanted to hang out and drink.

"Hi, Boo!" Garrity yelled to Ruth. "Who's this?"

"Boo?" Gib asked.

"Can't define zeitgeist," she said, "and you don't know *To Kill A Mockingbird*. I guess you don't have to pass a test to call yourself a writer, huh?"

"Oh. Ruth Radley. Boo Radley. Got it."

"Ethan, this is Gib. He wants to write about you."

"Really? Nice to meet you, Gib." Garrity shook his hand distractedly. "Boo, is there any juice? I'm really hung over." The only proof of that was that Garrity's eyes were bloodshot. Otherwise, he looked like a gymnast about to start a tumbling run. It made Gib -- whose hangovers had to be measured on the Richter scale -- more than a little envious.

"Yeah, it's in the bar fridge."

Garrity wandered over to the bar.

Ruth said, "Ethan will give you all the quotes you need, once he babies himself through the next few minutes. He'll probably have some free time after the meeting."

"What about you? You think you'll have any free time?"

"Was that an interview question, Hemingway?" Ruth went to greet the first people who were streaming into The Space. As around fifty people straggled in over the next ten minutes or so, Gib was interested to see the variety of people in the group. He had expected a bunch of saggy-ass hippies -- a mixed bag of luddites, folk singers, hemp growers, and tie die shirt manufacturers -- and he wasn't disappointed. But dirt wizards accounted for less than half the group. The rest looked like factory workers and accountants -- the kind of people who would go bowling in their spare time, not come to a place like this to talk about the environmental work they were doing.

The meeting, once it started, was a pretty loose affair, with everyone being given a chance to speak in a mostly clockwise order. In Gib's limited experience, this kind of overly democratic meeting always broke down. Because given the opportunity, most people would yap about personal "issues" and their feelings about everything from cats to conspiracy theories. Rambling from this to that to -- oh yeah -- the other thing. Surprisingly, almost everyone who felt the need to speak was direct and to the point. There were occasional rounds of applause when someone mentioned a successful event, publication, or signature drive. But mostly, people just nodded and took notes as information poured out.

The major exception was Garrity. He would pour out compliments on people, make rambling speeches about the need to "save Mother Earth from corporate greedheads" and other scintillating revelations.

Gib quickly found himself jittery and bored. He dreaded seeing Garrity open his mouth, because it meant another two or three minutes of spouting off. About a third of the group seemed to feel the same as Gib. The rest, though, looked on rapturously whenever Garrity spoke.

Luckily, only two or three worshippers at the Garrity shrine followed his lead, favoring the group with pointless anecdotes about how, for example, the choice between paper or plastic bags was a major ethical choice that would make the Great Goddess smile

upon people with favor. Or some such squirrely shit. And Garrity would always make sure to "validate their feelings", because it was important to accept all sort of differences of opinion, blah blah blah. Gib realized most people went to get more beer whenever certain self-appointed preachers to the converted stood up.

Other than those exceptions, though, everyone was all business.

For example, a freckled African-American woman asked for help passing out flyers in front of a furniture manufacturer in Oakland that was blasting out heavy pollution next to a junior high school. That got five volunteers, and a few mentions of other people who might be available. The woman nodded happily, especially after Ruth offered to print up the flyers at The Space.

"I think Frank Marion – you all know Frank – can come out and tape the whole thing and pass it off to some local stations," Garrity added. "Probably won't do much good, but what the hell. If there's little kids involved, there's always a chance we'll get coverage." It was the shortest speech Garrity gave the entire afternoon.

And that ended everything. As the meeting broke up, Ruth patted him on the shoulder and asked him to help her carry the keg back under the bar.

"That's it?" he blurted out. A couple people gave him suspicious looks. In retrospect, Gib realized how stupid he had been to expect to hear monkeywrenching discussions out in public.

"Hey, everybody," Ruth announced. "Before you all split up, I want to introduce Gib Edwards. Wave to everybody, Gib."

Gib waved.

"Gib here is thinking about writing a story about The Space. I'm sure you'll give him all the help he deserves."

The suspicious looks changed to a low-boil contempt.

"One more thing! I think he's a narc!" Ruth yelled.

Much laughter.

A little later, Ruth and Gib were sitting at the bar. At some point, Stanley Campanella had joined them briefly for a beer, but he had gone out to meet Norman Haddal for some unspecified business.. Ruth was finishing a beer with Gib while Garrity held court with about fifteen people. They were talking unhappily about a recent court Federal court decision involving Devil's Arroyo.

"It's a tragedy," Garrity said. "I wish Green Rage could think of something that could stop the place from opening. I hate to sound like a pessimist, but marches and protest can only accomplish so much."

There was general agreement.

Gib remembered that the anti-Devil's Arroyo demonstration in front of Pacific Power's headquarters had been what worried Bob Maynard. But the file hadn't gone into any detail about the cause of the protest. "What's Devil's Arroyo?"

Silence and stares.

"It's *nuclear power*," one of the women snarled.

"Well, sure," Gib stammered, "but what makes Devil's Arroyo any worse than any other plant?"

That was all the encouragement Garrity needed to explain the history of Devil's Arroyo at length. Ruth kicked Gib in the shin as Garrity started talking.

Boiled down to the essence, it was a thirty year fight about building a nuclear power plant. In 1963, Pacific Power had announced plans to build a series of nuclear plants Devil's Arroyo, about an hour south of the Bay Area.

When the Sierra Club members found out, they instantly pointed out irreplaceable features of the area, including a sacred Indian burial ground, a unique coastal wilderness biosphere (the last of its type in the state), the largest and oldest Redwood trees on the entire western seaboard, a bird habitat, and the largest abalone breeding ground between Seattle and San Diego. In fact, they announced, Devil's Arroyo area was beautiful enough to be a state park.

However, by that time, PacPow had gotten approval from the Atomic Energy Commission to start building. They hadn't spent much yet, but approvals weren't easy or fast to get, and moving the construction spot again would start to cost serious money. Plus, egos and reputations were now on the line. So the brawl began.

It was now 1965. PacPow estimated Devil's Arroyo would be finished and providing cheap electricity by 1973. By that year, construction was only about a third finished. The most eventful year in the intervening eight had been 1969. Geologists working for Shell Oil announced the discovery of the Hannigan Fault just off the coast from where construction was going on.

After that, things got really nasty.

When the existence of the fault was confirmed by the US Geological Survey in 1972, a VP of PR for PacPow announced "not even God could make an earthquake big enough to damage Devil's Arroyo." Throughout the rest of the 70s, this was mostly the level of the dialogue. Various lawsuits were filed by various environmental groups, which would take decades to went their way through the court system. In 1976, PacPow started doing hot tests of Devil's Arroyo One, killing abalone by the thousands each time, and local fishermen started filing their own lawsuits. The USGS tended to come down on the side of the activists, and they continued to show studies that showed Devil's Arroyo was not designed well enough to handle a "seismic event of any great size." The funniest response from PacPow was a claim that, because the foundation for Devil's Arroyo was so massive and wide, it would, in fact, *reduce* the effects of a major quake. The best known sound bite to come out of that contretemps was at the press conference for the announcement of this claim, where a reporter for the *Sacramento Bee* exclaimed in disbelief, "You can't think we believe this crap! It defies common sense!"

By that time, the current VP of PR (the third in five years) was burned out by the whole controversy and he replied, "This isn't common sense, it's geology!"

Over the years, the largest group of casualties in the fight over Devil's Arroyo, next to abalones, were probably PR flacks for PacPow.

The 80s were the decade of the protests. The first of the court cases were being shot down and moving up to federal circuit courts, but PacPow was getting tentative approvals to continue building, especially after Jerry Brown left the governor's office and was followed by years of Republicans. In 1986, Republicans became the majority on the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC), which assured smoother sailing for PacPow, even after Chernobyl. That year, Devil's Arroyo went online, twenty-three years after PacPow had first thought about building the facility. The original costs of One had been estimated to be about 160 million dollars. In 1988, the facility had cost PacPow

over a billion dollars, not even counting legal fees. Most of that extra cost was due to PacPow being forced to rebuild the facility multiple times to resist earthquakes. The court fights in the 80s revolved around the utility's desire to pass that extra cost onto the consumer, which resulted in a rare loss for PacPow.

In spite of that, the 90s mostly consisted of court failures for the opposition to Devil's Arroyo, from restraining orders to civil liberty suits. In 1991, the one of the largest and longest blockades of a nuclear plant took place over a span of two weeks, with tens of thousands of people taking part. Over two thousand people were arrested, but after it was all over, Devil's Arroyo kept chugging along. Even so, by the summer of '96, when Green Rage started leading demonstrations, the stories that were coming out of the operational facilities didn't fill anyone with great confidence about the place. Constant shutdowns were the norm, for reasons from overheating to pump problems.

Garrity concluded his lecture by telling Gib the impetus for Green Rage's large-scale protest in front of PacPow's headquarters.

"About two months ago there was another shutdown. You know what caused that one? Some *technician* took out the wrong fuses and all of Devil's Arroyo shut down for a whole day before they figured out the problem. The whole place is ridiculous, a Chernobyl waiting to happen."

Garrity's lecture killed any possibility for more socializing. People left, and Garrity went upstairs to the living area, leaving Ruth and Gib alone at the bar.

"So, what do you think of the act?" Ruth asked.

"Last night's show or the lecture?"

"Both."

"Well, as a singer, he gives a hell of a speech. As a speaker, he's a decent therapist."

"So you're not impressed."

"He's OK." Gib finished his beer and refused another refill. To his surprise, he realized he was a little bit drunk. Drunk enough to blurt out something before he had a chance to really think about it. "You can't tell me his charms seduce *you*, can you? I don't see you as going for the empty figurehead type."

For a second, he thought he had offended her. Then he realized for the first time that afternoon, she was actually looking at him seriously. Up until that point, she had been treating him like a mildly amusing fellow passenger -- the guy who sat down next to you when the plane left O'Hare, plied you with small talk about sports and politics until the plane touched down at LaGuardia, and then disappeared forever. Suddenly, she was looking at him as if she actually might want to remember his face.

"Oh, really? What do think my type is?" She was giving him her full attention, and her expectant grin was unnerving. Cynics wore that kind of grin during a rare moment of hope -- hope which they fully expected to be dashed.

In high school, Gib's regular catcher had been a cynical guy named Joe Meeker. Meeker believed the glass half-empty, and that someone had probably spit in it for good measure. The night before the regional championship game -- a game that Gib was pitching -- he had run into Meeker at a party. After taking one look at the 32 ounce beer can in Gib's hand, Meeker had, with the cynic's hopeful grin on his face, offered to drive Gib home. "Just so you'll be ready for tomorrow."

"Don't worry about me, man. I'll be ready to go tomorrow. I've only had a couple beers."

The next day, so hung over he could barely see, Gib had given up eight runs in one inning before he got pulled. It was the worst game Gib ever pitched in his years playing baseball. When Meeker had finally gotten back to the dugout, he had just looked at Gib and patted him on the shoulder.

"Just wasn't your day, I guess." Then Meeker reached into his equipment bag and handed Gib some aspirin and a bottle of water.

And now Ruth was grinning that grin at him. He knew that he had suddenly gotten into dark territory. Normally, the easiest thing to do would be to give an answer he knew was bound to disappoint, and then move on as quickly as possible. But this time, it was his job to win her over.

"What do I think your type is?" He trailed off, about to say "we hardly know each other", knowing it was a lurking fuck up. Putting off the question would screw things up. Jokes wouldn't work, false braggadocio -- "Hey, *I'm* your type! -- wouldn't work, and that meant the only real option was giving as plausible an answer as possible and hope his analysis was good.

A word popped into his head. "Mortar."

Ruth leaned back. "Hmm." The grin went away, but was replaced by neutrality, not rejection.

And that short pause gave Gib enough time to figure out the rest of his line of crap. "You're not the leader, or the life of this party. You're the mortar that holds the whole house together. Without you, this whole place is just a bunch of bricks, going nowhere." He held his breath while Ruth considered it.

Ruth kept silent for a long time. "Well, that's not a bad answer. I don't know how true it is, but it's a good answer."

"Influencing People"

Work is the curse of the drinking classes.

Oscar Wilde

Everything went very steady after that. Extremely steady, even.
His days were essentially split into thirds.

Third of the Day #1: Driver's Ed.

At the crack of eleven or noon, Gib would flounder out of bed, instantly ready for action after a couple of cups of coffee, and drive around the city streets and highways, learning the city. His method was to pick up the free weeklies, a method he had used in New York with the *Village Voice* and the *New York Press* and in Chicago with the *Reader* and *New City*. In San Francisco, he used the *Bay Guardian* and the *SF Weekly*. Taking the two papers to a coffee shop in downtown Berkeley, he cut out apartment ads for one or two bedrooms in a mid-range price group and taped them into a notebook. Then he clipped the restaurant reviews and any restaurant ad he could find and added them to the notebook as well. Finally, he just ripped out both music sections with all the club ads and folded them into the back of the book. Once he finished, he bought a really detailed driving map of the city and tried to find all the places he had collected.

He started with the apartments, because they would be the hardest. The first morning, he only found two places. Mainly he had been frustrated by all the one-way streets, which had screwed up whenever he tried to backtrack, and generally messed with his sense of direction and got him completely discombobulated. By the end of the fifth morning, however, he had found every apartment on his list, so he now had a pretty good idea of how to get around the city and what the neighborhoods were like: the Financial District, Downtown, the Haight, Now Valley, the Avenues, Upper and Lower Richmond, the Mission, and Bernal Heights. Those seemed to cover just about everyplace he might want to go in San Francisco.

He moved on to restaurants, and those took about four days. Clubs only took two mornings.

By the end of his scouting, he knew the fastest routes to cruise through the city, including Bush and Fell, the south part of Market, the Golden Gate Park paths, and how to use or ignore the highways. And he learned that San Francisco had the awful parking situation typical to any major American city.

The only thing that amazed him were how many muscle cars were still on the streets. Whenever he saw another GTO on the road, Gib made a point of waving.

"All those sixties cars last out here so well is because there's almost never any snow," Ruth later explained. "So there's no salt tossed down on the roads that messes up the bottom of your car. Plus, the muscle cars just fit the lifestyle. So people obsess about them."

Third of the Day #2: Mopping Up

During the afternoons, Gib would show up at The Space and either spend his time doing repair work – including sweeping, fixing things like plumbing, or mopping up the

floors (especially in the four bathrooms), or repairing holes in the walls. The last one was one of the weird anomalies about The Space. Cleaning up puke, stray streams of piss, spilled beer and crushed cigarettes were what Gib had expected. But every day after a show, there would be holes where drunks had tripped and cracked their heads, or just decided to shadow box with the dry wall.

With practice, he got quite skilled at using wire mesh and goo to repair the cheap walls of the converted factory space. Wherever there was paneling, he also got talented at slicing out the broken pieces and cutting new pieces to fit. Since Ruth hated that particular job, she was happy to let Gib do it. He considered planting bugs all around The Space in the repaired walls, until he walked to the end of that thought-path. At best, he'd get conversations between Trustafarian teens about which bands sucked and who had the best fake ID.

Gib wasn't the only volunteer, but he was easily the most steady and reliable, which he found bizarre: an FBI agent was providing the steadiest help to a bunch of suspected eco-terrorists.

The other volunteers were exchanging the work for use of The Space for meetings. There was one abortion rights group, two regular seminars about spirituality (one masculine, one feminine), a fledgling stripper's union, three small theatre groups who needed rehearsal space (and who got into wrestling matches with each other about stolen ideas), two art classes, and a mish-mash of others who needed a place to meet. They all met during the day, and the only ones who Ruth charged a nominal fee were the spirituality seminars and the art classes. All the rest traded work for rent.

At night, The Space had performances, including bands, lectures, poetry slams, DJ parties, and at least one art opening.

The upper floors were living and working space for both Garrity and Campy. Frank Marion had an apartment somewhere near the Haight, though he stored a lot of his equipment at The Space, while Ruth lived with two roommates in Noe Valley.

Third of the Day #3: Sexing the Superior

The last third of Gib's day was given over to his real job. He wrote notes on his day at The Space

Some sample notes:

TO: Jan Reuben, Special Agent, San Francisco

FROM: [Agent Code #: SF677-900-980]

Subject: Ethan Garrity

Subject appears to wake up every day at approximately 14.00 hrs.

When there are meetings of environmental groups, Subject in I charge.

Subversive meeting activities include:

- *Protest planning*
- *Anti-corporate rhetoric*

Note: specific anger is directed at Pacific Power's Devil's Arroyo nuclear facility. See separate report.

- *Anti-government rhetoric*

As of yet, there has been no violence advocated in public forums.

When no environmental meetings are scheduled, subject appears to see numerous films in secondary release. A representative list: Courage Under Fire, A Time to Kill, Independence Day, Twister. Subject has boasted of viewing Independence Day over 6 times, and this agent has witnessed Subject cheering at destruction of major U.S. landmarks, including the White House and the Capitol Building. The violent content in these films is clearly a mirror of Subject's violent potential, but further investigation is required.

TO: Jan Reuben, Special Agent, San Francisco

FROM: [Agent Code #: SF677-900-980]

Subject: Frank Marion

Subject has a job in the computer industry which keeps him away from The Space until late in the day. Subject's involvement with Green Rage and The Space appears to primarily be focused on electronic equipment.

Subject is clearly not a instigator in the group, but his facility with electronics may indicate an ability to build explosives and other destructive devices. This agent has witnessed Subject shooting fireworks from the roof of The Space in clear violation of city ordinances. This lack of respect for public welfare is likely indicative of a broader contempt for society, but further investigation is required.

TO: Jan Reuben, Special Agent, San Francisco

FROM: [Agent Code #: SF677-900-980]

Subject: Stanley Campanella

Subject begins day before this Agent can plausibly arrive at target building ("The Space"). Based on conversations with witnesses, Subject coordinates and assists environmental, anti-corporate and anti-government activities across the Bay Area, including financial and other assistance.

Subject is hostile to engagement with this Agent. This hostility is possibly indicative of a broader anger against society, but further investigation is required.

TO: Jan Reuben, Special Agent, San Francisco

FROM: [Agent Code #: SF677-900-980]

Subject: Ruth Radley

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... further investigation is required.

At the end of the day, he checked in with Jan Reuben. They would meet at the Berkeley safe house, he would give her the report, make plans for the next day, have sex.

That was Gib's first two weeks in SF. He drove in the morning. In the afternoon and evening, he mopped and hung out, talking with Ruth, Garrity and Marion, failing to talk with Campy. Then he went home, took notes, gave reports, fucked.

End of Day of Thirds...

The second Tuesday of volunteering, Ruth said to Gib, "I don't know what you're getting out of all of this."

Gib answered, "I'm getting background information for the story."

"That's a lot of puke you're mopping up for a story."

"I guess."

Ruth thought about it. "You're angling for a job, aren't you? Look, we do all right, but we really aren't looking to hire anyone."

"I'm not looking for a job. I'm a writer."

Thinking about it some more, Ruth said, "I'm not interested in dating you."

Gib was startled. "Where did that come from?"

Ruth smiled. "I appreciate your help around here, but you don't strike me as the idealistic type. So if it's not money, it must be sex."

"I told you, I'm writing a *story*!"

"Sure. See you tomorrow, Hemingway."

The next day, Garrity started invited Gib to join The Card Game. The Ragers were fanatical card players, dealing out hands at the smallest opportunity. Sometimes it was Gin, or Poker, or Euchre, but the most common game to see the Ragers playing was Hearts.

"How do you play?" Gib asked. Ruth was out paying bills, so the Ragers were looking for a fourth. Campy had muttered something about Hearts being just as good with three people, but Frank Marion uncharacteristically told the bigger man to shut his pie hole.

Garrity saw Gib's surprise at Marion's ire, and explained, "Frank's a pretty good card player. He takes it pretty seriously. He beats Vegas when he goes."

Gib asked Marion, "Five dollar blackjack, Frank?"

Marion said morosely, "Blackjack is for idiots."

Campy laughed, and Garrity said, "Frank's on the black list for blackjack in Vegas. He got kicked out of three –"

"Four," Campy said, with a rare grin.

"—four different casinos for counting cards. What did you win that night at Caesar's, Frank? You started by going ten thousand down, right?"

Marion mumbled something.

"And then you ended fifteen thousand up, wasn't it?"

Marion shuffled the cards loudly and said, "Are we going to play or what?"

Hearing *fifteen thousand* made Gib extremely nervous to sit down at the same table with Marion. But the rules were explained to him: each Heart counted as a point, the Queen of Spades for thirteen, and that the goal of the game was to get the lowest number of points. First person to a hundred points was the loser, and the lowest point

total was the winner. Gib thought he understood the basic idea, as long as they weren't playing for cash.

"But the most fun is when you shoot the moon," Marion said. "That's when you *take* every single heart in the deck, as well as the Queen of Spades, and everyone else gets 26 points. It's great!"

"Frank likes to try and shoot the moon a lot," Garrity said. "He screw that up the time, because we know to look for it."

The Ragers played a hand to show Gib how to play. They played another hand with Garrity giving Gib advice on what card to play. Then they started keeping score.

Gib was impressively awful. When he finally broke the hundred point barrier, the next closest point total was Campy with 42. Frank Marion only had 12 total points, and he cursed his bad luck.

"I've gone cold, totally cold," Marion moaned as he started a new round of scoring on the sheet of paper in front of him.

Garrity shuffled the deck and said to Gib, "We used to play poker a lot, but Frank got too upset. Then Gambler's Anonymous started having meetings here, so it sort of felt wrong to be playing poker when GA volunteers were sweeping up."

After an hour, Gib had lost five straight games, and both Marion and Garrity were telling him what a good sport he was. Then Garrity invited him to "the usual Friday night party".

"What's that?"

"Oh, well, on Fridays we usually don't have bands, so we throw a little party. It's usually pretty fun. Relaxed."

When Gib showed up at one-thirty on Friday, the music was going full blast and about forty people were still dancing out on the floor. Another ten or so were hanging with Campy at the bar and passing a bottle around. Gib stood awkwardly at the entrance. Campy looked over at him at least once, but the look was so nakedly hostile that Gib didn't walk over to the bar.

Ruth suddenly appeared out of the lights of the dance floor, as if teleported. Holding out her sweat-beaded arm, she pulled Gib onto the dance floor. Luckily, Gib had had a beer before he came, which was usually his bare minimum before he could force himself to dance. Even though he knew dancing would assist his lifelong goal of getting laid, he had never been able to break the clichéd white guy dancing discomfort. The lights were still flashing on some automatic program that Marion had set up, so his spastic butter churning was nicely camouflaged. Every once in a while, Ruth would open her eyes and grab his arms and swing the both of them around. Sober, even half-blitzed, Ruth was probably a pretty good dancer, but she was burning bright tonight, and her swinging arms caught him painfully in the nose at least twice before he stopped noticing.

After about three generic dance songs, the DJ put on King Floyd's "Groove Me", which led into the R&B equivalent of classic rock radio. Even an autistic quadriplegic could dance to Aretha Franklin or Sam Cooke. Then Marvin Gaye started crooning and most people paired up. Ruth grabbed Gib and put her head on his chest.

When the song ended, Ruth shook her head blearily and smiled up at Gib. The DJ put on some meandering jamband and turned down the volume. Most of the remaining dancers fled instantly, and the rest wandered over to the bar. Gib turned to follow, but

Ruth spun him around and kissed him.

"Thanks for dancing," she said as she took her tongue out of his mouth and led the way to the bar.

At four in the morning, Gib found himself playing cards with the Ragers upstairs in the kitchen. There were four or five people crashed on couches in the living room, and Garrity had put Ruth into a spare bedroom after she laid her head down on the bar and said "nighty night" to the whole group.

Though all three Ragers were clearly drunk -- Campy still drinking straight from a bottle of rum -- Gib was still losing badly at Hearts.

During a shuffle lull, Garrity said to Gib, "I really appreciate all the help you've given us. I wanted you to know that. We appreciate all our volunteers."

Campy grunted, which sounded like disbelief to Gib.

Garrity said, "Ruth says you've done a great job, too." Then he stared at Campy until the big man grumpily handed the bottle of rum over to Gib, who accepted the peace offering.

When Gib handed the bottle back after taking a long drink, Campy asked, "Why *are* you volunteering?"

It was the first complete sentence Gib had heard the big man complete in his presence, so he took special note of it. Campy had a deep, booming voice, a Paul Robeson, James Earl Jones kind of voice, a voice that you heard announcing: "In a world ..." for movie trailers. Soothing as the voice was, the suspicious nature of the question would have given Gib conniptions if he had been less drunk.

"Trying to see the inner working of this place," Gib said breezily.

"You learned a lot, have you?" Campy asked.

Gib mimed deep cogitation. Finally, he said, "Learned how to play Hearts."

They all laughed except Campy.

"Fitness"

Justice is incidental to law and order.

J. Edgar Hoover

So that was the first two weeks of investigating at The Space. Driving, Cleaning, and Jan Reuben.

One of the really annoying things about Jan Reuben as a boss her intense concern about things that Gib gave less than two shits in a pigeon's ass about. Such as qualifying on a pistol. Or talking investigation strategies. Or working out. Worst of all was combining all those activities into one

The day after the Friday Night Regular, Reuben called at quarter to five in the morning. Since he had only been asleep for about a half hour, Gib was let the machine pick up. What finer words in the world than these: "let the machine get it".

Gib only listened to the messages if the mood struck him. More often, he would just hit rewind on the machine. Which sometimes caused troubles.

One weekend during his first year of law school, Wallis had showed up at his front door.

"I left you three messages last week!" Wallis told him as they sat down to dinner in an Indian restaurant in Adams-Morgan.

"You called?" Gib asked. "Sorry, there was this girl I was avoiding."

"Why does that not surprise me?"

"Well, anyway," Gib continued, "it was just this big hassle, all right? It wasn't worth listening to the messages. Just a lot of 'You bastard', 'I can't believe you did that', on and on and on. Fine, I'm a bad guy, let's move on with our lives, all right? Who needs the stress? So I just hit rewind every time I came in the door last week."

"So you just erased all the messages without listening to them? All week?"

"Sure."

"Then what's the point in having an answering machine?"

Gib shrugged. "It makes other people feel better."

Wallis laughed in horror. "Why not just get Caller ID?"

Gib scoffed. "There's no deniability in *that*. The if I told someone, 'I didn't get your call.', I'd just be *lying*."

"So you never pick up your phone, never check messages."

"Not never. It just goes in waves. Phones are for getting pizza delivered, not hassles."

"That's crazy," Wallis said. "You missed all my messages. What if I had shown up at your front door and you weren't home?"

"Well, you did, and I was."

"But that was luck."

"If you say so," Gib said. "I prefer to think of it as the way the universe works when it's working right."

"But what if you hadn't been home?"

"You could have crashed somewhere else."

"But we would have missed each other."

“That would have sucked. But this isn’t the last time you’re ever coming to D.C. is it?”

“No.”

“So we would have hooked up some other time. Everything usually works out. You just have to keep a positive attitude.”

Wallis was interrupted by the waiter arriving with the wine. After the two of them ordered, Wallis said, “Gibby, do you have any friends where you’ve known them for years, and then one night you sit down with them to dinner, and you realize how little you know about the depths of their insanity?”

“I seem insane to you?”

“Well, most of the time I think of you as Edward Gibson, my good, solid friend. And then there are times like this when I realize you’re ten times more fucked up than anyone else I know. And that’s including my drug addict brother Owen.”

Gib just poured the wine.

The day he arrived in San Francisco, Gib had gotten a new digital answering machine. He replaced the “my machine is broken” excuse with the modern digital excuse, “oh, my machine must have been filled up; sorry about that”. He figured he could call up his own machine and leave long message so the machine itself could offer up the excuse for him. Very satisfying. Hitting DELETE for every message was more satisfying than pressing rewind, even if it involved a bit more effort. Plus, the machine was totally silent when it picked up a message, which made it easier to sleep in when getting calls from supervisors at unreasonable hours.

So when Reuben called him at 4:45 AM, he let the machine pick up. It was quite a surprise when he was woken up by a pair of his stink-ridden workout shorts being rubbed into his face. The stench was too awful to contain in a dream, so he woke up.

He sat up in bed and saw Reuben pawing through his pile of clothes.

“I’m amazed,” she said when she saw him move, “that someone with so few actual belongings can still have such a messy living space. Just look at all these dirty clothes. Where do you keep your clean clothes?”

“What the hell time is it?”

“It’s just after 5:30.”

“I slept all day?”

“AM.”

He stared at her. “You’re in my apartment – hey, wait a second, how did you get into my apartment?”

“I picked the lock.”

“You’re an FBI agent. Where did you learn how to pick locks?”

“I took a class.”

“Oh.” Gib looked around for a cigarette.

“Get dressed,” Reuben said as Gib found the pack and tried to fish out a smoke. “We’ve got some work to do.”

Gib finally got a cigarette lit and took one puff before Reuben snatched it out of his fingers and crushed it out on his floor with her tennis shoe. “Cancer, cancer, cancer. Come on, get off your dead ass.” She grabbed the covers and yanked them away, taking the opportunity to make a critical study of Gib’s naked body. For a brief moment, he

thought this might have been the point of Reuben's dawn break-in, a uncontrollable early morning desire to ravage him. Then she said, "For a former college athlete, you really are in terrible shape."

"I'm in fine shape," Gib instantly responded.

"How many miles can you run?"

"I dunno."

Reuben's smile had a nasty edge. She leaned over and slapped Gib in his chest. "Let's get moving."

Gib grabbed up the sweats and got dressed while enduring Reuben's taunts.

"Come on, flabby! Move it, move it!"

While he balanced on one foot and stuck the other through one leg of his favorite shorts, a pair he had gotten from UVa baseball, he finally recognized Reuben for what she was. He wasn't used to hearing this kind of hectoring in a soprano register, but Reuben was showing all the signs of being the worst, most unpleasant species of jock..

The Hard Worker.

Fuck.

Reuben drove them over the Golden Gate Bridge into Marin County, saying she had a great route for their run. As Gib drifted off, he realized he should have known Reuben was big into jogging. She had the build and having seen her naked, he knew her body had the runner's look – strong calves, stringy but muscular arms.

Hard Workers almost always gravitated to jogging as a passion, because it was a sport that required not much more than the ability to stay upright and in motion. They could feel like they really accomplished something after running for miles and not once falling down. Not once!

Jocks fell into some pretty basic types, from "Beauty in Motion" to "Date Rapist Walking" to "One Step Removed from the Primordial Ooze", but a sizable percentage of the ones who played high school sports and tended to round up the junior varsity teams at the college level were the Hard Workers. They were the ones who believed everything a coach told them, did every rep one hundred (and ten) percent, yelled with all their energy every time because they were always embarrassed when a coach yelled out "I can't hear you", arrived early to the weight room and left late, and were generally more enthusiastic than a bucketful of cheerleaders on speed. Oh, and they uniformly lacked any kind of actual talent or sense of the game.

It was important to recognize the difference between the Hard Workers and the Smart Workers. The Smart Worker were the guys who knew they didn't have quite as much talent as the next guy, and worked that hard to give themselves an edge. The Smart Worker studied and worked at their game so that they could sense the moment to jump in front of a pass, to pick a runner off first.

A Hard Worker, by contrast, was the cornerback who did everything to the letter during the week, then on game day would blow a coverage and give up the game-winning touchdown. Or who would blast out home runs in batting practice and then go 0-for-4 in the crucial game and make at least one devastating error. And there was always someone else to blame for the mistakes.

Another common name for them was The Asshole.

Coaches tend to like Assholes, because Assholes are invariably yes-men who

would suck the shit out of a Coaches' bunghole after he'd eaten a bean burrito. And then compliment the Coach on the quality of his crap.

Gib, on the other hand, had been a Talented Loafer. In his case, a pitcher. He would take part in the sprint drills, do just enough in the weight room. He would go through the motions of practice, waiting to turn on his concentration for the game itself. His senior year of college, he had ended up with a decent record (10-4, with a 3.23 ERA), but the Cavaliers themselves had been only an adequate team during Gib's four years. He had no shot at the majors, and no real interest, either. So in the last game he had started during his last year, there wasn't anything on the line besides "Pride", one of those nebulous and dubious concepts that coaches used to motivate players.

Gib didn't much care about pride, he just played to play. If the team won, great. If it lost, well, that was probably all right, too, as long as everyone played hard. It wasn't something important like birth, death, or sex; it was just baseball.

That last game, though, Gib tapped into a vein of skill he had never seen before. With one inning left in the game, he realized everyone on the bench had stopped talking to him. Not even a pat on the ass or a glove smacked into his thigh in appreciation of a well pitched inning. Gib had thought he was doing pretty well, but the rest of the team was acting like he had creeping leprosy.

Then he looked at the score board and realized he didn't just have a good game going, he had a *perfect* game going. With one inning to go, he had faced the bare minimum of hitters. His team was ahead, 3-0. If Gib got up the next inning and got the first three batters out, he would have pitched a perfect game. That would be one for the NCAA record books.

And Gib didn't even feel nervous. He felt warm. Comfortable.

Then he looked up at the pitching coach and saw the sheer panic on the man's face. Gib looked up and down the bench, and half the players looked like they were going to throw up.

Then Gib realized. None of these guys were going on to pro ball. They'd head off to law school or get a job, and only pick up a glove for the company softball team. They'd just be ex-jocks who had played on a mediocre college ball club. For guys who had gone 20 years with sports as their whole life, it must have scared the shit out of a lot of them. But players on a mediocre college baseball team that had had a *perfect* game, *those* players could live on that memory for years, regularly taking the moment out of their mental trophy case and polishing it fondly. They would all have been, however tangentially, been touched with perfection.

As the team headed out for the top of the last inning, the head coach stopped Gib for a second.

"You feeling strong?" Gib's guts suddenly started churning. Up until that time, about the only things the coach had said to Gib all year were two phrases when he got pulled for a relief pitcher: either "good job" or "you just didn't have it today".

"Sure. I feel fine." Gib waited for the coach to let go of his shoulder. When the man finally did, Gib ran out to the mound and tried not to waste time collecting his thoughts. Thinking too hard would only kill the groove.

Gib struck out the first batter.

Just like that. So simple. Two more outs for a perfect game.

Then the shortstop called timeout and summoned the infield to the mound for a discussion.

The shortstop, a guy named Dijanski, was that year's Chief Asshole, the biggest Hard Worker on the team. He was batting .273 on the year, had hit a paltry four home runs. But after each homer, he had run the bases at a sprint with his head down, eyes focused on the ground. Arrogance in guise of modesty. Dijanski, in spite of his mediocre stats, was convinced he was going to get drafted. He was, inevitably, Team Captain.

When the entire infield had gathered around, Dijanski had announced, "I think we all know how important these next two outs are. So let's *do* it, guys. Gimme a shout!"

The other infielders, giving Gib furtively embarrassed looks, had stuck their gloves on top of Dijanski's. Dijanski had waited for Gib to put his glove on top of the pile so they could cheer and go back to their positions. Gib futilely tried to communicate the sheer level of burning hatred he was cultivating. Finally, he just said, "Get your ass away from me, you dumb fuck."

Dijanski let out a loud whoop – "Let's do it!" – and the meeting on the mound broke up.

Joe Meeker, the catcher who had followed Gib from high school to UVa, stuck around for an extra moment. "Don't let that asshole into your head, Gib. Don't think. Just throw. You know how to do the right thing." Then he trotted back to the plate.

Gib took a long look around the ball field. There were only a few fans in the stands, but the sky was a bright blue, no clouds in the sky. He tried to capture every detail, hoping he would remember this moment forever.

Gib turned around and walked the next batter on four straight pitches.

There goes the perfect game, Gib thought, as the batter ran down to first. But he still had a no-hitter going. Even with a walk, you could still get a no-hitter. Maybe it wasn't perfection, but it was still pretty good.

The next batter swung and missed at the first pitch. Gib saw his Meeker leap up to throw to second before he stopped himself and flipped the ball into his glove in disgust. Gib turned around, dreading. And of course he saw a shame-faced Dijanski standing flat-footed while the runner slid into second base. The shortstop had forgotten to cover second so Meeker had no one to throw to.

Gib's next pitch was his best fastball. The batter cracked it screaming into left field, and Gib covered his face with his glove, staring out through the webbing. The left fielder made a diving catch, the stuff of legend and highlight reels. When he got to his feet, the runner had easily advanced to third base.

So it was two outs, man on third. Still a no-hitter.

Gib took a deep breath. Threw.

The pitch was an routine grounder to short. Gib dived at the ball as it went by, hoping he could end this himself. But it squirted past him, rolling through to Dijanski. Gib lay in the grass and watched, knowing – *knowing* – Dijanski would muffle the play.

Dijanski fielded the grounder cleanly, like a slow roller hit in practice.

Gib felt relief wash through him.

Then Dijanski bobbled the ball trying to dig it out of his glove.

And once he got it out, he started to throw to home, to try and cut down the runner from third. But the guy on third had taken off as soon as the ball had left the bat,

so Dijanski had no chance. Meeker was screaming and cursing and pointing for Dijanski to throw to first.

Gib dropped onto his back. As he lay on the ground, staring up at the sky, he saw a flash of white in his peripheral vision that indicated Dijanski had finally thrown to first. Gib vaguely wondered if the throw had been any good.

After a long while, Gib climbed back to his feet in total silence and walked back to the mound. The first baseman gently tossed him the ball. The runner had made first easily.

Gib struck out the next batter on three straight pitches, fastballs right down the middle. Easy. They won the game, 3-1.

While the team hit the showers, Gib sat and stared at his locker.

If it had ended there, it would have just been another vagary of the game. Dijanski couldn't help being an Asshole, and it was idiotic to hate an Asshole for being true to his nature and blowing a big play. It would be like hating the Welsh for singing, the Irish for drinking, the Polish for having jokes made about them.

But of course, Dijanski couldn't let it lie. He was Captain of the team. He was a Hard Worker. An Asshole. He had to define where the mistake had really been made. Or that no mistake had been made at all. How they were all still winners, looking on the bright side.

Gib felt a hearty slap on his back. He turned around and saw Dijanski standing in front of him, a smile on his face.

"Well, I checked with the scorer, and they gave me an error," Dijanski said, shaking his head at the craziness of scorers. "So at least you got the no-hitter. That'll go into the old record book."

Dijanski raised his hand for a high five. Gib punched him in the face.

When the rest of the team eventually pulled Gib off Dijanski, the shortstop had a broken nose, two cracked ribs, and was wedged so tightly in a locker that an emergency crew with a cutting saw designed to rescue people from car crashes had to be called to get him out.

Dijanski wanted to press charges for assault, but all the other players in the locker room had told the cops that he had slipped on a bar of soap and fallen into the locker. The cops decided not to inquire too closely, and Uncle Joseph had quickly handled the ensuing lawsuit.

After all that got settled, Gib was sure that now, just a few years later, Dijanski went to bars after 8 hours of sweaty stock brokering or banking and regaled his co-workers with his stories about the no-hitter he had played in. He had probably made the crucial play to save the game in the end.

Jan Reuben showed every sign of being that kind of Hard Worker.

Gib woke up some time later hearing the wind blowing hard against the car. Grabbing the back of his head and stretching, he realized the nap hadn't done much for him. It just confirmed exactly how tired he was. They were in the empty parking lot of Point Reyes National Park. It was a beautiful day, with a bright sun and a fresh breeze. A great day for sleeping in, Gib thought.

Reuben had acquired some bags full of food while he napped, which made Gib happy with her for the first time that day. When he reached into the bag to grab an apple,

Reuben looked annoyed at him. As he crunched, she said, "That's the last thing you get until we reach our picnic area. Get ready for a great run."

While she ran him through a series of stretches that were unpleasantly good for him, Reuben packed the food into two backpacks, handing one to Gib. After a bleak look, he slung the bag onto his shoulders and followed along as Reuben as she started jogging toward the Point Reyes paths.

Gib fell into a half-asleep trudge where he only knew where he was going by lowering his head so that his eyes faced the backs of Reuben's shoes. Half-focusing on the Nike swoosh, he just kept his feet moving in rhythm.

The run took the better part of an hour before the two of them emerged onto a beach. Reuben pulled the pack off Gib's back and tossed him another apple before spreading out the food. No wine, Gib noted, but bottled water.

The best that could be said for that food was that it was probably very healthy. And a sun-dried tomato sandwich on thick five-seed bread, with a sports bar for dessert, didn't exactly wet the whistle. Gib wished he had savored the oil and vinegar from the salad a bit more when he had had the chance. He choked two bottles down his grain-paved throat while before Reuben stood up and took off her workout clothes. Gib was too exhausted to be excited, but she was wearing a one-piece swimsuit underneath in any case. She pulled him to his feet and browbeat him into stripping down to his underwear. Dragging him into the water, she said, "Isn't this romantic?"

"Wait! Wait! Appendix point!" Gib yelled as the water got deeper.

"Appendix point?"

"It's a theory I have. The appendix isn't a useless organ in men. It's where your dick goes when you're in cold water. The appendix point is when your dick is about to enter said cold water."

Reuben smiled briefly, the polite way you do at a joke you didn't quite follow but don't want repeated. "I can help," she said, and grabbed Gib by his cock to drag out into deeper water.

Walking out to the point where the water lapped at about heart height, Reuben massaged Gib's penis in a way she clearly thought was erotic, but which he found annoying and on the edge of painful. After many years of experimentation, Gib had concluded that, as a rule, women didn't know how to give hand jobs. There was a bit of a thrill in having someone else touch your penis (unless it was a medical professional, though even that was attention getting), but in general, no one was better than the guy attached to it, since they had the most practice stroking it.

Moving her hand from his penis, Reuben pulled his underwear down his legs to his knees. Then she took a deep breath and Gib saw a future full of friction. Mouth open, Reuben dived beneath the surface of the water and wrapped her lips around him. Unfortunately, Reuben was not only proof of Gib's Theory of Lousy Handjobs, she was also evidence of another part of his Unified Theory of Fuckin': Most women give lousy blow jobs, too. Gib grabbed her head and tried to rescue his dick. In response, Reuben grabbed his buttocks tightly and pulled him deeper into her mouth. Then, holding his penis tightly in her mouth, she started blowing bubbles.

Gib yelled and tried to jump away, but with his legs underwater and Reuben's arms wrapped around him, the best he could do was thrust slowly back, then be pulled back.

He knew Reuben would think that meant he was enjoying himself, but he just couldn't help himself.

When Reuben came up for air, she said, "I'll bet you never did something like that before, did you?"

Gib shook his head. Of course not. Who would?

Reuben led him back into slightly shallower water. She pushed herself up into a floating position on her back and wrapped her legs around Gib. He stared at her in disbelief.

She can't want to have sex in salt water, Gib thought, dreaded, feared. She can't. She can't think salt water will do as well as lube, can she? Oh god.

Reuben leaned her head back into the water and closed her eyes. Without looking, she pulled the crotch of her swimsuit to one side and slid his penis into her. She took her arms and let them drift out to her sides in the water, as if she were making a melted snow angel.

It was fully as painful as Gib expected, but he hadn't foreseen the added discomfort of her swimsuit rubbing the shaft of his penis as he slowly thrust in and out of her. It was like fucking a tube of sandpaper soaked in water. Reuben didn't seem to mind, though, as she moaned and splashed in pleasure.

Gib could only imagine the imminent shark attack if he started to bleed.

After a while, Reuben's moans reached a crescendo (which sounded faked to Gib) and died down. In a little bit, she said to him, "That was great!"

Reuben slowly paddled away while he started to feel himself for damage.

"I'm going to take a swim," she said. "Do you want to come along?"

"No," Gib said, trying to keep his voice affectionate. "I really am pretty tired."

She shrugged and rolled over to start a messy crawl out into deeper water. Before she went too far, Gib said, "Jesus, Reuben, what the hell is your pain threshold?"

Reuben turned around. "My pain what?"

"I said, you must have a pretty high tolerance for pain."

She stood up and walked over to him. She put her arms down at her sides, her fists clenched, and said, "Punch me in the stomach."

Knowing better than to try chivalry, Gib punched her lightly in the gut.

"No!" she said. "Punch! As hard as you can!"

Gib set his feet and punched about half as hard as he could, and pulled the punch anyway. Reuben clenched her teeth when he hit her tensed stomach muscles, and stood stock still for a moment, the muscles in her neck and arms taut.

Then Reuben said, "You punch like a girl," before she turned and dived into the water to start doing laps.

"Prospects Park"

There is something tragic about the enormous number of young men ... who start life with perfect profiles, and end by adopting some useful profession.

Oscar Wilde

Monday morning, Gib was passably recovered from his Saturday workout, and he was bored with driving around. He thought about what he wanted to do, and decided he wanted to see if Ruth was around The Space. He brought coffee and bagels and newspapers to The Space and found her cleaning up the bar area. As he spread cream cheese on an onion bagel, Ruth asked him how his weekend went. He avoided the question.

After some companionable silence, Ruth asked if he was looking for a job.

"Here?"

"No, no. I was thinking you might want to meet a friend of mine. He's starting up a company, and he needs someone to write some marketing material."

"Really? I don't know if I'm qualified."

"Qualified? It's *marketing*."

"OK," Gib said dubiously. "Give me his number. I'll give him a call."

"Christ's sake, Gib, don't give me that pawn-off voice. I never see you working, except for volunteering here. So do you need a job or not? Because if you're independently wealthy or something, I want to know about it. That's what Campy thinks, that you're just a slumming rich kid."

Gib looked around. The sun was streaming in the high windows, flashing off the clean floors and walls. He impressed the scene in his mind, thinking it would be nice to cement in his memory the exact moment when his cover story fell to shit. Taking this job would likely not sit well with Maynard or Reuben. And he couldn't think of any plausible way to explain to Ruth that he wasn't *really* a writer.

On the other hand, he considered, he was good enough at writing fake reports. How much harder could this be? It would make his cover seem more realistic, or at least he could explain it that way.

"What's the guy's name?"

"Sidney Pinkwater. You've met him at the Friday night Regular. You had a long conversation with him."

"I did? What does he look like? What did we talk about?"

"I think you talked about Kerouac."

"I don't know anything about Kerouac. I must have been drunk."

"Probably. Besides, it was mostly Sidney doing the talking. He's very good at grabbing your ear in his teeth and hanging on for dear life. I'm surprised you don't remember him, though. He's the biggest guy in the world."

"You're telling me I talked about literature on Friday night. Here. With a fat guy."

"Not fat. Well, yes, fat. But mostly Sidney's just big. How can I describe him?"

Ruth thought for a minute. "It's like this. Say you were a homeless guy."

"Five minutes ago, I needed an job. Now, I'm out and out homeless."

"Right. So you're standing on the sidewalk. Three guys walk down the street in

front of you, right in a row. Arnold Schwarzenegger, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, and Sidney Pinkwater. When you asked for change, Sidney's the one you would call 'Big Guy'."

Gib thought about it. "He has presence, is what you're saying."

"He fills a room. And he wears these awful Hawaiian shirts most of the time, so you can spot him three blocks away."

"I wish I remembered meeting him."

Ruth finished the last of her bagel and stood up. "Here's your second chance."

"Right now?"

"I have to go over and look at some work Sidney is doing for us, so you might as well tag along and meet him."

It was past eleven when they got to South Park -- long past rush hour, and the streets were almost empty of people in this generic-looking industrial area southeast of the Moscone Center. Gib found a parking space on Second Street just north of the park, and then Ruth led him into the park itself. It was small, but had a pleasant canopy of leaves that filtered the light that had been glaring out on the street just a second before. The industrial feel of the neighborhood was leavened by some upscale-looking shops, and a few restaurants that looked to be serving a younger crowd.

"Nice park," Gib said.

"Jeez," Ruth said. "Don't you feel the power of the digital future flowing all around you?"

Gib took a long look around, trying to figure out what she meant. The only two groups Gib could specifically tag seemed to be bunches of punk kids and older men. The men, who had the look of retired dockhands, sat on park benches and talked among themselves. The kids -- though as Gib got closer look at some of them, he bumped their ages higher and higher -- all seemed to be drinking coffee or eating takeout while they were on their *very important* way to somewhere *extremely important* where *frighteningly important* business would be discussed. Clumps of people gathered around, pecking at laptops and playing with cellphones. They looked like a bunch of rhythm guitarists finally given a chance to play lead.

"You don't have a clue what I'm talking about, do you?" Ruth asked.

"Not really."

"These are all new media people. Don't you read? The future is now, here in this proud year of 1996. Web sites, computers, the Internet."

"Oh, OK, sure. Geeks."

Ruth sighed.

Gib said, "I'll tell you one thing. This would be the perfect place to open a bar. I even have the perfect name. Ask me what I'd call it."

"Okay" Ruth stopped, stood still, opened her eyes wide, and asked, in a breathy voice, "Gib, what would you call your bar, if you ever opened one here?"

"*Gentrification.*"

Ruth laughed. "With this crowd, half the people would moan about the quality of the house salad, and the other half would bitch you didn't have Pabst Blue Ribbon on tap."

As they walked around the park, Gib noticed the usual dissonance whenever a working-class neighborhood gets overrun by people looking for cheap rents. The whole area was summed up by three buildings just south of Jack London Alley. Two of the

buildings housed restaurants. The restaurant on the right looked like it could exist in any area with pretensions to hipster status. Gib had seen coffee joints just like it in Adams-Morgan, the East Village and Wicker Park. The one on the left was similar, but looked more crunchy. Without even going inside, Gib knew the menu listed food that would only appeal to lactose-intolerant, vegetarian anorexics. Etruscan turd salads with dirt appetizers and seven different brands of mineral water. Maybe a turkey burger to placate the meat-eaters.

Then smack in the middle of the two cafes was a residence hotel called the Gran Filipino. That was probably where all the dock workers lived. Gib was surprised the Gran Filipino hadn't been replaced by a smoothie shop.

As Gib was looking, a huge, grey-haired man in a Hawaiian shirt walked out of the café on the right. Actually, walked was the wrong word. The man's shoulders were just a bit too wide to easily fit through the crowded front door, so he twisted just a bit and sidled through with a practiced ease. The huge man had a large cup of coffee in one hand, but it was hard to see it past the reach of his fingers. Following him were two Armani drones with hundred-dollar haircuts. Gib was reminded of the oompa-loompas following Willy Wonka around his factory, only these oompas had sold out and were cell-phone using, BMW-driving suitboys, from the crease of their collars to the drying ink on their MBAs.

Gib tapped Ruth on the shoulder. "Big guy in a Hawaiian shirt across the street. Is that your pal?"

"Cool! That's him. Sidney! Hey, Sidney!" Ruth walked across the street, dragging Gib with her.

As they walked up to him, Gib realized that Ruth hadn't been exaggerating. Sidney Pinkwater was built like a bear -- six and a half feet tall, and as he'd already seen, wider than a door frame. His face was surprisingly lean, though -- tanned, clean-shaven and covered in wrinkles. When Pinkwater heard his name was being called, he turned, spotted Ruth, and waved. Gib was amazed by Pinkwater's hands. They had thick, brutal-looking fingers that jutted out from blue-veined slabs of hands, like sausages arranged on a pancake. Gib realized that Pinkwater was missing the top the ring finger on his right hand, and the little finger was gone entirely.

"Ruth, you're early! Wait, I mean you're late! Or are you right on time?" Pinkwater laughed easily, a low rumble that came from deep in his chest.

"We never quite decided on a time, Sidney," Ruth said. "Are we interrupting something?"

"No, not at all. Let me introduce you. Ruth Radley, meet Jameson Feyrer and Rick Bodio." Feyrer and Bodio shook hands like they were giving peace at church on Sunday, practiced looks of tolerance on their faces.

Pinkwater said, "Ruth, you have to illuminate us all as to the name of your friend."

"Hi," Gib said. "I'm Gibson Edwards. Most people call me Gib. Ruth told me you needed --"

"Time enough for shop talk later, Gibson," Pinkwater interrupted. "Mr. Feyrer and Bodio have an appointment they have to scamper off to. Can you and Ruth give me a moment?"

Pinkwater put his arms around the two suits and led them away, speaking in a low voice, before he finally patted them both on the back and shook hands. The two suits

slithered into a BMW parked just up the street and drove away.

Pinkwater came back to Ruth and Gib. "Gibson, haven't you ever learned not to talk business in front of strange suits?"

Gib felt a roiling embarrassment in his gut. "Sorry. Did I screw something up?"

"I doubt it. But you can never tell what will frighten off money people. They're perpetually nervous, like elderly virgins."

"That's nice, Sidney," Ruth said. "What does a jaded libertine like you know about virgins, elderly or not?"

"Even jaded libertines had to start somewhere. Besides, virgins are one of the banes of any sensible man's existence."

"I thought I was the bane of your existence, Sidney."

"Virgins are one bane. Smart women are another." Pinkwater and Ruth grinned like two tennis players sharing a glance after a hard fought point.

"That reminds me of a story," Pinkwater said.

Ruth turned to Gib. "Sidney is about to tell you a story with a moral, which probably also has no morals. Make sure to forget every word."

Pinkwater ignored her. "Years ago, I was besotted with a lovely French girl. It was a charming and somewhat surprising connection we concocted. Because at the time I was a clean living young lad who always voted Republican. So, obviously, things had been a bit lacking in the department of coitus."

"In other words, you reeked of desperation. But luckily it didn't translate into French," Ruth said.

Pinkwater considered looking offended. "Is that any way to talk?" he asked.

"Is it accurate?"

"I'm afraid so," Pinkwater said grudgingly. He looked over at Gib. "It happens to the best of us." Gib nodded his head, which was all the agreement it took to cheer Pinkwater back up. "In any case, one thing led to another, and we found ourselves -- how shall I put it?"

"About to fuck," Ruth said. "Is this going to be a long story?"

"As wit all satisfying activities, it will be just long enough. As you know, Ruth, my policy is one of total honesty. As long as the timing is right, of course. So, just as we were about to commence with the festivities, I casually mentioned to the mademoiselle that it had been quite a while for me. After I explained what I meant, she started to laugh and told me, 'That's all right. It has been a long while for me, too. *Pour toujours*.'"

"What does that mean?" Gib asked.

"Forever," answered Pinkwater.

"Jesus," Ruth moaned. "Poor woman. She must still have emotional scars from having you as her first lover."

"Hardly! I told her it was essential that we change "*pour toujours*" to "*encore et encore*"! In the end, all concerned were quite satisfied."

"Satisfied. Boy, that sure is romantic."

"That's exactly my point. She was romanced by one of the great American lovers of the twentieth century -- someone who will be memorialized with Don Juan, who will be as legendary as Ovid, as -- "

"De Sade," Ruth interrupted.

"The moral of the story is: without all the hymen-breaking stress, I'm sure the experience could have been momentous for her, even earth-shaking. It would have made want to write wondrous poetry and pain soulful canvases. Instead, she was merely satisfied." Pinkwater sighed, and a significant percentage of all the air for five cubic meters around swelled his lungs. "Poor dumb frog will never know what she missed."

The banter between Ruth and Pinkwater had such a well-practiced quality that Gib felt awkward just listening. He cleared his throat, which got both of them to turn toward him momentarily. At which point, the best he could do was to awkwardly say: "Ruth said this place was crawling with geeks."

Pinkwater looked completely confused, and behind him Ruth rolled her eyes at Gib, who felt a blush rising in his face.

"What, the coffee shop?" Pinkwater asked, looking around.

"No, South Park," Ruth said.

"Oh. Gibson, 'geeks' isn't the preferred term this month. All the beautiful people who are whoring for venture capital are calling themselves 'digerati' now."

"That's Latin for asshole, right?" Ruth asked.

Ignoring her, Pinkwater grabbed Gib by the shoulder and turned him to look out at the Park. "Let me point out a few people as we walk, Gibson. You've heard of Silicon Valley, I'm sure. Well, this is Multimedia Gulch."

"Oh."

"You don't seem fascinated, Gibson! Have you gotten special inoculations that protect you from hype?"

"What you said Gulch doesn't mean anything to me."

"Well, it should! It should make you dance like St. Vitus! This is where we're building the future! Cyberspace! Wiring the world! What we all build this year will determine how we all live through the 21st century. When the first web browser came out two year ago, it was as important as the first steam engine."

"If you say so. It never sounded that interesting."

"How could it not?"

"For one thing, I don't own a computer."

Pinkwater actually stopped. He grabbed Gib by the shoulders and squeezed in horror. The look on Pinkwater's face was the look Martin Luther had just before he started nailing complaints to church doors.

"You," Pinkwater choked, "don't own a *computer*? Do you hunt and forage for your food? Do you drive around in a horse and buggy? I'm surprised you're wearing pants that have *zippers*!" Pinkwater turned to Ruth. "You didn't tell me he was a hysterical historical! I can't have a *Luddite* working for me!"

"Now, Sidney --"

"I'm deadly serious, Ruth! How can a *caveman* possibly sell the future to brain-impaired suit-wearing shitheads like the two who just drove away?"

"Now, look!" Gib interrupted.

"No offense, Gibson, but --" Pinkwater tried to continue.

"Hey, shut the fuck *up* for a second, okay? I never said I *wanted* your damn job! I just came down here because Ruth said it might be worth it. I didn't come here to be insulted! I'm not a damn caveman. I know how to *use* a computer. I just don't *like*

them!"

At least three people with unique haircuts walking nearby looked around in amazement and horror at the last sentence. They quickly walked on, like tourists skittering past a masturbating bum on the street. Even Pinkwater shut up for a second. Then he laughed abruptly, and his earlier anger was gone as quickly as it arrived.

"Well, where do you usually go?" Pinkwater finally said.

"What?"

"To be insulted, I mean. Ruth, is he always this good a straight man?"

"Sure. He's good for two or three of those a day."

Pinkwater looked even cheerier. "Superb! Gibson, do you work cheap? Please say yes."

"What's the job?"

"Please say yes."

Gib finally said, "Probably." As long as being treated like an asshole wasn't in the job description, Gib figured he had nothing better to do. He could still volunteer at Te Space later in the day. And picking up some extra cash wouldn't be too bad a thing. Even if he had to work cheap, it would give his cover more credibility. "But first I want to know what the damn job is."

"Gibson, I --"

"And that's another thing. Don't call me *Gibson*. I told you most people call me Gib."

Pinkwater stared in shock again. He started to say something, then caught himself. "You don't own a computer, so of *course* you've never read *Neuromancer*," Pinkwater said, more to himself than to Gib. "I'll bet you don't read science fiction at all, do you?"

Gib shook his head. He blurted out, "No. I could never figure out why people never grew out of that Star Trek shit."

Pinkwater laughed and rubbed his hands with a proper movie villain style. "Oh, perfect. You're going to be a wonderful little project for me, Gibson. And I'll continue to call you that, unless you truly mind, because it's the name of one of my favorite authors."

"No, I guess I don't mind."

"Wonderful! Let's all go back to my office, so I can show Ruth the final designs for The Space's web site."

Pinkwater wrapped a huge arm around Gib's shoulder, and they both started to walk. Gib looked over back and gave Ruth a completely baffled look. In response, she gave him a happy thumbs up.

As they walked through the park to Third Street, Pinkwater seemed to know and be known by just about everyone walking past. He called out one loud, hearty greeting after another at the range of people wandering around. At the same time, he kept up a continuing commentary in Gib's ear.

"You see that skinny wretch there, in the short-sleeved shirt? Yes, the one with the duct tape on his glasses. He's probably one of the richest people within thirty square miles. About six years ago, Richard there invented a piece of hardware that allowed networked computers to talk to each other at five times the speed they could before. He licensed the patents to three different companies. Two of the companies fought like cats and dogs, while the third marketed the hell out of the product. In the end, the marketer

bought the other two, and Richard made millions in stock, over and above the regular licensing fee. A frighteningly rich man before he was 27. Unfortunately, Richard, being such a hideous specimen of humanity, has probably spent 50 grand a year on high-priced hookers since he made his millions. Poor bastard. He'll probably blow through the fortune in another couple of years."

It was like listening to a sports nut ramble on, Gib realized. You just had to know how to nod and murmur in the required spots.

Two men -- one with a shaved head and a goatee, the other with green hair -- who would have looked big next to anyone besides Pinkwater walked past, laughing uproariously about nothing in particular. Pinkwater related that one of their CD-ROM games had sold like gangbusters the year before, and they had made a tidy fortune. Not billions, but tidy nonetheless.

"What do they do now?" Gib asked.

Pinkwater shrugged. "I think they're recording an album. Mostly, I just see them at parties."

A woman wearing combat boots pedaled a mountain bike past them. Her hair had that unnatural yellow-white color of a heavy bleach job, except where purple and dark red highlight had been added. She waved at Pinkwater.

"That's Angela. She's like you, a fellow writer. A fellow scrivener. But she also does a lot of tech things. A lot of people in the Gulch are jacks of all trade. Programmers, artists, writers." Pinkwater rolled his eyes back and forth, looking for spies before he whispered in a carrying voice, "Even *businessmen*. I shudder to say it."

"What do *you* do, then?" Gib asked.

"Ah, well, I'm the unusual one. I'm just a boss."

Ruth laughed, but Pinkwater ignored her.

"I started the company, you see, so I have the luxury of being the unskilled and uninformed person in the office who makes all the decisions."

"Don't let him bullshit you, Gib," Ruth chimed in. "He's a programmer, a geek just like all the rest of them. Sidney created *Lane Changer*."

"Oh, hey, I remember that game," Gib said. "I played it back when I was a...uh..."

"Oh, you can say it," Sidney said. "Back when you were a kid. A teeny-weenie, itty-bitty child. I've been getting royalty checks for thirteen years. I can measure the time in grey hairs and my ever-expanding belly. Hey, you see that guy over there drinking coffee? That's Louis."

"What does he do?" Gib asked, expecting some tall tale.

Pinkwater looked surprised. "Do? Nothing. He's just an asshole. He thinks he has *ideas*. Avoid him at all costs."

Gib rubbed his face in frustration. "Are you going to tell me about this job anytime today? I mean, I don't have anyplace to be, but I can hear gossip about people I'm not interested by watching TV."

"Yeah, Sidney. Stop playing tour guide and let's get back to your office."

Pinkwater assented and led them into a ratty-looking warehouse building on the southeast corner of Third and Brannan. Even the clattering of the choogling freight elevator couldn't stop Pinkwater talking, as they slowly rose to the fourth floor.

"After I wrote *Lane Changer*, I kept working, did a lot of consulting. About three years ago, I was doing some consulting for IBM, and one of my clients -- he was a big fan of *Lane Changer* -- invited me out to take a look at some of the things they were working on out at the Watson Research Center. Go behind the wizard's curtain to see this and that. Everything from electron microscope magic to machines that will be calculating the value of Pi until the sun goes dark."

The elevator stopped, and Pinkwater had to slide the gate and door open, holding it until Ruth and Gib stepped out.

"The last thing they showed me was some huge networking design project they had. They were talking about linking up all the pharmacies across the country. So if you were horseback riding in Missoula, Montana and you got socked in the chest with a myocardial infarction, the sawbones in the ER can punch up your record and make sure you're not allergic to penicillin or shellfish or something. So far, so good, so Orwell, right? So the blue suiter --"

"What's a blue suiter?" Gib asked.

"Someone who works for IBM. The Blue Suit Force. Anyway, he's demonstrating these amazing simulations of data flow across the country when he looks up and realizes I'm off in my own little world. A little offended, he asks me what I'm thinking.

"I say, 'Chips implanted in people's heads. Black helicopters flying around the countryside. That kind of thing.' The guy doing the demo doesn't have the slightest fucking clue, but his partner does, and he suddenly thinks he's in a room with a Michigan Militia member or something. Looking at that guy's placid face gone horrified, I knew I had to get the hell out of corporate work. It made me too twitchy.

"So a couple of years ago, I purchased this building and hung out my shingle."

Pinkwater stopped at a rusty metal door at the end of the hall and pointed to the simple two-color sign just below the peephole.

Black Helicopter Productions.

The inside of the office was a wide-open converted factory, but the cinderblock walls had been painted various bright colors overlaid on white. The heating ducts still hung from the ceiling but brand-new, multicolored wiring snaked around the ducts and down to the computers, like digital IVs pouring nourishment into the computers. The people sat at lines of tables, with partitions on rollers to give the impression of cubicle space. Gib could envision the original sweatshop workers who had pieced together shirts and pants in the same space decades before.

"Luckily, the building was originally wired for an industrial spec, but I had to redo everything on the inside..." Pinkwater rambled on about the impressive quality of his sweatshop.

There were about thirty people in the huge loft. Three different types of music engaged in a struggle to the death in the air above the clicking of the keyboards and mice. Over against a far wall, four people were playing a pickup game of basketball, shooting at a rim bolted into the wall, and the sharp thump of the ball set the chaotic pattern for all the noise. There didn't seem to be much talking, because most people were hunched near their monitors.

Pinkwater put burly arms around both Ruth and Gib and led them into one of the few enclosed rooms on the whole floor. Both rooms had walls made of thick, transparent glass. In one room, Gib could see a pool table with accessories, a bar, and large black speakers. The room that Pinkwater guided them into contained a conference table with black leather chairs scattered around it. The table had a both a huge monitor on it as well as a stack of empty pizza boxes. Pinkwater picked up the boxes and dumped them in a 30-gallon garbage can hidden behind the door. The chair he settled in creaked under his bulk and its two arms barely seemed to contain him.

Pinkwater talked to Gib while he started up the computer attached to the huge monitor.

"We have a monstrously large presentation coming up in a few weeks in New York, and I have preliminary materials due in two weeks. Unfortunately, while I have any number of talented artists, programmers, designers and so on, I don't have a single person working for me who can skillfully string two sentences together. Humiliating. Embarrassing. That's where you come in. I'm going to give you a mound of papers about twelve feet high and I need you to diet it down to approximately six inches."

"That's not really how it works," Gib said, knowing that even if that *was* how it worked, Pinkwater wouldn't know, either.

Pinkwater waved his hand. "I don't really care how it works. I just need it done."

The computer blared out the first four notes of Jimi Hendrix's "Purple Haze", and Pinkwater looked over to start up a program.

"What's your day rate?" Pinkwater asked, while the program was starting.

"Uh, I don't --"

"Look, I won't pay hourly. That gets crazy. And I can't set a project fee, because I want to leave this open-ended. How about four hundred a day?"

"What?" Four hundred dollars a day? That was crazy. Before Gib could calculate how much that would be over a year, Pinkwater anxiously continued.

"Not enough? I don't want to lowball you. Five hundred?"

"Five hundred is fine," Gib choked out. "But --"

"We can talk about it again once you know how big the project is. And you can come back to me if the hours you put in get too crazy. Don't hesitate to do that." Pinkwater turned to Ruth. "Ruth, Ruth, beautiful Ruth. Would you like to see the site we built for The Space?"

"That would be great, Sidney."

An hour later, Gib knew more than he wanted to know about web pages, the Internet, and various other silliness that made him wish he had turned down the job. After signing a hastily-read contract and confidentiality agreement, he also had a loaner laptop in a carrying bag, and a garbage bag full of what did indeed appear to be a twelve-foot tall stack of paper. In about a week, Pinkwater wanted him to come back with a written plan no more than two pages long for breaking down all the information into proper marketing materials. He was also supposed to bring an invoice.

In the first 24 hours of reading through the technical specs and descriptions of the product that Black Helicopter was dedicating its time to, Gib picked up the phone four times to call Pinkwater and quit. The only thing that stopped him was the thought that it might sour his relationship with Ruth. So instead, he sucked her into the process.

For breakfast on his third day of cutting through Pinkwater's papers, Gib brought pages of questions over to Ruth, who did her best to answer them. She turned out not to know very much about the technical details, so they called in Frank Marion as a technical consultant. Gib discovered Marion was doing consulting work for Pinkwater, anyway, so Gib got an enthusiastic, if not effective, explanation what Pinkwater was trying to create.

Gib had never seen Marion so enthusiastic, in fact. Usually, Marion was usually so totally focused on whatever was right in front of him that the rest of the world vanished. Where Campy watched and reserved judgement, or Garrity effused explanations about the way the world should work, Frank Marion never seemed to know that judgements or explanations were required.

But once he got heated up about Pinkwater's project, he sounded like a revival tent preacher. Unfortunately for Marion, every time he paused and listened for the righteous to give him a "hallelujah", he got a peevish objection from Gib instead.

"Basically, it's a whole new paradigm for computers," Marion said.

"Okay, first of all, we are *not* using words like paradigm," Gib said. "To me, 'paradigm' rhymes with 'unprofitable'."

"They don't rhyme at all," Marion objected.

Gib looked at Ruth, who shook her head. "If Frank doesn't get it, maybe it's not as good a joke as you think," she said.

Gib sighed. "Fine. Frank. It's simple. There are only two things a money guy cares about. Profit. Power. Profit and Power. Paradigm shifts are holes to throw money down."

"Gib, you don't understand. What Sidney is proposing will throw everything we know about software, hardware and networks out the window! It will finally make computers fulfill on their promise!"

"*Frank!* I. Don't. Care. That's not what I'm trying to figure out here. I just want to be able to present Sidney's ideas so that suits will piss hundred dollar bills and shit certified checks. So they have to be convinced that if they fund Sidney, they'll end up either swimming in money like Scrooge McDuck, or wielding power that makes God crap his pants. Anything else is a waste of time."

After the first day, Gib had spent most of his time reading every business magazine he could find at the San Francisco Public Library. Just to get an idea of the mind set and the language, so that when he started to write, he could find the rhythm of the language, the same way he had while churning out reports like "Basement Bomb Making". It was a poetry of meaningful meaninglessness. Mostly, he figured he would write what Philip Gibson, Senior would want to hear before he invested money. Gibson Senior was the devil's advocate in his head, who shot down any idea or explanation until it was simple and appealing enough. Also, intimidating.

Sullenly, Marion said, "So what are you going to say instead of paradigm? It's the right word!"

"Jesus, Frank."

Gib and Marion went back and forth for another few days, until Gib was finally able to put some pages together to bring in to Pinkwater. When Gib entered the warehouse space of Black Helicopter, he saw Pinkwater playing basketball with five other people. As Gib walked up to the basketball players, Pinkwater grabbed for a rebound and

slammed one of the other players into the wall behind the backboard.

"Nice block, Sidney," Gib said.

Pinkwater turned around and noticed Gib standing there. Tossed the basketball toward one of the other players. "I am sometimes overcome by my own enthusiasms. It's a fault, I admit it. Do you have something for me?"

Gib handed over the papers, and tried not to appear nervous while Pinkwater read through them. The two men walked through the warehouse space toward the conference room.

Sitting down at the conference table, Pinkwater slapped the papers happily with his hand. "Gibson, this is horseshit!"

Gib could hear the pleasure in Pinkwater's voice, so he knew to wait for the punchline.

"It's unmitigated nonsense. Verging on outright lies. Genius!"

"So you like it, Sidney?"

"Adore it. Would you like a fulltime job crafting falsehoods like this?"

Gib thought about it. For the first time, he found himself vaguely grateful for some of the things Gibson Senior had tried to teach him. "What exactly do you want me to do?"

"You would come in here every day and listen to me and my people jabber. Then you would make it sound nice and profitable."

"Well, if that's all you need, then why should I take a fulltime job? What does that give me that I don't already have?"

"Steady paycheck?"

"Sure, until you don't need me anymore."

"Health insurance?"

"I don't get sick a lot."

"Stock options?"

Gib smiled. "Sidney, I listened to Frank Marion explain your project for days, and you see what I came up with. Do you think I would have written crap like that if I thought you were going to make billions?"

Pinkwater leaned back in his chair and thought about it. "Well, Gibson, I don't know what to tell you. The only thing left to offer you is not exactly tangible."

"I thought you were going to offer me free beer on Fridays."

"Free beer? Well, of *course* we have free beer on Fridays. Do you think I'm *nikulturni*?"

"Then what's left after free beer? Hookers and blow?"

"Fun."

"Fun?"

"Fun! This is a fun place to work," Pinkwater said. "As long as I see you once a day, you will have total freedom to play around and come up with ideas. I noticed you cut the web publishing out of the proposal."

"Seemed like a waste of money."

"Perhaps, but it's money I'm willing to waste to capture hearts and minds. I want to be a thought leader in this industry. You can write for that, too. I'll pay you extra for each piece you write for the web over and above your salary."

Gib felt absurdly complimented. Pinkwater was rolling over and exposing his belly, for no reason that Gib could puzzle out. "Why the hell do you want me so badly?"

"Because I think you will be an entertaining addition to the group."

"That's it?"

"It's my business. I run it in such a way as to please myself. I'm rich enough to do that."

Gib thought about all the drawbacks. On the one hand, if the FBI found out about it, it would mean he was scuba diving in a shit quarry unless he came up with a good explanation. And taking this job would take him away from *The Space*, which was the point of the investigation in the first place.

On the other hand, Pinkwater entertained the shit out of him. And it would finally be a reasonable cover story for Ruth and the Ragers. And he might even be able to pump Pinkwater for information about Ruth. And Green Rage, of course.

On the third hand, what the hell.

Gib said, "All right. I got nothing better to do."

Pinkwater laughed. "Superb. That's the kind of enthusiasm that gives me the courage to go on."