

Machiavelli's Desert

(excerpt)

By Lawrence Uhlin

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*Dedicated to my wife Nancy,
who is both my love and muse*

Prologue

1 p.m. 17 February - Arnivan

A waterfall splashed into the winding river Noa, ten metres down from where they stood. From that point the river made its way to Arnivan's southern Pacific delta, where it mingled with the blue-green sea while feeding the coral with land-rich nutrients. Loto stood with his wife Vailea, daughter Keala and their son Hoa pili. In the right hands of each were small plaited wreaths made from binalo leaves wrapped and bound by thin, malleable branches of the medicinal tree. The wreaths were accented by an evenly spaced trio of soft yellow flowers.

First Loto, then Vailea dropped their offerings into the falling water; the children solemnly followed their parent's actions. Together they watched until the wreaths became one with the foaming surface. Together the family turned toward the hill in the distance and bowed their heads in respect. They felt the earth shake beneath their sandaled feet; still they concentrated on their prayer, their act of giving thanks for the family's good fortune.

The edifice built into the hill was where Loto had been hired as a permanent employee. For two years he had been a casual labourer, advancing to the position of lead hand and finally to security guard as the structure was completed. Vailea, Hoa pili and Keala shared their familial sense of pride in Loto's advancement to final and permanent employment in Arnivan's first and only nuclear

power plant – the plant that would allow their country to pull itself from Third World status to a self-sufficient level of economic freedom. The electricity that the CANDU reactor would produce would power the country's natural resource industry, it would put light into every home, heat into every oven – it was the small country's major step into the 21st century.

Turning to leave the sacred offering place, Loto looked south to the hill, again. An unusual misty veil rose strangely beneath the floor of the reactor. Vailea followed his gaze, noted his expression, the widening eyes, open mouth. Their eyes met and she understood the fear that crossed his usually placid and wide face. Running to the jungle's edge, to the narrow roadway, they located the clearing where the jeep was parked. Loto drove to the junction of the jungle road and a two-lane tarmac highway that led to the north of the island. They heard the first distant rumble of an explosion as the jeep sped north to the nearest town. Loto did not know what the noise signified but lack of knowledge was quickly trumped by a gut-deep fear that greyed his native colour. Vailea curiously wondered how their offering could offend their ancestor's spirits; in the back seat Hoa pili pulled his younger sister to his side and tried to soothe her quiet weeping.

Loto's best friend, Hemi turned from the window in the nuclear facility's external observation post. Carefully he opened the vacuum door to the rear exterior gangway that circled the building housing the CANDU reactor. The gangway was thirty feet above the ground level and offered an unobstructed view of north facing hill the reactor was built into.

Leaning over the scaffolding he felt heat and then caught the slightly sulphuric smell that accompanied the rising screen of smoke. Locking the air-pressured door behind him, Hemi located his Personal Protection Alarm; a silent signal was immediately sent to the security commander's desk overlooking the main entrance to the facility.

"I don't know what's going on Commander, but a few minutes ago I felt the whole building shake and just now I see this wispy kind of smoke rising up from the back of the hill, and it smells strange, too."

Hemi was speaking into a collar-mike as he jogged along the steel catwalk toward another vacuum chamber leading to the security commander's post. The commander responded to Hemi's report with a question that was blocked by a scream of pain. A steam pipe had burst inches from his body as he pressed his thumbprint into the scanning lock reader. Despite the heavy clothing he wore in the conditioned temperature control, Hemi perished instantly. His brain bubbled with the heat and vaporized as it burst from his skull.

Hearing the scream the security commander swiveled his chair to the bank of monitors. All of the screens were blank. All visual and audio systems connecting the operational area of the reactor were down. He pushed the alarm system and heard nothing. The floor beneath his feet was intolerably hot and the walls that housed his command post began to collapse and disintegrate.

Below the collapsing upper level all was chaos of another degree. The containment building was a mass of flames precipitated by molten fuel that found its way through cracks. The fuel was supposed to fall into a pool of heavy water in the reactor coolant vessel – there it would cool, but the pool was rapidly decreasing in volume, the heavy water was leaking from the stainless-steel tanks built at a specification of almost half the international safety requirement. The leaks, the heat, the flash-fires created an environment of flying debris that damaged the entire structure. Water and steam lines burst, knocking through all of the vulnerable areas of the building. The few technicians not consumed by the fires were battered by the force of cannonading water and many were blown into the spewing steam breaks. It took only a few minutes for all of the cries, all of the pain to silence. No one in or near the perimeter of the building survived. It took but a few seconds for the release of radioactive material to escape from all open areas of the devastated containment building. The minimal concrete floor and walls of the building could not contain the molten fuel as it burst through the side of the hill on which it was constructed. The molten fuel ran down the hill into the surrounding jungle and a light breeze propelled a toxic cloud up island to the populated communities.

As the cloud of radioactivity made its progress northward, it descended on the first of the island's communities. In one, a wide-eyed group listened in disbelief as Loto related the detail of the veil of mist and smoke and the sound of the explosion. A priest among the listeners called for the group to kneel down and pray; Vailea shook her head and said no to the invitation. She walked away with a child clinging on either side. Loto followed.

* * *

10:08 p.m. 17 February - Ottawa, Ontario

The prime minister of Canada, Nicholas Plato, sat in the study of 24 Sussex Drive, leaning forward, looking intently at the large-screen television. In his cupped right hand was a snifter of brandy, forgotten. He was mesmerized by the story unfolding before him.

“The question on everyone's mind now is – how did this catastrophe happen to a small island in the Pacific Ocean? To answer this we are joined by Dr. Bert Cavendish of the National Seismic System in Hawaii.

“We understand that an earthquake may have occurred near the island of Arnivan, Dr. Cavendish. Can you confirm this?”

A video shot of a tall man came into view. He was standing in front of a large map of the Pacific Ocean.

“Yes, we can confirm that an earthquake of slightly less than a magnitude of 6 occurred in the Pacific, not far from the island of Arnivan. This island is located 15 degrees north of the equator and 135 degrees west of the Prime Meridian.” The pointer in the hand of the scientist rested on the elongated shape of the small land mass.

“The actual quake centre-point was a few degrees south of the island in a trough called the Polynesian Cross Fault. It’s an area that we had earlier thought was much deeper than we now know to be the case. In fact, because it is a relatively shallow point in the Pacific there was no tsunami effect; and for all intents and purposes, as a tectonic plate type of earthquake it caused minimal damage to the land mass of the island.”

The broadcast flashed back to the CBC anchor. “Thank you, Dr. Bert Cavendish. Well, as you have heard the actual quake caused little or no physical damage to the island of Arnivan, however, it appears as if the principle damage catastrophe was the domino effect it had on the meltdown of Arnivan’s nuclear energy station.

“We now have Dr. Archembault of Atomic Energy Canada Limited standing by to give us an idea of what happens when a meltdown of this size occurs.”

Nicholas Plato picked up the remote control, pressed record and then muted the surround-sound. Tossing back the brandy he reached for the mobile communication unit that connected him to his chief of staff at the Prime Minister’s Office.

“Will, sorry to bother you at this time but we have some damage control to do – and it must be done immediately. I want you to contact the inner-cabinet members and arrange for an 11 p.m. meeting at Rue Gigués. Also, without raising too much suspicion I want you to reach all of our friendly contacts in television and compile video and sound bites of every mention of the Arnivan meltdown. Have our tech guy put all of that on Ultra Ray and bring copies for each of us at Rue Gigués.”

Chapter 1

A September evening, 18 months later - Ottawa, Ontario

Dr. Claire Frenette bid adieu to Yves Bois, Canada's newest member of parliament, and watched as he left her office. He walked down the long hallway to the vacant commissionaire's station, paused briefly to sign the log book and left the building. Claire Frenette shrugged her shoulders slightly as she glanced around the small office, checking that everything was as it should be before she locked the door. The time was nine p.m. and the meeting had tired her, yet she felt a tingling pleasure in the back of her mind – a moment of celebration. Finally, she had taken the step, moved to reveal a terrible wrong. The wrong, she realized, might never be corrected despite her efforts, but Claire Frenette had done what she could to expose the deceit.

Shortly after Bois left she walked into the moonlit night, excited emotional fatigue her companion. The weather was fair. She would, as usual, walk to her rented flat; the home away from home on Murray Street. She would descend the concrete stairway alongside Colonel By's lock, then make her way upwards to pass through Major's Hill Park, emerging onto busy Confederation Drive and the Byward Market area. It was a rigorous walk that would help to relieve her tension. Dr. Frenette would have seen diners sitting in the restaurant of the Chateau Laurier as she walked down the stairs. At the bottom, she would have passed evening walkers strolling beside the river.

A casual observer would likely regard her as a rather pretty, fifty-something woman of average height, dressed conservatively in a beige suit that complemented her dark hair, enjoying a walk on a pleasant Ottawa evening.

But on that night, her journey was interrupted. Shortly after she reached the bottom of the stairway two men passed her, one on either side. The man on the left paused, looked back at her and asked if she had the time.

"It's 9:15," she said, glancing at her watch, an expression of concern crossed her face.

"What are you doing?" she blurted, as the man who asked the time pushed her backward, off balance. She staggered into the arms of the other man.

"Now," said the first man and she felt a strong hand clamp over her nose and mouth as she was pulled into the bushes beside the river.

Minutes later the reflected lights from the city of Hull, across the river, would serve to outline her body in a diminishing silhouette as it slipped beneath the surface of the river.

* * *

At about the same time that Dr. Claire Frenette was descending the stairs alongside Colonel By's Lock, and just a stone's throw away, an incident was developing outside the gates of the Parliament Buildings. Two men were engaged in an altercation. One of them – tall, lean, his balding head exposed because his hat had been knocked off as a result of being punched – adjusted his glasses with one hand and held out the other to fend off yet another punch from a shorter, burly man in a worn ski jacket. A briefcase lay nearby.

“What the hell is going on?” the tall man, Will Headley, asked in a squeaking, fear-filled voice.

The other man said slowly, calmly, “Here's an address and time – be there.” He then pushed a folded piece of paper at Headley and quickly moved off to the busy Market area.

Will Headley put his hat back on, adjusted his glasses and looked about. Some passers-by had stopped to watch, but no one approached to offer him assistance. He was glad of that, feeling both embarrassed and abused.

He hurriedly walked across the busy avenue, made the stairs going down from the National Arts Centre to the canal and continued on until he felt he was out of sight of all who might have witnessed the incident. He assured himself he was not followed by his assailant or anyone else.

Climbing back up the slope to his right, he made his way to the Sparks Street barrier and hailed a taxi that drove Will to an address in the wealthy Rockcliffe area of the city, his home.

Will Headley was the chief operating officer of the Prime Minister's Office, responsible for day-to-day scheduling and presenting to the prime minister information Will deemed worthy of passing on. He lived with his wife and thirteen-year-old daughter, though sharing space was what they really did: there was no harmony in their family home, and that was well illustrated by his entrance to the house; it seemed more like an intrusion from the point of view of his wife, Marilyn. Invisibility was the word to describe the effect of his presence on his daughter Tracy, as she passed him in a hallway staring blankly ahead. Their home had never been a happy one. Their lifestyle had been governed by a need to be perceived as better than others, in any aspect of life – just so long as it was better or more than the next person. Regard for each other was only superficially manifested in public, while loathing ruled within the walls of their residence.

Will's wife of fifteen years courted young military attachés and, whenever possible, new politicians on the Hill. She was obvious in her flirtations, and some thought she was like a lover who carves yet another notch, more for the sake of numbers than meaning. Tracy, their only child, was already addicted to crack cocaine and a consistent meth user; her emaciated, pale figure, forever dressed in black, was well known among the street's dealers and users.

Will Headley, the once-brilliant strategist and still competent organizer for the country's highest officer, now found his excitement in life through various forms of gambling; lately it had been through the unobserved privacy of Internet gaming. Though Headley was well paid, at any given time his gambling costs could exceed his monthly income by three or four times. To date he had managed to keep just ahead of the debt. He suspected the evening's assault in front of the gates of his employer was related to a local lender growing impatient with Will's tardy payment schedule. He was frightened.

Pulling the crumpled paper from his pocket, he read the address and time of the meeting. It was a restaurant at Dow's Lake Pavilion, and the time to be there – ten p.m. That place was closed at this time of year, he thought. Though fearful of the meeting, Will Headley felt compelled to attend, knowing that if he failed to go, the next encounter would surely be more damaging. Probably another assault, perhaps more publicly.

A hastily made sandwich was dinner, quickly consumed. He then left the house, walked several blocks, hailed a cab and gave the restaurant's address to the driver.

Arriving at the destination, he saw that his suspicion about the place being closed at this time of year was correct; it was dark in the front, but a small light at the back door shone on scattered debris and a garbage bin. A bright flash from the inside suddenly illuminated the garbage and clutter around the kitchen entrance. A faceless voice directed him to enter and as he did a grimy, steel-encased fire door slammed shut behind him.

"Mr. Headley, welcome!" a large man with outstretched arms said loudly. "My name is Renakes, and that's about all you will need to know about me. Except that you should be aware that I know everything about you."

Renakes, confident looking, tanned and, like Headley, balding, sat at one end of the long, stainless-steel table in the restaurant's kitchen. He had a noticeably distinct and strong accent, which the prime minister's chief of staff tried to place. Probably Russian, Baltic; perhaps a Slav.

Headley was instructed to sit at the other end of the long table, opposite Renakes. A suspended ceiling light glared at him and added to his discomfort. Two other men sat quietly in darkened corners of the kitchen.

"I know you have a very large debt right now. I know some of the holders of your debt, and I also know that as of six-thirty this evening, your debt increased by about sixty-five percent, because of your recent Internet visit. Mr. Headley, I also know that while credit is rarely extended for on-line gambling transactions, in your case, because you are such a valued client, credit was extended to you.

You must have been seen as a very good risk, because you are now in a position of being absolutely unable to repay the money within the time frame given to you. Let me bring you up to date on your debt, Mr. Headley.”

His smile was mocking, coolly vicious. Will Headley’s fear and confusion deepened. Through the fear, there was the sweating, shaking knowledge that he was not going to win in this. He felt a further wave of pressing confusion.

What does he mean? Credit? Increase in debt? I’m in deep, but not to that extent. A sixty-five percent increase in debt ...?

It was all impossible. He would have had to play just last night. He hadn’t.

“Can’t happen, right?” asked Renakes reading his thoughts. “Well, it did, my friend. You are now in so far that everything in your life is in jeopardy of being turned upside down. In fact, Mr. Headley, your very life might well be in jeopardy.”

As he spoke, one of the other men in the room placed a wireless personal digital device on the table in front of Headley.

“Go ahead, Mr. Headley. Check the Internet and see if your latest email batch has a message from this casino.” Renakes encouraged Headley in a friendly way, as if helping him. “See if there is a message from this place, the Desert Oasis Casino. Oh, you will probably have lots of spam mail, as well. We all get that terrible stuff ... me too! Can’t seem to avoid it.” Renakes looked sympathetic. “But I think you will quickly recognize the email from the casino. It has as its subject ‘Thirsty’.”

Headley decided to remain silent as long as he could, to let this Renakes do all the talking and see where it ended. He looked over his shoulder, wondering if one or the other of the men in the room watched as he punched in his user ID and password. It occurred to him that it was absurd to worry about their seeing his password. If they knew this much about him, they surely knew his password. It also occurred to him that they wanted him to own the problem, thus his effort at contact was more meaningful than if they had simply pulled up the information for him.

There were more than fifty messages in his mailbox, most spam, as Renakes had predicted. He found the message with the subject line “Thirsty” and clicked on it. The Desert Oasis logo appeared: a marquee of flashing lights and roulette wheels, blackjack tables and dice. A banner floated over the parade of gambling opportunities and devices flashing bizarrely on the small screen; it read IMPORTANT MESSAGE FOR W. HEADLEY – click here for details. It was shocking to see his own name so boldly lit and glowing on the computer screen, even though he knew he was the only one able to read the message.

He clicked on the banner and was instructed to go to the Desert Oasis personal email site for the content of his “IMPORTANT MESSAGE.”

Headley was perspiring heavily. Something was going on that was out of his control, and at that moment he was unable to understand the connection to all of the events. His personal email showed that he had several unread promotional messages from the casino, but it was clear which one he wanted. The bold caps “IMPORTANT MESSAGE” were repeated for the second time.

He clicked on the heading. The message materialized, and he read,

Your value as a customer has always been appreciated; however, though we extended your credit during your last visit, we now feel that it is unwise for Desert Oasis to offer further credit and gambling privileges.

Your current, unsecured debt with Desert Oasis is \$278,419.

As you are aware, and as you have agreed to by electronic signature, this debt is payable in full within 30 days from the date of signing.

Upon successfully retiring this debt, you will again be accorded gambling privileges at Desert Oasis.

Yours truly,

Marsha Tetrecelli, Credit Supervisor.

He looked in disbelief at the message, his mind swirling with possible connections, errors, motivations.

“What the hell is this?” Headley screwed up his face into a scowling, inquisitive expression, looking directly at Renakes.

“Come on, Mr. Headley, need you ask? You’ve been put in an untenable position. You have incurred major gambling debts, all of your credit cards are maxed out, you have almost depleted your savings account, there are four individuals in this city who have extended credit to you – that is, carried a portion of your gambling debt – and as it happens, two of them are known loan sharks with criminal connections, individuals that specialize in repayment coercion. And now, Mr. Headley, you have an American gambling casino waiting to receive \$278,419 from you within thirty days.”

“But this is bullshit – I didn’t gamble a credit line with that casino and you damn well know it, whoever you are. This is a set-up of some kind, and I’m not about to let some two-bit crooks fleece me. If you know me, then you ought to know I have some influential connections, people who take this kind of extortion attempt seriously and act to stamp it out.” Headley was hoping he sounded more confident than he felt.

He started to get up from his chair and was immediately jolted with a bolt of electricity. Dazed and lying on the dirty floor of the kitchen, he tried to focus. One of the unknown men was standing nearby, a Taser pistol raised and aimed to deliver another shock.

“Save yourself a lot of trouble, Mr. Headley. We are several steps ahead of you. We know where we are going, and you don’t even know there is a trip planned. We have an agenda, and you are merely one small, alternate step in the progression toward a goal.

“We have documentation of all of your gambling debts. Suspected financial embezzlement efforts prepared in the form of news releases have been compiled and are ready to be sent to the press in all its forms; to your employer, the prime minister; and to three police agencies that would be interested in various aspects of your potential criminal involvement. They will appreciate the tips concerning embezzlement, and they will also enjoy the organized crime links you have in both this country and the United States.

“If you just think about all this for a moment, Mr. Headley, I would personally bet dollars to donuts that you can see how well the press would love to hear that bit of unfortunate news about the prime minister’s right-hand man.

“You, Mr. Headley, will be somewhat tainted, as would anything or anyone associated with you. You wouldn’t be asked to resign; you would be immediately dismissed. You might also be aware that certain criminal elements don’t like a lot of publicity of the sort I mentioned, and they seem to have this outdated way of settling disputes or disagreements – something like an eye for an eye. Vengeance, in any case, will surely be visited upon you, Mr. Headley.”

Headley was helped back to the chair. He wept; he was hurting, and sick with the realization that somehow he had gotten in too deep, so deep that even though the casino debt wasn’t real, it wouldn’t matter. He was about to lose everything he had aspired to; all he had accomplished. Stupidly, his thoughts even went to Marilyn – what would she do now, without the perceived power of her position?

Renakes stood before Will Headley; he shook his head, slowly. He stared at Will like a parent who has found out his child has committed some terribly disgusting act. Then he said, “I don’t quite know why anyone would care about you, Mr. Headley, but apparently someone can bail you out of this mess. As you might guess, it will involve a trade of sorts, but I can’t get into that at this time. Just be aware that you are not alone, in any sense of the word; you’re not alone, ever. I’ll be contacting you within a few days. Don’t leave town,” he laughed.

Then Renakes smiled, affectionately, adding a macabre sense to Will's horrified disbelief and need to escape his nightmare.

* * *

A September afternoon - Vancouver, British Columbia

Senator Eric Marley listened with studied interest to the younger man. They were sitting a small table in the bar at the Sylvia Hotel, Vancouver. Between them a miniature recording device lay on the table, its red light signifying that every word was in process of being digitized, for the record. Marcus Davis – or, as he was now known, Daley Whitman – was close to forty years of age. Dark and wavy hair. A reasonably attractive man. Nearly six feet tall and weighing about one hundred and eighty pounds. He was dressed casually in dark clothes. His demeanour was generally friendly. Nothing physical marked him as exceptional. But as he sat at the table, drinking a glass of dark beer and staring occasionally out of the window at the ships that lay in the roads of English Bay, it was clear that his story was indeed exceptional.

“It wasn't direct robbery; it was more like a threat to disrupt an element of commerce. We were to infiltrate Visa's security system and with an undecipherable code, re-encrypt all of their receipts for the day. Thus, Visa would lose the total potential earned interest for that day. Only temporarily, of course; but even temporary, with that much money, it would mean a significant loss of interest, both simple and compound plus the threat that it could happen again and not knowing when, would no doubt cause company executives and shareholders some concern. The reality of their system having been breached once would open a host of other possible financial catastrophes, as you can imagine Senator. There is never a good time for that to happen but there are especially bad times and the economic situation being what it is right now, it would certainly be devastating in terms of loss and credibility.

“We would offer Visa an insurance policy against disruption and delayed interest income and other financial disasters. We thought it was a great plan. Let's say, for example, that the interest on worldwide Visa purchases might be two million for the day; then we could charge an insurance premium of about a million to guarantee there would be no delay in compounding their daily interest. Visa would eventually break the code, we knew that, but it would not be on the same day as the interception, and they wouldn't know which day would be the target. The plan was a compelling, multi-tiered, high-tech scheme of larceny. It was tantamount to long-distance robbery without using weapons, a plan that had been easily woven into a web of convincing argument, and almost entirely

built upon a shifting base of beta-level software, unproved, experimental, and coloured with a wide brush stroke of dreams.

“But it was just convincing enough for me to see a way out of my never-ending hole of debt. It would be an escape to the lifestyle that I, Marcus Davis, longed for ... back to the Caribbean. To the peace and quiet of a place where leisure was primary, a place where I could indulge my own computer dreams, arranging long-distance deals from a beachfront patio and making money while I slept. No more travelling from Orillia to Kingston once a week in bad weather conditions and assessing inmates of a federal penitentiary, asking questions that most of them didn't want to answer, testing some who barely understood what they were hearing. There were a lot of scary and wicked people in those places. But not all of them were like that. Lauccourd, the guy who told me I was wasting my time doing two-bit assessments on bad actors seemed like a decent sort, probably one of the few.

“But, in truth, Senator, I was just a stupid, child-like dreamer – that's what I was.”

The Senator nodded, recognizing the words he had often heard from good men relating their cupidity, and some who said it because they felt he wanted to hear the deprecation. Was this man's story contrived toward that end or a genuine dilemma requiring his intervention?

“Ultimately, I realized that Nat Lauccourd really didn't know if the plan he concocted could work; all he knew was that he needed someone outside, someone legitimate to make initial contacts for the coded communications. If it had worked, Nat and his test pilot, as I had come to think of myself, would probably have been a long way from Collins Bay Penitentiary, me to the beach, and Lauccourd to wherever his wheelchair allowed when he first qualified for parole, and his parole would be in short order. This was especially true since his presence at the parole board hearing would have been preceded by my glowing and positive assessment that here was one of the rare occasions in which this contract psychologist could with confidence write ‘the man Nathaniel Lauccourd has truly benefited from the variety of training courses he has attended. He has also been an excellent role model for several other inmates of the institution.’

“The trial judge didn't follow my lawyer's plea that I was a first-time offender and had learned a big lesson. The judge felt I would best serve as an example to potential white-collar thieves using computer technology, and a special example to those entrusted to work for the public in institutions inhabited by criminals.

“I was sentenced to five years in a federal institution, joining Lauccourd on a wholly different venture, one neither of us wanted; he was sentenced to an additional year.

“First, I went to Millhaven – the reception centre, as it’s euphemistically called. It’s the place where all federal offenders go for classification and relocation or, if they’re bad enough, to remain in a maximum security environment. I wasn’t there for long. I wasn’t considered a maximum security risk; nor was I violent or a sex offender, or both.

At the end of the first month, I was tested and interviewed ... all the things that I used to do. Finally, I was assigned to Collins Bay, a medium security facility. The warden isolated me in the Protective Custody section. He felt I might not be safe in the general population, as I had, in fact, assessed several of the inmates who were still incarcerated there, and some were still there because of my assessments, and I knew a few of them would not be pleased with my evaluation of them. Cons tend to bear grudges.

“After one month of isolation, they moved me into the general population, and I was scared, Senator. I was to live on the street called Cellblock One. I moved into my ‘house’ – as cells were called, just before suppertime.

“I was to share the space with another inmate; a black man named Miguel. That night I passed on supper. I lay quietly on my bunk, staring at the ceiling, trying not to hear the violence of voices around me, trying not to shake with fear. I was at risk in the general population, but someone else thought the risk was not as bad as my nerves were telling me. And my nerves were strung out, tight like a steel guitar string.” Whitman paused. He looked out the window of the bar at Sylvia’s, past the walkers on the street, beyond the runners vying for space along the beach-side trail, to the freighters moving around their anchorage. The sun was beginning to set, about to reward the bar’s regulars with another dazzling display of light on water, but Daley Whitman was clenching his fist, his jaw tight, images behind his face flashed fear, not enjoyment of the reddening sky and silhouetted sailboats returning to harbour.

“I was sure something was wrong, more immediately wrong than my being there, in prison. I sensed that something was going to happen, the gut feeling of something big and bad, and all for me. I got the impression that whatever was about to transpire would be an orchestrated thing, something I had absolutely no control over. The rational side of my brain, not frequently evident during that time, knew I was in a state of paranoia. My senses were acutely tuned into every nuance and suggestion of evil in that place. There was no way out. Just an overwhelming and incredible, helpless energy – I shivered, I sweated, every muscle was taut, gut tied up and head fucked up. This was panic, and I was there, practically drooling with the fear of it.

“Lockdown, lockdown!” a metallic voice screamed through the speaker system. A blaring, pulsating alarm immediately followed, so loud it blanketed everything. I think I jumped almost straight up in the air when I heard it. I don’t recall getting up; I was just . . . up, standing, trying to comprehend. I saw my hands stretched out in front of me, defending. But I didn’t know what I was defending against. Probably invisible terror.

“The yelling and screaming in the cellblock grew to a level equal to the blaring of the alarm. I’d never been so scared, Senator. Something was going down and I didn’t know what it was or where it was coming from. There were no answers; straight thinking wasn’t possible, only a huge and searing fire of fear that burned out all sense of reality.

“But something got me back into the present – I think it was the automatic locking of my cell door. It must have been that, because the metal-on-metal clanging also made me wonder how Miguel was going to get back into the cell. Anyway, I was jerked back to reality and the observing part of my brain started to function.

“Through the bars, I could see the guard-post; we called it the *fish tank*. Guards moved rapidly outside the post on the strip and behind the dark-tinted, thick, bullet-proof glass, I could see dimly outlined figures moving in a flurry of activity from station to station in the enclosure; flicking switches and testing double-banked backup systems. The sound of steel gates and doors rolled, banged and echoed through the strip.

“A guard named Ferguson pushed the large red panic button at the same time as he pushed his personal alarm’s panic-button, and then yelled into a hidden microphone mounted on the wall of Cellblock One, not far from my cell. Another guard in the fish tank post shouted into another microphone, ‘Ferguson’s got a problem on CB One!’

“A bright red security light flashed on the master control panel in the main guard post. The corporal in charge of the shift observed the flashing red light and quickly hit a speaker switch, opening audio receiving communications with Cellblock One. The noise of screaming, bellowing voices was close to deafening; it was amplified and echoed through the metal wall-mounted speakers from its real time source – my cell block. Chaos reigned supreme - and the new kid on the block had a moment’s insight into the violence of life in prison and the cause of his early panic.

“‘This is Main Post A, CB One – can you hear me?’

“The corporal waited the compulsory three seconds. I could see his darkened silhouette, bent and leaning over the communications console, his right hand reaching to hit the outside alert switch that would activate a call for the prison’s tactical unit and advise the warden at the same time.

“A voice cracked through the thickness of the moment. ‘We’re okay, Corporal, but we have a bad scene here and will need ambulance service immediately.’

“The corporal’s right hand pulled back from the alert switch and he visibly sighed with relief, acknowledged the response and instructed a second guard to ‘Call an ambulance and the police and get the warden on the line, in that order.’

“Another guard keyed open the cellblock door to the designated six officers grouped together on the strip by the fish tank post. They rushed in to the cell block, armed with their billy clubs. They made a V formation behind the officer who had duty in the block. The noise level gradually subsided as they forced the inmates into their respective cells, immediately locking the individual doors.

“Officer Strandy, the guard who had answered the corporal’s call, quickly walked over to the furthest reach of the cellblock and looked down at the black man who was bleeding. In the language of the prison, he had been shanked, stabbed with a metal ruler, one end taped heavily for gripping and the other shaped and sharpened for violence.

“I watched from the locked cell. I watched the ambulance attendants come and take away the stabbed con – it was Miguel. I watched the guards physically and morally support each other as they made their way out of the cellblock. I heard the threats from the assailant, Hazelton, as he was dragged out to segregation. ‘No fucking nigger gets special privileges around my house,’ he yelled through the bubbling blood in his mouth.”

* * *

“I don’t know all the logistics of what happened next, Senator. It seemed like a lot of stuff happened coincidentally and very strangely. Anyway, after that, I thought not much could surprise me – but something did, big time!

“Miguel had been taken away, so had Hazelton. All of that in the space of an hour. By about nine p.m. I was starting to calm down, I let myself entertain the idea that all of the excitement was over, for a while. That’s when the guard Strandy unlocked my cell and ordered me to stand up, beside my bunk. I stood up and another guard ordered me to turn around. Grabbing both of my arms he quickly clamped handcuffs on my wrists. Strandy put leg-irons on my ankles, and I was shuffled out of the cell block to the end of a long darkened hallway. I was sweating again. Thinking that it was the guards who were going to give me a little physical welcoming – the hallway was empty and I waited for the whack to my head or worse. At the end of the hallway we stopped, ‘tighten-up’, I told myself, ‘You’re not among friends. It’s going to hurt – bad.’ That’s when leg-irons were removed

and I was hustled to the front of the prison, to the infirmary. Then the *something* surprising happened.

“Nat Laucourd’s case manager, Karen Chate, instructed me to change in the infirmary washroom. She handed me a bundle of clothes, civilian clothes, my clothes. Then we walked out of that prison to freedom.

“At about ten-thirty that night, there I was Senator, dressed in my own clothes. I’d traded the prison uniform for my jeans, a T-shirt and leather jacket, and I’m sitting in the Kingston Brew Pub having a Dragon’s Breath Ale with Karen Chate. Very nice; but what the fuck is going on?

“I had met with her, Karen, when I was working as a contract psychologist at Collins Bay or as we called it then – Disneyland, because of the bright red castle-like turrets and steeples on top of the high walls; and now she was standing me a beer in a pub *outside* of the prison. She was friendly enough, talkative but evasive. Not really telling me anything. She said her purpose was to try and reassure me that although I knew nothing about what was going on, there was every reason for me to relax. I would likely not be taken back to the prison.

“Her cell phone rang, she said ‘hello,’ and ‘okay.’ Dropped a ten-dollar bill on the table, told me to finish the beer – quick; and we left the pub. Turned left on Clarence Street, and left again, into an alley where a dark car was waiting with its motor running.

“The drive to our destination was short – seven or eight blocks. We pulled up in front of a large house on Sydenham Street. The sign said Hochelaga Inn. It looked like a mansion. A wrought-iron fence surrounded the huge house, which was several stories high, and in its front-centre, beginning at the second floor, a turret rose another two stories. We didn’t stop to talk to anyone, just passed through the foyer and hurried up a wide, carpeted staircase to the second floor. Karen quickly unlocked the door and glanced round as she ushered me into an elegantly decorated bed-sitting room.

“A deep pile carpet muffled a conversation nearby. The voices came from a room in the turret I had seen from outside the house. It was at a slightly different level from the room in which I now stood, higher by three or four steps, and it opened to the main room by an archway. The voices belonged to a man and a woman who were sitting at angles to one another, talking quietly, not looking toward us. I noticed that to the left of the woman, who was more or less facing me, a kind of ladder went up to another level of the turret. Quite a place for a meeting, I thought, better suited to lovers’ rendezvous.

“Karen sat down in a dark bamboo chair, facing the speakers, who were still in their little enclave; she motioned for me to sit on one of the two large sofas. The single beer I’d had didn’t seem to be having an extended effect, but I was high on adrenaline and not able to relax. I noticed that Karen was calm, very cool. That was reassuring ... strangely reassuring to me, like someone knew what they were doing. I sure as hell didn’t know what was going on.

“And this is where you come into the picture, Senator. I remember very clearly what you said as you stepped down into the room and walked toward me: ‘I know, or feel that I know, how confused you must be by all of this apparent skulduggery.’ You said that in a low, kind of comforting tone of voice. You looked to me to be about sixty-five, maybe more, and the word ‘skulduggery’ seemed to affirm that estimate, I hadn’t heard that word since reading a Charles Dickens’ novel. Your dark blue suit conveyed a sense of business formality.”

Whitman paused, through the window he again watched walkers pass by on the nearly dark street, runners and strollers still jostled for space on the beach path, and in the roads the large freighters gave off pinpoints of light that glistened on the water. It reminded him of another bay, another meeting with Karen Chate. But that would be later and it would all be on the mini-recorder Senator Marley used for the conversation.

“I remember your words exactly. ‘Mr. Davis, my name is Senator Marley; you know Ms. Chate and you don’t have to know anyone else here. You’ve been selected as a candidate for a special program that Corrections Canada has commenced. It’s called the Corrections Canada Results Program. The purpose of the program is to acknowledge that although the law levies a penalty related to crime, it does not always follow that some individuals, having committed non-violent crimes, will benefit from incarceration. The committee and government arm responsible for this program do not believe, however, that someone who has committed a crime ought to be let off scot-free, as it were.’

“You paused for a minute, picked up a file that probably had my name all over it. Then you said ...”

“Ah, allow me.” The Senator interrupted, smiling, though still unsure if Daley Whitman was to be trusted. “This part of the talk was always my role in the Results Program, and except for the names of the individuals, it never varied.”

Senator Marley cleared his throat and said:

“Your crime didn’t involve alcohol or drug abuse, there was no violence, no use of or threat with weapons and during your trial you did, by all accounts, express a high level of contrition. As well, you’ve never run afoul of the law before.

“You’re an appropriate candidate for this program, Mr. Davis. The program allows individuals such as you to leave the prison situation, to be involved in an endeavour similar to what we refer to as community service. Community service, as I’m sure you know, is determined by a judge at the time of sentencing, so this program we’re offering you is different, inasmuch as the service you’ll provide will be of a nature that may require you to engage in an activity on behalf of the Canadian government, at some time in the future. To be sure, Mr. Davis, there is a large measure of uncertainty attached to this condition of freedom. You are not obliged to accept the offer.” Marley smiled and asked Daley how he had performed.

“Exactly the way I recall it, Senator. Exactly.” Both smiled at the quip, friendly. Working toward mutual trust.

Daley continued, “Then the woman whose name I wasn’t to know walked down the stairs toward Karen Chate and said, ‘Thank you for bringing him along, Ms. Chate.’

“She, too, was dressed in a suit, though of a light blue colour that contrasted with Karen’s simple, stylish black pants and turtleneck.

“I didn’t know what to make of it all, Senator; I was confused and tired, out of prison dress, and still fighting the feelings of depression that filled in the space my fear and anxiety had occupied in the prison. Suddenly, I’m put into this now illogical and bizarre setting, with you and the older woman, people I had never before set eyes upon. Confused by the ‘skulduggery’? At that moment I probably would have been confused if asked my name. I was certainly baffled by my presence there.

“‘Marcus Davis.’ The blue-suited woman spoke. Her voice, I remember, was strong, and I knew that what she was about to say was going to take on the tone of a lecture or directions that were not to be questioned, let alone contradicted.

“‘You are being offered an opportunity to relieve yourself of your sentence, absolve your conviction, your criminal record, and change your identity. You will, at a later date, be required to trade some of your time and ability for this granting of freedom. If you comply, you’ll trade your old life for a new one. You should know, Marcus Davis that you have been under scrutiny for quite a long time, ever since you were convicted, perhaps longer.’

“She paced from Karen to a position in front of me, where I sat on the sofa. Funny how in situations like that, when a person is really strung out, they often recall unusual bits of information,

and what stays with me is that the skirt of her suit made a soft brushing sound in the silence between her comments as she moved about the room and returned to face me directly.

“I think you’ll have many questions, Mr. Davis, but let me save you the trouble of formulating them. We’re not able to answer questions, or give you information other than what you’ll hear this evening from the Senator and me.’ She waved her hand in your direction; you bowed very slightly and made momentary eye contact with me – almost made me feel human, Senator.

“So, please be patient, and hopefully most of your pressing concerns will be addressed. Though, I must also emphasize that not all your questions will be answered, nor will all the pieces to this puzzle be provided; not now, perhaps ... never.

“Our observations of you suggest you are the type of individual who can live with a measure of uncertainty in your life.’

“A heavy knocking sounded on the door to my right and I jumped, startled, still nervous.

“Glad you didn’t say I was the calm, cool, collected type,” I said stupidly, and the joke died mercilessly.

“A large man brought in a trolley with a sterling silver coffee service. Coffee was poured, we all settled back into sofas, chairs – all very civilized despite the chaos of the day, the night and my head. Occasionally, the woman or you would get up and walk about a bit. The conversation – or, more accurately, the directive monologues – continued for more than an hour. You people knew an awful lot about me. She told me about my relatively reclusive lifestyle. You knew that I had very few friends; that I was not close with my few family members; that I had lived in the Caribbean for a while; that I was perpetually broke, and that I still grieved for the woman who left me several years ago.

“The woman in the blue suit told me that this program, the Results Program, was generally only used for those convicted of white-collar crimes, partly for reasons already stated, no violence, etc., but also usually offered to people who had education or experience or both that could readily be transferred to other areas of the country. The program was in its infancy, as yet without long-term evidence of its efficacy; although it had its birth in the United States. That experience was, so far, considered to be quite successful, but as yet unproven. It was also felt that it was best suited for candidates who were unmarried, and/or not involved in long-term relationships.”

* * *

Leaving the bar at the Sylvia, Marcus Davis and Senator Marley walked in a light rain to the nearby Raincity Grill. A secluded table near the back of the restaurant offered some privacy for dinner and the further details of the provocative story.

“It was likely that I would be completely on my own for quite a while.” Daley Whitman said, and carefully chose a seat facing the entrance to the restaurant.

“There would be very infrequent contact with my benefactors. I was to lead my own life for a time that could be more than a year or two and as little as a few months, but no longer than the prison time to which I had been sentenced, that is, the five years.

“I was to be exactly where I had been six months before that evening. I was simply dropped back into life – relocated, to be sure, but still in the same business, still the same person but with a different name and a new location. For those friends and family I might accidentally run into, the story was to be that while being held without bail, I had been privy to a conversation that involved a large illegal drug transaction. I had informed on the conspirators in exchange for my freedom and prior status, and a new identity. The witness protection program.

“It turned out that I was not able to return to my former town of residence and that suited me just fine. I left Sydenham Street, Kingston, the prison, and the province of Ontario, all in the same night. There was a red-eye heading to Vancouver, where I was met by a man who provided me with a well-conditioned used car, a suitcase full of clothes and enough money to pay for a few months’ rent, a damage deposit and a balance that would buy my food, gas and dinners out for a month. I was given a map with a highlighted yellow line winding its way from Vancouver to Kamloops in the interior, the high country they call it. There, I was put up in an everyday sort of looking motel. The *Kamloops Daily News* was handed to me with instruction to ‘find a place to live.’

“I received new credentials in keeping with my field of study at my alma mater, the University of Toronto. Several job opportunities were steered toward me; small government contracts were tendered upon, some awarded; and I existed. Though barely. Often I reached the brink of what I thought was a financial end, only to get another small contract, never big, just enough to keep me on my own, to keep me going. They seemed to know how important it was for me to be independent, to maintain a lifestyle, as a friend once described, of an *iconoclastic sonofabitch*, possessing a modicum of cultural awareness, a need for space between relationships, and to hell with traditions.

“Being free and back on the street again was more than good, despite the times of uncertainty around income; it was some kind of miracle. I remember again the woman in the blue suit saying ‘We pulled you out early. Somewhat ahead of schedule because, as mentioned earlier, you have been

selected as a good candidate for this program, but frankly, Mr. Davis, we like to have the candidates spend a longer period of time in what they believe will be their home for several years. Tonight's difficulty with a belligerent inmate might have put you in the way of some unnecessary harm. Consequently, you get a bonus, Mr. Davis.'

"I didn't have to be persuaded. I hadn't thought my life was going to be in any way tolerable in that prison. And there had been a damn good possibility that it could end in that place. No, I might have been making a deal with the devil then, but there was no way I would decline the offer. Being locked up, despite the critics who say that life is pretty easy for cons, can be a terrifying business. Even the enforcers look over their shoulders. Drugs and alcohol are always present and the cause of unpredictable behaviour on the part of anyone, and very unpredictable on the part of individuals already loaded with skewed ideas of values and morals, and often with a large dollop of psychosis added in for good measure.

"A new identity and parachute drop to another part of the country notwithstanding, I was told – and you were there to hear it, Senator – that when the day came when I was to fulfill my part of the exchange, there would be no choice in the matter. I must do as instructed or, within a very brief time, be placed back in the institution from which I had been released. I would be returned to the general population with all of its attendant circumstances and dangers. In fact, it was you, Senator, who informed me that if after the meeting, I didn't think I could go along with the plan as I'd heard it, I would once again find myself resident on Cellblock One of Collins Bay Penitentiary.

"So far, I've told you most of what you already know, Senator, of the life of this thirty-eight-year-old man who is now known as Daley Whitman, who used to be Marcus Davis.

"And now, despite what all of you back at the Hochelaga Inn felt about me, that I can live with uncertainty, yeah, that's true but I'm not sure that I can live with deceit, and I know for certain that I can't live feeling that I'm being set up for a fall. I got the call, Senator, and more, so much more that I'm scared shitless and I need a friend and right now you're *it* Senator."

Chapter 2

It was almost noon when Yves Bois walked from his small apartment to his office at the Parliament Buildings. His late-night meeting and the questions it raised had prevented sleep until

four that morning. Although he had risen late, he still felt tired as he entered the building by a members' side door and picked up a late edition of the *Ottawa Citizen*.

He glanced at the front page of the newspaper and stopped. Bois felt as though he had walked into a glass wall. He was physically off balance and staggered slightly as he walked to the nearest bench in the hall leading to his office. Sitting down, he looked again at the bold caption that announced the death of Dr. Claire Frenette. There wasn't a lot of information: drowned in the river; body found about midnight by a man looking for his lost cat, jammed between a fallen tree branch and a large rock. Investigation by the Ottawa Police Department.

Bois made his way to his office where a receptionist told him of an urgent call from the Ottawa Police Department. Returning the call, he arranged to meet with detectives later in the day.

He recalled the details, yet again, of his meeting with the scientist. Bois was Canada's most recently elected backbencher of the federal Opposition party. Moreover, he had been assigned as the Opposition Science Critic. Though he knew little of the subject he was determined to bring his knowledge base up to speed.

As much as possible, he wanted to avail himself of all and any information he felt was important to his job, so when Dr. Frenette had called his office, wanting to meet with him, he had readily agreed. He had also made the decision not to consult with his party whip or leader about the meeting. Both would probably have encouraged him to follow through with such a meeting, but they would have scripted his questions beyond sincerity, and his answers to her inquiries would have ranked as vague responses. He decided to avoid what he was later informed was '*the years of experience and wisdom*' they could have offered.

So, last night he entered a rundown government building, a building clearly of little importance, he thought. The commissionaire's desk was unmanned, a logbook lay open and a pen rested between the pages. He had signed in and walked down a long, poorly lit hallway to the door simply marked "Dr. Claire Frenette."

He introduced himself to the scientist and was ushered into the small room that was little more than an oversized cupboard, with one small window. The office was sparsely furnished: three chairs in varying need of repair, a small metal desk and an old bench that had once been used as a seating place for the pages waiting in the wings of the House of Commons. The room had two doors, one of which led to Dr. Frenette's small laboratory; the other had opened to the politician at the end of the dreary hallway in the forgotten building that constituted the oldest of the edifices populating the Hill. It was one of many buildings not on the tours of public interest; a building where civil servants

and out-of-favour professionals were lodged until their retirement, sickness or death allowed them to leave.

The two exchanged brief pleasantries, though it was clear to Yves that the scientist was somewhat agitated, in a hurry to get on with the business she wished to deal with.

They talked for almost two hours. The scientist fretted about the fact that Canada was quickly falling behind in the area of research and development. She told Yves Bois that of all the G8 countries, only Italy spent fewer tax dollars than Canada on research and development. She said, “Cutting back on basic research is a bit like eating your seed corn . . . very shortsighted.

“One of the initial projects we had an opportunity to collaborate on was with a southern U.S. university. I liked the idea, not just for its far-reaching and necessary next-step implications, but because another woman scientist, Dr. Justine Elliot, a brilliant expatriate Canadian, was also involved. The project started in 1985, before Dr. Elliot was with the university; it was then known as the Fullerene Carbon Project, a potentially desirable means of providing low-resistance transmission of energy. By the time my colleague contacted me, it had advanced a long way from those early days of research, to a point where it was so important and big that I was practically delirious with the thrill and challenge it promised.

“However, the agenda set by funding restrictions disallowed our involvement at the time. We thought that the cuts to research and development would soon be seen as dangerous to the advancement of any national thrust to make our presence felt on the international stage of pure and applied science, and consequently would again be viewed as an element of great benefit to the people of Canada. However, Monsieur Bois, scientists do not seem to be held in esteem by politicians and bureaucrats, each of whom seems to be striving to maintain their respective positions by restricting funding for such intangible and amorphous subjects as research and development. It was like saying, ‘if we can’t see that value right now, concretely, it has to go.’ As I suggested earlier – tantamount to eating or destroying one’s seed corn.

“Monsieur Bois, we knew the research on this project would take an awfully long time; we thought it could be years, but it could also break quickly if we had the resources to work with.”

Bois could tell Dr. Frenette was trying very hard not to speak with a tone of frustration. Her entire attitude projected a sense of being restricted by forces quite external to her; helpless could best describe what he read as her feelings of the moment.

Helpless, yes, she thought, it was just that, for she was in the presence of a representative who provided a major source of her frustration and feelings of helplessness – a politician.

He noticed that as she began to release the check she was holding on her emotional restraint her voice became sharp, taking on a tone he felt was disdainful incredulity.

Yves Bois nodded politely. He was a representative of the government opposition and he clearly understood that Dr. Frenette's ire and frustration was not selective of its target, except to say that it was most definitely directed toward the political system.

"Dr. Frenette, if I understand you correctly, you're suggesting that if the powers that be had been more forward in their thinking, we – Canada – could have been legitimate forerunners in the discovery of a ... what was it, a fuller project?"

"Fullerene Carbon Project," she corrected him. "A project that has since evolved rapidly with the introduction of another scientific phenomenon – nanotechnology. No doubt you have heard of that Monsieur Bois?"

"Um, yes, I have heard of that, but vaguely I must admit. But back to what you were saying Doctor. You're suggesting that the specific research project you were about to launch was officially shelved?" he asked.

Dr. Claire Frenette looked out the single office window; it was now dark, though a brilliant, waning moon had risen. She remembered the sense of excitement she had felt several years ago upon reading the first draft of an article for submission to the *Journal of Molecular Chemistry*, submitted by a team of researchers, the principal investigator being Justine Elliot. The draft was a catalyst to collaboration on an intriguing project – a wonderful scientific opportunity. Then it had been August, hot outside, throughout the city of Ottawa; cool in her office near Parliament Hill, a different office, expansive and with an enviable view.

Another moon had risen that night, a slivered, waxing, crescent moon, filled with great promise of development, challenge and excitement. How could she have known that, in just a short time, the Canadian partnership to research for what might become the world's fastest superconductor would be cancelled by a politician – on advice given by bureaucrats who were unable to comprehend the enormous importance or benefit to the world? Claire Frenette felt sure that those who cancelled the project were not versed in anything scientific; their verses were composed of budgetary considerations that saw value linked only to the degree that equalled their master's term of office. And bureaucrats, not to be outdone, would also march to the drum of whatever minister held the portfolio of research and development.

"Monsieur Bois, I don't know if we would have been ahead of anyone else in the pursuit of the nanotechnology project, or at the forefront. I had never thought of it in that way. My concern was

that we were precluded from involvement in an area in which we had much to offer, in a collaborative sense, but more importantly, in a very functional sense of scientific advancement for the benefit of all.”

“I think I understand your frustration about the project being shelved, if that is indeed what has happened. But I – ”

“Monsieur Bois,” she interrupted, “I’m a senior scientist in the field of molecular chemistry and I hold a so-called important administrative position within the National Research Council in this country. I’m on the editorial boards of several prestigious scientific journals and I’m quite aware of the few research programs, especially the few pure research programs, in which the government chose to engage. I can say to you unequivocally that I was informed by my American colleagues that, because of a lack of national commitment from our government, they could no longer pursue the project with Canada. I can also say to you unequivocally that this is not the only short-sightedness by our government. The applied research concerning the recent disaster in Arnivan, that is the CANDU reactor’s installation and operational safety, was stopped by political decree. The level of safety measures for both the installation and operation of the reactor were compromised by lack of follow-through that had a dollar value attached and was thought by some to be ‘unnecessary and over-cautious.’”

“Wait; wait, please, Dr. Frenette! A terrible accident happened in Arnivan, but you can’t mean that we deliberately caused that catastrophe ...?”

“Unfortunately, yes. I do mean that. We deliberately cut corners, resulting in the catastrophe. It was known as a loss of cooling accident: heavy water used as a cooling moderator for the core had leaked through cracks in the metal containers made not of the required twenty centimetre specifications but a compromised twelve-centimetre reactor vessel that was unable to withstand an earthquake of less than 6 magnitude. The next safety barrier was supposed to have been a concrete base slab supporting the containment structure, but it was slightly less than half the four-metre thickness necessary to contain a meltdown. One error played into the next and, because the compromised slab had been poured atop a hill with a highly pitched side, there was consequently no resistance to the molten liquid; in fact, it allowed the core elements to leak quickly through to the ground. The ground would normally have arrested its movement, Monsieur Bois, but in this case, the path of least resistance, the steep slope, was the place where the radioactivity burst through the side and into the environment. None of this should have happened. The molten mass escaped. It

should have been checked, and would have been, but for the final failure of the emergency core cooling system. It was not stopped.

“A huge quantity of radioactive gases and vapours escaped from the fuel and into the reactor containment building and on to the facilitating climate of Arnivan. Inside the containment building, molten fuel fell into a pool of decreasing heavy water in the bottom of the reactor vessel, creating an environment of flying debris that damaged the containment structure. Water and steam lines burst, knocking through vulnerable areas of the building, and they released substantial amounts of radioactive material into the internal and external environment – taking with it the lives of all the technicians within the building.

“Monsieur Bois, the causes of the failures were human errors during construction of the reactor and inadequate quality assurance, compounded by design weakness deliberately done with the thought that the citizens of Arnivan deserved a break from the financial stress of building to safety specifications.

“Ah, how generous we were! On the Richter scale of severity, the Canadian generosity read a full seven, equivalent to Chernobyl; generosity that was born of a concurrent need on the part of the Canadian Nuclear Agency to drastically cut back on staffing. These were government cutbacks that were reflected in diminished safety requirements. Deliberate to the point of being criminally negligent. The kind and temperate weather of Arnivan permitted the clouds of radioactive vapours to hover and not be dispersed throughout the atmosphere. There was a massive contaminant effect. The populace was not dispersed to the north of the island, to higher ground; how would they have known to do that? They were not informed, Monsieur Bois. Emergency measures in the event of just such a catastrophe were overlooked or undone, as in the case of not providing tablets of a stable iodine compound that would greatly have reduced the radiation resulting from inhalation of radioactive elements. And finally, this particular CANDU was known as a fast-breeder reactor, again for economy, as fast-breeders use spent uranium fuel that has been reprocessed, and they are significantly more dangerous than other fission reactors.”

She paused, suddenly deflated, overwhelmed. She looked at Bois, who wore an expression of shock on his youthful face.

“I didn’t know those details, Dr. Frenette. I’m aware that the World Court has heard evidence, but like most Canadians, I can’t believe we’re going to be saddled with the entire responsibility for the reactor’s failure.”

Claire Frenette looked at the newly elected politician; her lips formed just a hint of an ironic smile. Shaking her head from side to side in a manner of disbelief, she said, “The reactor didn’t fail, Monsieur Bois – we failed.”

She continued, tired now; close to exhaustion, thought Bois.

“You may make whatever you wish of these pieces of information, sir; I’m merely the messenger in this case, not the letter writer. What I make of it, though, is another matter. It was just another exercise of control over scientists by political imbeciles. And now our entire country is about to pay the price of that avarice and stupidity!

“Perhaps you think me hysterical, Monsieur Bois. However, let me assure you that I am not. But I’ve finally arrived at a position in my professional life where it is time to speak about the inequities and disrespect for the scientific community in this country; this country that is supposed to be a respected leader in the world. The CANDU reactor accident was preventable. Canada has fallen behind the Western world of science by design – by purposeful design, Monsieur Bois.

“The disrespect toward the scientific community that I speak of is also, by extension, another example of the political arrogance that government shows toward its electorate. My hope has been to inform someone who is in a position to air the dirty laundry. I have chosen you, Monsieur Bois. And my reason for doing so may seem childish to you, but I did because you are the country’s most recently elected politician. You made it through a by-election, winning handily in a difficult riding. I know little of politicians except what I see as the outcome of their profession, and as you can tell from my conversation thus far, I have a very poor opinion of their values and commitment to the people who elect them and to the professionals they govern.

“It is my hope that you, sir, have not yet been tainted by the taste of egotistic avarice. I have heard your election speeches; my residence here in Ottawa is a temporary address to accommodate what little work I am now charged with. I live in your riding, and I voted for you in Montreal. Please, Monsieur Bois, please – do not trample my vote into the political rot of this government. You have been described as naïve and an idealist. Some may say they are pejorative terms, but I hope that description is accurate. I understand that you are also the Opposition critic for science, therefore, I beg of you – hear my words, Monsieur Bois.

“I’ve talked with others about uncovering this fiasco: some elected officials, some bureaucrats, some elected members, even some business people – all to no avail. Some humoured me with condescending complements, some ignored me, and believe it or not, some threatened me. If you’re unable to assist me in disclosing this information that the citizens of Canada have a right to know,

then I shall go further, probably to the press, and ... if there is a god, Monsieur Bois, he, she, will have to help us all.”

Their conversation continued on for a short time and during the final space of time Dr. Frenette became less heated, and again, more controlled in her dialogue with him. Calming somewhat, he thought. Eventually it was apparent to both that the questions raised could not possibly be answered in that place, by either of them. Bois promised he would consider taking the issue to his party leader, and then the House. But first he needed to think carefully of all the ramifications; ramifications, he assured her, that were not protectionist political agendas.

“I just need to get this clear in my own head before talking with others, Dr. Frenette. Please be patient with me.”

Leaving the building, Yves Bois walked slowly down the long hallway to the exit door, where he signed the commissioner’s logbook and jotted in the time. The shadow cast by the still bright sliver of moon seemed to elongate the shadow of his rather short stature as he walked toward the National Arts Centre. He wondered how it could possibly be that Dr. Frenette, a leading scientist, could have had her job so arrogantly shuttled to an office and function of so little consequence. Virtually restricted in her profession. Was she that threatening to the powers that be?

Questions without apparent answers troubled Bois. He was certainly not a scientist, but even a fool could see that something was very wrong here – but where, exactly? And could he, would he, be the instrument of correction?

The police had called him early in the morning, before he arrived. The logbook at the commissioner’s desk had been signed as Bois entered and left the building. He guessed that his name had also been penciled in Dr. Frenette’s appointment book. He realized that he might have been one of the last to see the scientist alive. Of course the police would want to talk with him.

During their meeting, he told them that he was a new politician on the hill with the responsibility of being the Opposition Science Critic, thus it was quite natural to meet and discuss science with a scientist.

“And a very attractive scientist, hmm?” asked the younger of the two detectives.

“What do you mean, detective? What has that got to do with anything?”

The younger policeman raised an eyebrow and said, “A couple of things stand out, Monsieur Bois; the woman was attractive, unattached, and probably lonely. You know, long lonely nights? And, for what it’s worth, we understand that you’re a single guy, probably pretty lonely in this place.

And, if I'm not mistaken sir, I think you're from Montreal, which of course is the same place Dr. Frenette called home. Did you see much of her back there in Montreal, Monsieur Bois?"

Yves looked at the detective, a look of disbelief crossed his face. Then he said, "You know, officer, most of the politicians here are lawyers and I'm not, but I don't have to be a lawyer figure out when someone is trying to scam me. What you're doing is not police work – it's harassment."

The older of the two detectives then said, "Monsieur Bois, my partner didn't mean to insult you with his comments. We're just doing our job. Looking at all of the possibilities. In fact, we just want to clear what we can of this case before we send it on to the Canadian Security Intelligence Service.

"You see they usually get cases where publicly employed higher-ups are involved in suicides or murders or accidents. It's not usually our turf, but we'd like to tell them that we did our job."

"Then I suggest you stick to your job, detective and stop trying to smear me. I don't know what happened to that woman and I don't think your method of finding out is very enlightening."

The younger detective looked at the older one and shrugged as if to say it wasn't important to continue the conversation.

"I've just got one other question, Monsieur Bois. There was a note found on the woman's body. It could have been a suicide note, it wasn't really clear. But suicides usually give off some vibes around what they're planning to do, so, I'm interested to know what you thought of her state of mind."

Bois relaxed a little. The younger detective pulled back, stood looking out of the window. The older one serious, looking officious.

"I'm not a psychiatrist or a psychologist, detective. I'm not sure if she was depressed. My guess would be that she wasn't. She was kind of angry at politicians, but so are a lot of people. In any event, I didn't get a sense that the woman was about to kill herself."

"Okay, thanks. We'll be on our way, now." The younger man was already out the door and out of sight.

"You'll probably get a call from CSIS, Monsieur Bois," the detective told him.

Chapter 3

Will Headley found that the man Renakes was true to his word. He called Will at home, three days after their encounter. Will was reluctant to meet with the man in another remote place and he

protested, fearing another assault. Renakes, for his part, was agreeable; sounding quite cheerful, he suggested they meet at a small Italian restaurant on Somerset. It was a place unlikely to be frequented by anyone that Headley would know.

Will had been through a very bad time in the few days since his first encounter with Renakes. He fretted, was short-tempered with anyone other than the prime minister. Sleeping was almost impossible and his imagination gave up to a mind weighed down by paranoia. Every bizarre scenario that could possibly be conceived became one thought-step short of reality. He had even considered suicide, feeling there was no way out of a half-contrived and half-willingly embraced position of fate. Headley's self-weaknesses became so clear that he felt he was wearing them like a flag; thus he was protectively angered and upset whenever anyone asked a question not directly related to his function as chief of staff for the Prime Minister's Office.

Vito's Pasta Place was a small eatery with seating for about forty patrons. When Will arrived, all the tables were occupied. Renakes sat alone at a corner table. Will hurried across the room and sat down, looking intently at Renakes.

"Good of you to come," Renakes said with accented courtesy.

"Are you Russian?" Headley asked directly. His nerves were so frayed that he could focus only on direct questions and answers, afraid to wander into areas of subjectivity that might bring about evidence of his impending mental collapse. His hands shook, uncontrollably.

Renakes, still smiling, appearing to be quite relaxed, looked around the room, as though he were making a mental note of who sat where and how involved the other patrons were in their own conversations. He glanced outside as well; Will's eyes followed his, and through the street window his look fell briefly to a storefront on the other side of Somerset, where a man stood in a closed and darkened shop doorway.

"I lived for a time in Russia. But I lived for a time in many countries of the world. Now I am spending some time in your great country, Mr. Headley."

"I know what you want." Headley chokingly blurted out the statement.

Still smiling, Renakes tilted his head to the side and nodded. "Oh, do you, Mr. Headley?"

"You want me to steal secret documents. You want information because you know I'm close to the PM." Headley raised his voice slightly, leaning forward; then frowning, he became aware that he was at risk of attracting attention. He sat back, expelled a breath filled with anxiety and fear.

Renakes stopped smiling.

“Look at me,” Renakes commanded in a voice that was low, deep and filled with violence. It was probably the only thing in the world that Will Headley would have paid attention to at that moment. He raised his head and wiped his sleeve across his eyes, the tears brimming but attention now focused, and fearful. In a moment he perceived that this man Renakes had done terrible things to many people. It was his trade, fear and violence. The square, tanned face was stone, and the voice quietly hammered Will into a submissive state, overriding his emotional disintegration.

“I want you to control yourself – *now*. The waiter will be here for our order. I shall order for both of us. You will smile. That’s all, smile.”

Renakes consoled Headley by telling him that he had no intention of asking that he steal secrets. The consolation was short-lived, as Headley then stammered other beginning fears. However, he was silenced in his pursuit by the man whose face and voice now softened to describe all of the many real fates that could befall a man who gambled, and embezzled – real or otherwise: “a man who held an important position in his country’s service.”

Headley again verged on panic. He drank his wine as if it were water, holding the glass in both hands to control his trembling.

“It’s all right, Mr. Headley. I am here to help you out of this terrible situation. You must begin to think of me, and those whom I represent, as rescuers, lifesavers. In time, not only will you be freed of your burdens, but you will be free to indulge yourself respectfully, in whatever recreational endeavour you choose. You see, Mr. Headley, you stand to gain financially; on condition, of course, that you are agreeable and cooperative.

“Now, let me describe the arrangement.”

* * *

It took only one and a half hours for Will Headley to pass through a gamut of psychological feeling that struggled through the closing walls of paranoid psychosis to a state bordering on a free-floating euphoria. He left the restaurant, food untouched, slightly drunk, walking lightly in the misty Ottawa night. Hailing a taxi, he went to his office instead of home. He had work to do now. His first task was to consult the Prime Minister’s timetable for the next week.

Chapter 4

The long conversation between Senator Eric Marley and Daley Whitman carried on after their dinner, and at the conclusion, it was clear to Marley that Whitman's state of affairs would have to have yet another complication – Marley would have to involve the assistance of others in order to save the younger man. Canada, it seemed, had put the man in danger; it was then up to Canada to help him out of danger. The day following Marley's return to Ottawa he placed a call to a friendly contact in the Canadian Security Intelligence Service.

* * *

Senator Marley waited in the foyer of the Senate chamber for the intelligence officer, Mari Volser. A man slightly above average height and somewhat stooped in posture, Marley had been a prolific writer before entering the Senate. He wrote fiction, novels, several numbering among Canadian favourites. A few had received prestigious book awards both at home and abroad.

He was a man who prided himself on his dedication to Canada. He had been influential in persuading a somewhat reluctant young man to run for leadership of the country. And, through his tutoring and guidance, Nicholas Plato had, indeed, ascended to the leadership of the party and, ultimately, became the prime minister of Canada.

Eric Marley's values, though unquestionably utilitarian and beneficial to the country, were nevertheless thought by some, particularly the newer politicians on the Hill and in the Senate, to be just a bit stodgy; slightly out of sync with the modern world of politics and lifestyle. He had been a great admirer of Pierre Elliot Trudeau and honoured him daily by always pinning a red rose in his lapel.

Mari Volser had met with Senator Marley several times in the past, to the point where they were on a comfortable first-name basis. Even so, she was not used to cryptic calls from him, calls touched with a sense of urgency. Why, she thought, was it so important to meet, so quickly and so mysteriously?

Across the wide foyer of the Senate building, Marley spotted the attractive woman: her hair dark and short, her skin the warm colour of slightly creamed coffee that spoke of her mixed heritage. Mari's mother had named her beautiful daughter after Subhadra Kumari Chauhan, the Hindi poet. She had agreed with her German-born husband, Johann Volser, that in their mutually newfound home of Canada, "Mari" would be a suitable alternate to the formal "Kumari," as stated on her Canadian birth certificate.

Smiling, they greeted each other in the French fashion of a peck to each cheek, then exited the building through wide double doors. Senator Marley suggested they walk to their luncheon destination, so he could relate to the CSIS agent the story of the man called Daley Whitman and his concerns.

Mari was agreeable. It was pleasant to talk with the Senator again. And she was more than intrigued by the urgency of his request. Still, she hoped the meeting would not be prolonged past the lunch hour. Several files were demanding her attention. She was particularly eager to wrap up the details of a newly assigned investigation regarding the death of a government scientist. She felt it could be done with a sustained effort of intensity and within a short space of time. “Routine job, Mari,” her station head, Roger Delcourt, had said, handing her the file.

Mari and the Senator walked casually along Wellington toward the Market area. The weather was mild, the air fresh. Marley quickly moved from what he called “chit-chatty pleasantries” and began his story.

“His email was a surprise to me and his message a puzzle. He left a telephone number and an address. I guessed Mr. Davis thought I would know all about his life. Perhaps he thought I was somehow involved in tracking him after our only meeting, which was instrumental in his move from prison to freedom. That was not so; I had indeed put behind me all information concerning him and the operation he might at some time be used for. My job was finished on the night that young man and I first met.

“I try not to engage in investigations that best belong with someone or some agency other than me, but I often get calls from citizens and, where possible, I try to oblige them with at least an attentive ear. Despite the intrigue and provocative bits that might impose themselves as crumbs of curiosity in mindful residence, I generally mind my own business. But I’ve come to know over the years that I’m usually unable to resist a call for help. I certainly don’t see myself as a saviour or even a Good Samaritan; however, since I was a child, no matter how desperately someone might aggrieve me, offend me, even physically hurt me, I have been unable to resist the phrase ‘help me.’

“Of course, Daley Whitman, as he is now known, was taking rather a big risk in contacting me. For all he knew, I could still be involved in the very situation he found himself in. From the beginning, though, all of us involved with the Corrections Canada Results Program felt that this man was used to working his way through complex situations; therefore, I reasoned that he must, indeed, be stuck in a very difficult circumstance to risk contacting me. But in the end, it seems I was the only reasonable person for him to contact. So, for all that – who else was there?

“I decided to meet with Daley Whitman. But not here in Ottawa. There is clearly a prevailing sense of trouble surrounding everything in Ottawa lately. The World Court trial has upset everyone and now the Reparations Committee is about to decimate us economically, the world economy is broken and international governments are failing to deal with climate change. There was and is a blanket of dread here in Ottawa. Consequently, it felt like a good idea to arrange a contact away from here. Moreover, the fellow now lives in the west, in the British Columbia interior, a town called Kamloops. So Vancouver was definitely a better meeting place for him.

“We met in a hotel called the Sylvia in Vancouver. I had arranged rooms at the hotel; actually, my wife arranged for the reservation – I didn’t want anyone officially involved with my office or the government to have the slightest sense of knowledge regarding my plans. I’m not sure why I felt that a sense of secrecy was in order, but it felt better to keep things quite confidential.

“The Sylvia is a rather unpretentious hotel, made up of suites and rooms that used to be apartments. I suppose that at an earlier time it was an address of some prestige, especially as it has a lovely view of English Bay, and guests are often the fortunate viewers of magnificent sunsets. I rather like all of those qualities: old buildings, bodies of water where ships swing around mooring buoys in a magnificent harbour.

“Apart from the beauty and romance of the city, I was feeling a substantial amount of concern about whatever it was that this man was involved in. He sounded desperate. And although I cannot be certain why, I do admit to having a terrible sense of foreboding and the need for confidentiality. My wife would call it a premonition. I don’t know what to call it anymore. Dread was the pervasive feeling that flowed through my body as I sat down beside Whitman in the bar of the hotel. My first job was to have him agree to our entire conversation being recorded. He readily agreed and I placed the small recording device on the table, between us.

“Whitman felt it was important for me to have a sense of the whole picture, and I agreed to hear every detail. He told me of an advertisement in the Globe and Mail, of his visit to Grand Cayman Island, the presence of a woman by the name of Karen Chate known to him from Collins Bay Penitentiary and known to me from our first meeting in Kingston, Ontario, her later appearance in the Cayman Islands and again in Kamloops with the fantastic promise of winning a lottery prize. Most of this he told me quietly in the bar, and owing to its length of detail, he continued the story over dinner in a nearby restaurant, a short walk from the hotel. What we didn’t talk about in the bar or restaurant we finished in my rooms at the hotel.

“It was a long meeting, and by the end it was evident that a most extraordinary series of events was being played out in a very secretive and, to me at that time, illogical manner. Daley Whitman had been directed to have an operation that would render him sterile, but paradoxically, that was a state he had already achieved, years earlier. Astoundingly, the surgeon who was supposed to have performed the operation did not detect that Daley had, in fact, already had such an operation; his vas had already been severed. Or if the surgeon did detect it, he chose not to make mention of the fact. His tour of mystery began in George Town, Grand Cayman Islands. While there he sees a boat that later turns up in a harbour on British Columbia’s Sunshine Coast. Being on the Sunshine Coast was also interesting, as Whitman had been advised to go there by Karen Chate, the apparent agent of Corrections Canada. Our man’s curiosity about this coincidence leads to covertly investigating the contents of the boat, named *Mariposa*. The boat that he has seen in Grand Cayman and Sechart. His search of the boat reveals nothing very remarkable, except two vials that are exactly the same as vials given to him in the surgery on Grand Cayman Island by Karen Chate; he was instructed to deposit a semen specimen to be later dropped in a wastebasket aboard a ferry from the Sunshine Coast to the lower mainland of British Columbia.

“Well, Mari, prior to becoming a senator, I was a writer, as you know, and I am involved with the government of this country, but despite a large measure of creative imagination and a position within the bureaucracy, I cannot possibly conceive of a scenario that would have put this man in such a position by government order or directive. In my opinion, this was not something one imagines the government of a country held in high esteem as a moderating influence in the world would do. All that of course, with the exception of our erroneous involvement in Afghanistan some years ago and our present day dilemma of selling poorly-installed nuclear reactors and with poor follow-up to boot.

“Moreover, the intent of Corrections Canada in developing the Results Program, that Whitman was selected for, was to engage former federal inmates in productive, transparent forms of assisting in community service endeavours. To the best of my knowledge, these candidates for early release were to be engaged in domestic forms of payback, not foreign affairs missions that strongly suggest elements of espionage.

“So, what on earth was happening? The poor man was at a loss to see any sense in the matter. And I too was at a loss to help him comprehend his predicament. My suspicion about federal corrections involvement peaked when I heard of the so-called surgical operation; however, that was exceeded by anything even my wildest imagination as a writer could ever have conceived of, when

Daley Whitman said that Karen Chate informed him he must return to Grand Cayman for another operation. This time, under no duress of threatened reimprisonment. Whitman was offered a substantial and, in my opinion, absurdly excessive amount of money to undergo another operation, that is, another vasectomy – or more correctly, yet another pretence at a surgical procedure that had long since been carried out. Why? Well, according to Karen Chate, because of some vague Canadian security matters!

“Whitman then received an email from a hospital in George Town, Grand Cayman, informing him that unfortunately the operation had been unsuccessful. They went on to say that this sort of thing happens now and then following a vasectomy, and it is verified by examination of the semen. The semen they were apparently in possession of was contained within a vial that Whitman had on instruction deposited in the garbage container aboard a British Columbia ferry returning from Sechart, or the Sunshine Coast as it is known to the Vancouver mainland area. However, Mari, in case you are not sufficiently informed of fertility matters, let me now inform you that semen must be examined within the hour of ejaculation in order to make an accurate determination of a successful vasectomy operation. Moreover, our man knew from the beginning that the operation was a fanciful hoax. Why he did not ask for more information from his host in George Town is still something of a mystery, but so be it, and perhaps it might in the end be for the best.

“Well, at this point in time, I was filled with a lot of questions and really nowhere to seek answers – nowhere reasonably at hand, that is. So I decided to call you.

“Clearly, now I am compelled to involve others: you, Mari Volser, CSIS, and perhaps the RCMP. The clarity of this circumstance suggests the need for investigative powers beyond mine.”

* * *

Their conversation continued as they made their way to the luncheon destination in Byward Market. Marley filled in details of his meeting with Daley Whitman to a fine degree. Mari was impressed with his memory.

Stopping at the overlook to the canal, they leaned on the mortar and stone barrier and looked toward the Ottawa River with the city of Hull beyond.

People passed by busily, going to and from the Hill and other destinations. Mari watched the faces that passed around her; a few she recognized: another senator crossing toward the National Arts Centre; a clerk from her own office walked by with a friend, talking animatedly. She also spotted a CIA liaison officer whom she had worked with in the past. It was several years ago, a joint investigation involving CSIS and the CIA – uncovering a Russian agent who had a passport in the

name of Hampel. Paul William Hampel. The Russian agent was at first thought to be a Canadian citizen who just happened to be a criminal with Russian connections. He had been carrying almost \$8,000 in a variety of currencies; he was found to have several bank and credit cards and three cell phones. He had two digital cameras and a short-wave radio along with a fake birth certificate – the man was loaded. The CIA liaison was certain that Hampel was an elite Russian espionage agent. He said that there were only a few of them and they were among their nation's costliest and longest-term undercover agents who go to great lengths to spy on their target countries. Something of a sleeper agent.

Mari had liked working with the CIA agent because he was a detail man, always concerned with tying off loose ends and ensuring that a job was finished by double and triple checking details. She didn't like his looks, though. His expression was usually one of a threatening and emotionless stare. His name, she remembered, was Konstantin Renakes and although he often worked at ground level, he was said to be of higher rank than officially stated.

Renakes was talking on a cell phone as he walked by, not seeing her, his tanned face uncharacteristically smiling and the sun reflecting off his balding head.

Mari turned again to the less busy viewpoint of the canal. To the right was the dining room patio of the Chateau Laurier's restaurant. She wondered what the Senator would think if she told him the story of the strange death of the government scientist, Dr. Claire Frenette, that had occurred in the space within their view. She had an odd notion that the story Marley was telling her was somehow related. There was no obvious evidence of that seeming relationship. Just a feeling. "Watch out for those hunches, Mari," Beau Metcalf, her long-time confidant, lover and best friend had often said to her. "You're frequently right, but when you really get down to analyzing them, it turns out that the ones with definable links usually bear fruit, while those out of the blue usually pass back into the netherworld."

Over lunch, the Senator continued his story, with Mari now and then interjecting questions, or asking for clarifying details. She had to agree with him: the story was extraordinary.

Marley asked her if there was any possibility that Corrections Canada could be involved in such a scheme. She shook her head. "It doesn't fit in any way with their mandate, Eric. About as absurd a notion as this restaurant selling plumbing equipment for dessert."

Leaving the restaurant, they walked toward Sparks Street, their parting point, where she would go on to her office and the senator would return to the Parliament Buildings.

Marley asked, "What do you think? Should we leave well enough alone in this matter, or should it be pursued, and if so, to what extent?"

"You've given me a great deal of information this afternoon. I need to consider it all very carefully. But I want to thank you for sharing the story with me, and the recording. Can we meet again, say in two or three days? I'll need to listen to the whole conversation and I have a feeling that will take some time, Senator."

Parting at the corner, Mari and the senator embraced and shook hands. She reaffirmed her promise to contact him in two or three days.

* * *

In another life, Mari had been a policewoman, but she had found the job tedious and dissatisfying. CSIS was also at times tedious, but rarely dissatisfying. There were the occasional moments, though, when because the agency did not have law enforcement powers and was under the strict control of the federal government, she and not a few of her colleagues felt their hands were tied or their investigations blocked at critical points. At those times she chose to put her trust in persons well placed in the upper echelons of the CSIS organization. She wondered if that difficulty was going to happen in her new assignment, the investigation of Claire Frenette's death. It seemed there was a lot of political sensitivity: a top scientist may have committed suicide, or perhaps was murdered, and a neophyte politician, Yves Bois, had probably been the last to talk with her.

And now she wondered about Senator Marley's story concerning this fellow, Daley Whitman. She was intrigued and somewhat flattered that Senator Eric Marley had felt confident enough to consult with her regarding his concerns. But it did have something of a downside: now there were two new active files in addition to several ongoing cases requiring the skills of her enquiring mind, a mind that was filled with scepticism but fuelled by the challenge of overcoming adversity. Her tenacious bent ensured that her assignments would leave no detail unexamined, and all unfinished business dealt with. Intelligence Officer Volser's traditional methods of crime detection had, years before, been upgraded to include forensics of a highly scientific level and much more than a passing awareness of the role that psychology played in both crime and international espionage. Her skills were tempered and enhanced by a vivid imagination and creativity.

Thoughts of her conversation with the senator loomed large as she typed a summary of the exchange and stapled it to the report destined for the station's director of operations. Walking down a short hallway, she stopped at the director's office. The door was open and he sat turned towards the computer graphic information projected on the silicone sheet that was a wall. Seeing Mari enter

he closed his index finger and thumb of his right hand into a circle configuration. The graphics collapsed and dissolved as a magician's dove or rabbit disappears into thin air.

"Excuse me, Roger. I've got a new file here that I want to give to you directly. I think it might lead to something of interest to us and I'm kind of eager to have you look it over and give me a go-ahead to start investigating." She ended with an appealing smile that she hoped Roger Delcourt would recognize as her way of saying 'I'd like you to agree with my decision. Oh, and you might find some personal interest in this as well.'

"Sit down, Mari, let's have a look." He smiled in return and picked up the file she placed on his desk. At his gesture, Mari sat in the chair opposite. He scanned the pages with a handheld Essence tool.

After a few moments he placed the document to the side and said: "So, Mari, you remember that I too used to work in the prison system. As well, I did indeed know this man, Daley Whitman, but as the senator informed you, he was then known then as Marcus Davis. I met him in prison. At the time neither he nor I were inmates." He laughed at the irony. "We were both contract psychologists. My job within Corrections was a transition thing, something that allowed me to earn a living while I pursued my real interest and education – you know the Master's degree in international politics. Consequently I ended up here, talking with smart intelligence officers like you.

"Marcus Davis' job was his way of cobbling together a living on a day-to-day basis. He didn't seem to have a goal or an interest that compelled him to move in a direction with a definitive end result. He was a loner. But if you needed something, he wouldn't say no. He got the job done, lots of assessments for risk placement and many for parole recommendations. He used to say that his real passion was behavioural psychology; he could never understand why the prison systems of the world didn't embrace the science of applied behaviour analysis.

"Over the years, our paths crossed a few times, not always by choice and not always in person. His name has popped up a few times since I joined CSIS. And now it seems that our paths cross yet again. I had heard he got involved in a situation that eventually ended in a major federal sentence. After that I didn't hear anything new. Interesting how he has once more shown up on the radar."

"Is this guy a bad actor, Roger, or did he just do something really dumb?" she asked.

"I never thought of him as a bad actor, a villain. He was something of a dreamer, but generally smart. He knew his field of work and he was reliable. I recall having lunch with him one day. He said something like, 'How is it that you and I are outside eating lunch and not inside, behind bars?' He

believed it was just a case of luck, wrong place, wrong time. Anyway, Mari, he ran out of luck or was caught in the wrong place at the wrong time.

“Still, some of the luck he talked about stuck on him, I guess. I heard he was sprung from Collins Bay soon after he was imprisoned. His name was changed and he was parachuted into British Columbia. Not unlike the witness protection program in that sense.

“Look, Mari, if you find this thing compelling enough to engage with it, then go ahead. But watch you don’t take on too much. You’ve already got quite a lot on the go.”

* * *

After her meeting with Roger Delcourt, Mari Volser initiated several enquiries regarding the man named Daley Whitman or, as Roger knew him, Marcus Davis. It was obvious that Corrections Canada had to be contacted because of its employee, Karen Chate, who was a connecting link to all of Whitman’s/ Davis’ potential difficulties and uncertainties. Karen Chate was the starting point. Mari later realized that Karen was the starting point of an enigmatic pursuit based on dissimilar beginnings, but with a common ending.

She also pulled the file on Dr. Claire Frenette and set to tying off more loose ends – or, rather, trying to tie them off. One of the issues that needed to be addressed was Dr. Frenette’s meeting with the political newcomer, Yves Bois.

Chapter 5

Mari Volser’s interest in the Frenette case was primarily due to the fact that the scientist had been involved in several top secret projects concerning the security of Canada, not the least of which was molecular science related to the detection and defence of weapons of mass destruction. True, she had not been so engaged during the past two years, but protocol insisted her death be investigated and handled by Canadian Security Intelligence Service.

Reading the file Mari was aware that there was evidence of some very sloppy bookkeeping on the part of whoever had compiled the dossier on Dr. Frenette. The more she read the files, the more her feelings of annoyance turned to nagging curiosity. Questions concerning linkages to a number of other files led her to an awareness that some references had been purged from the file and in one instance a link actually had a name blanked out on the hardcopy. It seemed to Mari to have been a rather low-level interference with files of a confidential nature. But the more interesting question

was why, at any level, would someone want to alter or fudge information in the file of a government scientist who might have committed suicide?

Mari compiled a point by point analysis of the doctored file and sent it on to Internal Security for query. She then stacked the growing file and placed it in her locked drawer. It was after the preliminary paperwork that she felt ready to interview the politician Yves Bois.

Bois was nervous and reticent to talk on the phone. He was still bearing something of a grudge against the young detective who interviewed him earlier. Reluctantly he agreed to meet in the lobby of the Canadian Museum of Civilization, across the river, in Hull. He was scheduled to attend a meeting on aboriginal cultures there, and would be finished by about eight p.m. They could meet immediately following his get-together.

She recognized Bois from the file photos; she also knew quite a lot of his background. His file, unlike Dr. Frenette's, was complete to a very personal degree. He had been a civil servant of sorts, a man who had been with the Quebec provincial government in a position of planning. Bois was unmarried and his only living family members were distant cousins and an aged aunt. At some point in his recent past Bois decided that his life's intention was somewhat bigger than the job that he was performing at the provincial level.

Yves Bois was the only child of a French-Irish mother and an Anglo-French father, both now deceased. His parents had met while working for a mining company, father in the bowels of the earth and mother in an office, both looking for new positions. His mother applied for a job in a school district. She was hired as a clerk. She was bright, energetic and able to influence people, to the point of persuading her employer to hire the strong, short-statured man from the mine: the very man who had charmed her lonely heart with his warm smile whenever he entered the dusty office to pick up his paycheque.

Between the lines, Mari read the maturing of Yves; it seemed that except for annual holidays, his parents did little else but work. Usually, both were away all day, requiring Yves to take care of everyday issues: school, shopping, cleaning. But they were there with love and homecoming was an every day celebration, each parent embracing and kissing him, finding laughter and infecting him with their happiness. He could easily recall joy shining in their eyes, unmistakably sincere and glad to be part of this miracle known as his family.

Coupled with his loving environment was the development of Yves Bois' regard for life itself. It had been relatively easy for him to order the importance of the elements in his world; the fundamentals of family, respect, love and commitment. Thus, it was the case that he sought to

perpetuate those sentiments through a vocation with the civil service. His consuming interest in his vocation later helped to stave off the waves of grief he experienced in the years following his parents' accidental death in a highway traffic accident while on their way to holiday in the Charlevoix.

Yves was naïve to a fault, even believing that those he encountered on his road to Parliament Hill were sincere in intent, and that those in Parliament were just as sincere. He did learn, though, despite the pains of swords delivered from hidden, disguised and sheathed scabbards that declared intent does not equal observed action. He was still learning.

Mari Volser walked across the open foyer of the Museum of Civilization toward him. She introduced herself and felt an immediate liking for the man who suggested they drive to Parc Gatineau, to L'Orée du Bois, a restaurant within the Parc.

"Yet another Bois," he joked. "It's been a long day and I'm very hungry." He also felt the restaurant might be more conducive to conversation than the open space of the museum.

They each drove their own vehicles and met again inside the log cabin restaurant.

"This place is known for its ambience. It was recently rated three stars and its cuisine rated at four stars. I hope you didn't mind driving out here. Oh, and by the way, please excuse me if I sounded a little frustrated when you called. I'd had a run-in with an over-zealous police detective. Please, accept my apologies."

"Accepted, Monsieur Bois, and I was not offended. These things happen."

Mari ordered an appetizer and declined sharing Yves' half litre of sauvignon blanc. Despite his declared hunger, he ate sparingly. It seemed to Mari he was experiencing difficulty in concentrating; his attention jumped from table to table, as if trying to determine the identities of the various parties. But after a second glass of wine, Yves Bois began to talk.

"I'm uneasy about Dr. Frenette's death," he said, looking directly at Mari, his gaze now focused.

"From the information she gave me, I can't conclude that Dr. Frenette was in any sense so depressed she would kill herself. She was angry and not a little frustrated, but not depressed. In retrospect, thinking of our conversation, I'd find it easier to believe that she was more at risk of someone else killing her than of killing herself. But even that's a stretch, though she did talk of threats," he said quietly.

Mari nodded and acknowledged the neophyte politician's statement. She asked about the details of their discussion: what areas had it covered?

Yves took a small hand-held PC from his right inside coat pocket. Touching the information ports with the stylus, he brought his reminder note to the screen.

“I can only tell you what I told the police; well, a bit more. I recorded this shortly after leaving Dr. Frenette’s office that night.”

He thought for a moment; finally deciding that he had to trust someone, and probably an agent of the Canadian government would be a reasonable bet, though he recalled Dr. Frenette’s attempt at telling others of her concerns.

“You know the phrase ‘whistle-blower’? Dr. Frenette was beginning that process.” He talked on for several minutes, the tone of his voice capturing her attention. Yves tried to fill in as many details as possible, and he carefully stayed clear of speculation.

At the end of his description of the meeting, Mari asked if Dr. Frenette had mentioned the name of other scientists who were working on the project that had been suddenly stopped. And were any names mentioned regarding those involved in ordering the cutbacks for the CANDU Reactor.

“She mentioned one name. I recall the first name was Justine, but I could be mistaken about the last – I think it was Elliot; perhaps Ellis. Dr. Frenette indicated she was happy to be working with, one, a woman, and two, a brilliant expatriate Canadian. Many scientists have moved south of the border lately, though probably not many with the first name of Justine. She may not be hard to contact, though how much she can add to the mystery of Dr. Frenette’s death at this time is pure conjecture. Dr. Frenette didn’t mention any names concerning the reactor. That was general – the government, politicians and bureaucrats.”

“I expect you’re right about lots of scientists moving south of the border. Tell me, Monsieur Bois, on a scale of one to ten, how sure are you that the last name of the other scientist was Elliot?”

“I would say ... probably a seven. I’m more certain of that than Ellis, which might score a four or five. But I do know her first name is Justine. I’m sure of that because I’ve only ever heard that name once before, the title of a book by a favourite author.

“Can we get onto a first-name basis, Ms. Volser? I’ve always been more at ease when I’m referred to by my first name and vice versa.”

“Of course, Yves.” Mari smiled, feeling herself relax the non-investigative part of her personality. I like this man, she thought, not in any physically attractive sense, there was simply a comfort level about him that one might experience in the presence of a close friend, or a family member, someone trusting.

“As politicians go, I’m really an innocent, Mari. I’d rather suspect people of good intentions than spend time imagining they are conniving and secretive. My political colleagues are often reminding me that I’m naïve. I’ve even been told that naïveté is one of the reasons I got elected. Even Dr. Frenette said it was a quality that influenced her vote. People seem to like innocence. Anyway, I also have another sense about myself . . . one that recognizes incongruity. Things out of place, out of order, or balance. I have very strong feelings that Dr. Frenette’s death is quite out of the ordinary, almost out of reality. I also suspect that you or someone in your department may feel there’s something strange going on here, too. I ask myself, why would CSIS be so interested? If you’re able to, Mari, please acknowledge my feelings that there’s something quite out of the ordinary and dreadfully wrong. Help me, if you will, to confirm my own sense of disorder.”

“I don’t know if there is anything wrong. I also must tell you that I don’t share your sense of incongruity, and it’s not because I don’t buy what you’re saying, it’s simply because you had an interaction with Dr. Frenette, and I didn’t. Maybe I too would feel something was wrong if I’d been witness to your conversation, or even if I had some prior knowledge of this person. But from where I sit right now, I’m just investigating her death because she was a scientist in the employment of our government, and because at some time past she had professional involvement in projects that would normally come under the scrutiny of my agency in the event of problems of a security nature. I don’t know if anyone else in CSIS harbours suspicions like you, honestly.

“I will give you this, though. My primary interest right now is to ensure that we can close the file on Dr. Frenette, just as the local police did. But, unlike the police, I can’t turn this over to someone else. So for me to close the file means I’ve got to feel confident that all questions are wrapped up, answered. Any incongruities – yours or otherwise – are dealt with, totally and without the possibility that new questions will be raised. In other words, we simply want to be assured that Dr. Frenette’s death was an event without suspicion.” She closed her comment with a friendly smile.

Yves considered what the intelligence officer from CSIS had said. He concluded, despite Mari’s objections to suspicions around the death, that CSIS didn’t feel completely comfortable with accepting that a well-respected scientist like Dr. Claire Frenette would leave a meeting with a naïve politician, after opening a dialogue that she had hitherto resisted concerning issues that might be of some magnitude on the world stage of science and then walk into her death, drown herself voluntarily.

He said, “So, you feel there are unanswered questions, that it is not a clear case of suicide. Good.” He nodded his head thoughtfully. “Obviously,” he continued, “I don’t know any of Dr.

Frenette's relatives or close friends, but I'd like to think they might feel at this time that she left more of a mystery about her death than answers. I really hope someone else is asking questions. The police said there was a note – not directly a suicide note, but one that could be read as such, if one strongly believed that she did, indeed, walk into that river of her own volition.”

Mari Volser nodded. “It's a vague note; anyone can read it in more than one way. It could fit whatever explanation we finally settle on.”

Chapter 6

The Commons Page passed a note to Prime Minister Nicholas Plato. *I'd like to talk with you, confidentially, and very soon. Realize you're very busy but this is of great security importance. I could raise the issue in question period, but I'm not comfortable with continuing the status quo of that forum. I'm more interested in seeing government function around issues of consensus as opposed to confrontation.* The note was signed by Yves Bois.

Bois had decided he had to hear the rationale behind slowing Canada's scientific research to a near stop, especially in light of Dr. Frenette's death, to the point where a disaster had occurred and progress had been denied. As he had hinted in the note, he could have pursued the questioning in the House by first taking the issue to his party leader and strategizing how they could collectively embarrass the prime minister during question period. But Yves was tired of seeing important issues dealt with by yelling and screaming, with the primary focus to make the government look foolish, indecisive and incompetent.

Plato recalled the daily briefing papers generated by CSIS regarding its current investigations, one of which mentioned that Bois had visited with a senior scientist who had recently committed suicide or had died under some cloud of suspicion.

As a rule, he didn't respond to urgent notes from backbenchers, not even those of the opposition. He started to crumple the note. Then he caught Bois' eye as he scanned the benches opposite. What did Bois mean, by *consensus as opposed to confrontation*? He knew, of course, that Bois had won his recent by-election on a platform of honesty and openness with the electorate. *Naïve and idealistic*, the press had branded him. Plato's own caucus had dismissed both the man and his idealism as trivial, fated to change by peer pressure and party directive. Still, the message was provocative.

Plato scribbled a response to meet at an address on Rue Guigues and put the note in his own pocket, later passing it to another page for delivery as he made his way to the Commons cafeteria for lunch.

* * *

The house on Rue Guigues was an unusual place to have a meeting, thought Yves Bois as he was ushered into a darkened hallway and then to a dimly lit room. He had been aware there were people watching him on the street; he expected them, but it still seemed unusual to meet in the living room of a house and not an office.

Yves was uncomfortable as he talked to the prime minister. He had never been engaged in a one-to-one conversation with him before, let alone having such a talk in a comfortably furnished home with a warming log fire burning.

Bois selectively related the exchange he had had with Dr. Frenette: her revelation that government restraint was likely responsible for the Arnivan CANDU tragedy; her frustrations concerning the suppression of scientific projects; and his surprise regarding her subsequent death.

The prime minister, for his part, nodded quietly, understanding now Bois' link to the CSIS report, but also curious about the demise of this Dr. Frenette and her revelation to Yves Bois, an opposition backbencher, albeit the Opposition's science critic.

Nicholas Plato spoke in a tone of quiet reasoning with Yves Bois, but through it he felt the prime minister was covering some impatience.

"I don't usually get into these sorts of discussions with people, Yves, especially with the opposition, and, in this case, owing to the fact that I know nothing of the details of Dr. Frenette's death. But you were candid in your message to me, and I think a little *quid pro quo* can benefit both of us. Perhaps not immediately, but later. I don't know when.

"How did it happen, the cutbacks that have affected both of the issues you raise? I'll give you the short, down-and-dirty version. Canada, like most democratic societies, has this sense that people will only re-elect politicians who can manage their primary scarce resource – money, or resources that can be traded for money! If it is seen that they can validate expenditures they do so and they let their constituents and the press know all about the clever management of complex funding arrangements. If tax dollars are spent on non-recognizable or non-observable areas of apparent productivity, then they will often cut their expenditures and again boast to their constituents and the popular press that they have just saved the tax payers a lot of money.

“In the case of pure research, as you must know, ninety-nine percent is unseen productivity. Other areas with similar characteristics are prevention in psychology, psychiatry and medicine. You know, if you go to a hospital with cancer and you come out cured, that’s measurable and very observable to everyone you know. But if twenty scientists are working on a cure for cancer and are not successful for the next five years, one can’t easily point to that phenomenon and say to the electorate, ‘If I’m elected again, I’ll put more money into this worthy research.’

“So, back to the pure research sector. The former prime minister, my predecessor, saw research and development as important, but not compared to other government concerns. For him, the National Research Centre, the Atomic Energy Commission, pure research, and extended research to overcome potentially unknown problems that might evolve with previous developmental research products, for example, the CANDU Reactor – these things to that man and his cabinet were the quiet, non-obvious and quick ways to cut expenditures and boast about lowering taxes and the deficit. Even to the point of cutting back on safety features of the CANDU, savings that were rationalized by passing them on to the needy Third World country that purchased the reactor. After all, if a scientist says an event of this magnitude has a less than one tenth of one percent possibility of happening, it is not likely to happen. Well, to politicians the term *not likely to require specific safety features* is translated as *eliminate the cost of installing the features*. And, by the way, don’t dare tell anyone about the minimal safety aspect – instead play-up the cost savings element.

“Not a very futuristic, forward-looking, twenty-first-century kind of guy, my predecessor. Neither were the members of his cabinet. In fact, that cut put Canada so far behind that we are now in a fight for our future as a country. Generally speaking we have long been considered a world leader in many areas, now we’re conceivably on the brink of national bankruptcy and Third World status, because of what the World Court’s Reparations Committee might reasonably decide as our penalty for cutting safety issues to save dollars.”

Yves Bois had been sitting forward in his chair as Prime Minister Nicholas Plato talked. When Plato stopped, he pushed back, his breath escaping in a rush that signified hopelessness. It was awful to think of this sort of thing happening; it was profoundly disturbing to hear such an admission from the political leader of one’s own country.

“Prime Minister,” he started.

Plato interrupted, “Yves, we’re here in this room, this house, alone in a room together, and under extraordinary circumstances; let’s not stand on formality. Call me Nicholas.”

Bois considered the informality; he knew that the divulgence of such information also carried with it a tacit understanding of cooperation, perhaps an appeal to his feelings and beliefs in nationalism. But he also felt a sense of trust towards the man who sat opposite him, in the safe house on Rue Guigues. Yves also hoped that his feelings, his naïveté, were not overtaking the moment, a moment when he needed a clear and critical point of view.

“Look ... Nicholas, this has been something of a revelation. I mean, we all know about the electorate wanting politicians to be fiscally prudent, but I don't think any one Canadian out there would begrudge the spending of tax dollars to prevent a meltdown of a CANDU reactor, a breakdown that has cost countless lives, probably worse than Chernobyl. But wasn't there anyone in cabinet or the advisors who could foresee the potential disaster? Worse yet, did your team not have a suspicion that you would be faced with this at some point?”

Yves was upset; he felt his face flushing, and it flushed even more when Nicholas asked, “Has your team discussed such suspicions with you, Yves? Right now your leader and a lot of others are clamouring for the opportunity to put in place a vote of ‘no confidence’ in this government. If your party assumes the mantle of governing party by that default, can you feel confident that they've been apprised of the dilemma to any greater extent than you have this evening? And, more importantly, will you and your party deal with the issue more effectively? You know as well as I do that it takes the bureaucrats and mandarins about six months just to get politicians up to speed. Would your party make it faster, be wiser in its handling of the catastrophe, would the World Court happily oblige a six-month delay in the reparations because of a change in political governance of wealthy Canada? Would Arnivan accept that; moreover, could they afford the time to accept such a delayed circumstance? People are dying there, Yves, they need help quickly.”

Again, Yves sat back and sighed loudly.

“But what about this other business, the concern that prompted my wanting to meet with you, this – Dr. Frenette, the Fullerenes Project? All of that has happened within the time of your government.”

“I believe that what I am going to say will be hard to accept, Yves. But the truth is I don't know what all of that is about. I'm working on it; I have people I trust investigating it, but again, in truth, I have people who are close but whom I don't trust. So far, I see a very intricate web of intrigue, but I don't know just who the spiders weaving the web are. However, I strongly suspect that I, while being one of the flies, I'm not the really important fly. There appears to be bigger prey to ensnare, I think,” he said cryptically.

They talked on for a few minutes more, the meeting ended with a reassuring handshake. Bois left the house by the kitchen door in the back of the house. Passing up the dark and unused alleyway he was aware, again, of being watched. At the street he turned to the right and walked toward the National Art Gallery, thinking how this city, this country, was on the brink of a catastrophic change, and that very few of its citizens comprehended how enormous the effects of the catastrophe would be upon their lives. This would be the third dulling jolt to a complacent Canadian society – first global climate change, the ramifications of which were still inexorably evolving; second, the worldwide economic meltdown that was just barely being acknowledged and experienced by the general population, though the unemployed knew it firsthand. And now this. Did those who watched him leave know the ramifications of being charged by the World Court for crimes against humanity? Most people, even the press, it seemed, felt that ignorance would be a defensible position; after all, who could possibly think that Canadians were anything but quiet, polite “don’t rock the boats” who wished no one harm? How sheltered we are, he thought. How stupid is the image we have of ourselves, so much so that we are deluded into feeling we know a world perspective, when in truth we don’t even know ourselves; at least not any better than others for whom we have felt a characteristic sanctimonious deference.

The news that the country was being brought before the World Court was at first received by the shocked Canadian public as an outrage. The press made much of it, slandering first the government, then scientists, and in particular the Atomic Energy Safety Commission, then the Board of the AESC: all of the science of the day was unbalanced by the images of dead and dying people, hundreds of them. Suddenly, it seemed that some of the people had woken up to the fact that it was really going to happen – Canada was to be dealt with swiftly and harshly. Retribution, the penalty for Canada’s criminal behaviour, was to be delivered – it began with threats to withdraw diplomats, UN shouting matches occurred, and behind all that, still more people were dying of radioactive poisoning. The papers became technical and graphic in their reportage, late news broadcasts brought in foreign, usually American, reactor specialists who thoroughly trounced the lack of scientific follow-through, the short-cuts, poor safety education, inferior installations, and on, and on. In the end, it amounted to a meltdown of extraordinary proportions, possibly exceeding the radioactive effects of Chernobyl, endangering and killing the citizens of the small, island country of Arnivan. Whole communities were left abandoned; large areas of beginning industrial activity now lay wasted and dormant; farming was as dead as the radioactive animals that had to be destroyed. No matter the huge level of international aid that was quickly brought to bear, exceeding even the international

efforts associated with the Asian quake and tsunami disaster of 2004. Hospitals, both permanent and in the field, could not deal with the overwhelming masses of humanity whose lives and livelihood had suddenly and irrevocably changed, ended or altered in ways that were incalculably horrible. With much of the international press Canada now ranked with Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany on the stage of crimes against humanity. But Canadians still seemed distant from the reality.

Recently Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition had begun to let up in the House; but in that camp only to a small degree, politics were still politics, and Yves Bois was becoming heartily fed up with his thus far short-lived chosen vocation. The story now was more about the nature of reparations to Arnivan. It was clear that without a massive infusion of money, the Canadian and Arnivan lifestyles were about to exchange places on the stage of world wealth and economy. Canada was *going down the tubes, to hell in a handcart*, and still the citizenry refused to acknowledge the enormity of the event. Where did they think the money to pay for those reparations would come from?