

The Archangel
MICHAEL

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RICHARD GARTNER
WITH GEORGE GARTNER

POEMS & EPIC ODES,
BY RICHARD GARTNER:

(Note: All of these poems and odes are in
'California Christian Criminal')

CONSTRUCTION POEM
CRAZY DOGWOOD FREEMAN
V W CRIME DOES PAY
DANIEL & THE THREE
DAVID & GOLIATH
FORSOOTH & FORWHAT?
GUESS WHO
IN THE STRETCH BY A NOSE
JOB
JONAH
KEYWESHARK
LETTER TO THE JUDGE
MOSES
MUMMY DUSTY
SAMSON
SANITATION ENGINEERS
SATAN SANTA
SOUL BOWL
SUNK BY A DRUNK
THE FIREBUG
THE PUPPETEER
THE SPIRITS
TOBIT, TOBIAH, & SARAH
WELCOME ONE AND ALL

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

The Angel Jon, the precursor to this sequel, *The Archangel Michael*, was written from Jon's and other character's perspectives in that book, at the end of which Michael makes his appearance. This book is from Michael's perspective of events beginning toward the end of *The Angel Jon*, to go forward where he is the primary in this book, *The Archangel Michael*.

Without reading *The Angel Jon*, the reader will find that some of the references to what happened in *Jon* are not detailed in this sequel except as a reference, though this book has its own independent story.

In this book I have included after the last chapter an excerpt from the third book in this series, 'Angels, Demons, & Spiritual Warfare'.

After that I have included a character index and other informatics for your reference.

Finally, I have included a couple of pages of what I call "Ax Grindings" or thoughts that in the writing of this book came to the fore, that I thought I might explain, should you care to read why to this point I find virtually every nationality, race, or religious persuasion to have been involved in genocide at one time or another...so I can't find the "good guys" yet to be our human heroes.

I think I can invent them and will. LOL

PREFACE

EXCERPT FROM: *The Angel Jon*

“Praise You and worship You and all power be Yours forever and ever, Lord!” Jon uttered as he found himself wafted from the Presence by divine winds.

He discovered himself once again at the Gates of Heaven, and there stood majestically, one of the most powerful of The Lord’s warrior Angels.

A circlet of hammered gold gleamed around the forehead of the being, holding long, black hair from falling forward to obstruct the blazing emerald green eyes. A diagonal, livid red scar ran from jawbone to right ear in contrast to the otherwise flawless features—the scar kept memento from battles of long ago.

The Angel was dressed in the garb of a crusading knight, complete with broadsword at hip. A trumpet like horn hung at his other side from a leather thong about his neck, while a shield with an embossed cross leaned against one of the gate posts.

As in a dream of the millennia-long wishes that he had undergone on the world watching demons wreck havoc, he heard the deep booming voice of this awesome one of The Lord’s hosts, address him.

“Jon, you have only to ask for me and I will come, for I await the second coming but have always been unbound.”



Jon raised a hand in mute acknowledgment to the exalted warrior of Heavenly and Scriptural fame as he was wafted back toward the enemy’s dominion...Earth.

In return, the Archangel Michael tapped a gauntleted fist to his breast-plated chest before raising his fist in a half salute of farewell.

PROLOGUE

THE ARCHANGEL MICHAEL

Michael stood there for a long moment, pondering his offer to the Seraph, Jon. He wondered why he had chosen to do so, as he felt no leading by The Holy Spirit, yet he had just happened to loiter about the Gates of Heaven at just the right moment to witness Jon's departure.

Or have I just "happened" to be here? Have I been led to be here without knowing it? Maybe I am just getting old and tired of wandering about the Heavens, and move without incentive or thought from observation to observation, he thought to himself. Then another thought struck him by association.

Assuredly...I may be getting old and perhaps deliberately forgetful of things I have witnessed upon the Earth that leave a bad taste in my mouth, but what is truly "old" is letting the Enemy have his way with man...without hindrance.

He sought The Lord's will for a moment and found a curious lack of response.

The Archangel had heard through the Heavenly grapevine (so to speak) that The Lord had allowed the Seraph some outside the norm manifestations on the physical plane. For what exact reason only The Lord and perhaps...the Seraph knew.

As he was the Archangel, Michael had long been "unbound" to act outside the normal restrictions imposed on The Lord's Angels in acting against evil. These restrictions limited Angels to a defined set of guidelines of how far they could go to protect man against the orchestrations of Satan and his hosts, or from even trying to sway man away from following his own sinful nature.

Michael knew, though, that while he was not bound in this manner, The Lord didn't want him to arbitrarily sally forth from

Heaven and smite the Enemy as he would wish. Nor would he manifest on the physical plane to do what man would perceive as miracles to convince them that Eternal Life wasn't just a myth and that they had better seek their Lord...to gain their Salvations.

Lucifer had abused the freedom of being Archangel when he had been "first among the Angels" before his fall, and though Michael was now Archangel and could theoretically do as he wished, he wasn't about to trespass on what he knew to be The Lord's will.

Lucifer had played at being a god to the point where he had started thinking of himself as one and had even gone so far in his delusions as to challenge his own Creator.

These thoughts chased one another about in his mind while Michael stood there in a bit of confusion, for he knew that The Lord was aware of his thoughts, oftentimes soothing him with the knowledge that though it was not yet time for him to take a hand against the Enemy, the time would come.

His confusion stemmed from how at the moment, The Lord seemed to be denying him any input one way or another through The Holy Spirit, who was a constant Presence with any of The Lord's Celestial Beings.

Michael had become a fixture in Heaven over the last millennium, as he had wearied of watching man fumble in spirit. He was, in fact, so tired of watching on Earth, the Enemy ply their trade so easily with temptations, and diffusions in so many ways...to deflect man's spiritual focus, that he just moped about Heaven. Weary and bored of lurking upon the Earth only to continually observe man's sinful nature and the demons efforts, so readily result in a bountiful Hell harvesting of all too many souls.

Yet...the Seraph was apparently unbound to do something or other on Earth, and as Michael hadn't received direction from The Lord either way...*hmmm*....

But... on the other hand, maybe Satan, when he was Lucifer and Archangel, hadn't received direction either when he sought

The Lord's leading, and that is why he went his own way to ultimately fall from grace. Michael surely wasn't about to follow Lucifer's path.



Well, enough of this! Michael finally came to a conclusion and addressed The Lord. "Father, you know all, and I go to observe your will being done...if for no other reason than the balm it will be to your faithful servant to witness first hand...that You are hopefully allowing one of us to in some way...chastise the Enemy."

He turned toward his shield and lifted it to sling it across his broad back and adjusted its strap to comfortably ride over one shoulder and diagonal down across his chest and back up under his left arm, leaving his sword arm unencumbered. It was a habit, as he hadn't used his armor, shield, or sword in battle for millennia. They had all just simply become his normal attire. Then upon second thought, he took off his embossed shield and returned it to where it leaned again, against the Gates of Heaven. *Why as a mere observer, should I encumber myself?*

Just before launching from Heaven toward Earth, the Archangel paused and his green eyes twinkled at his thoughts. He knew The Lord just might find humor in his setting them forth kind of facetiously prayer-like, as they both knew just how self-serving they were for Michael, while perhaps not being the Holiest of communications.



(It was known by Celestial Beings that God had given his creations to have attributes in common with Himself, and The Lord certainly must have given the gifts of Laughter, Joy, and Humor, to some of them, as of those good attributes He had Himself, in like manner to, for instance...Love.)



Michael dropped to one knee and bowed his head to where his long, black hair fell forward, from where it was not so confined at the sides by the circlet of hammered gold that adorned his brow.

He spoke solemnly, knowing that his hair wasn't hiding from The Lord the humor displayed in his countenance (to whatever extent Angels could facially show humor, as their features were somewhat stone-like and set). "Lord, should you choose to have any smiting done to help the Seraph, Jon...by any other Beings...I pray you consider your humble Archangel to have placed himself to be available to be that instrument...should you choose to allow me to lift my hand."

Perhaps entirely too happy at the thought of doing violence to another being, no matter how deserving, Michael was also filled with contentment by thoughts of there even being a remote possibility that he could be an active thorn in the Enemy's side. God is Love, but Angels were Angels, and required criteria for them didn't have much to do with having to love their demonic enemies.

(Actually, given free to act, The Lord's Angels were about the best creation imaginable in their potential to do some big time destruction. [2 Kings 19:35])



The Archangel rode the Celestial Winds and was wafted from the Gates of Heaven. He was almost sure that he felt a response from The Lord in answer to *his* plea couched in prayer, by feeling The Lord's Divine sense of mirth awaken to shake the Heavens.

Or...maybe The Lord was mirthful over some other childish action by one of his creations, all of whom were but babes to him, no matter the millennia that were under their belts. Michael pondered the thought.

Michael truly suspected that The Lord deliberately chose to not know everything all of the time so he could be surprised and delighted here and there by the wayward antics of some of his creations.

He also thought for the umpteenth time that it would be pretty boring to know everything, see everything, and be everywhere, in any timeline, to where there were no surprises. That is why he suspected that God sometimes limited Himself to present time events in whatever time-line so He could enjoy observing his Creation and the actions of his Creations...unfold.

PROOF

THE ARCHANGEL MICHAEL

CHAPTER ONE

The two giant figures faced each other warily across the small clearing in the woods. Hosts of the enemy minions were ranked in phalanxes high into the heavens. A full eleven-foot-tall each, they were seen to be as the “giants” told of in Scripture, some of whom were descended from when: “In those days, and even later, there were giants on the earth who were descendants of human women and the heavenly Beings.” (Gen. 6:4)

Michael was undaunted by The Lord of Hell and his host. He stood in a widespread stance, his hands resting one atop the other on the pommel, with his sword imbedded several inches in the mossy earth.

He blazed with the Light of The Lord for two reasons. One that he felt an absolute need to remind all present of the power of The Lord, to put the witnessing demons and their Master in their place. Two, as The Holy Spirit had broken the unusual silence (to Michael) of impartings to him from The Lord, by giving Michael to know to deliberately gather attention to himself in order that the Seraph could slip away from this impromptu gathering unseen.

Michael had previously noticed when Jon had unobtrusively... by increments, backed away from the developing confrontation between he and Lucifer, and slowly allowed his own glow of The Holy Spirit to fade to where it was totally cloaked. Then out of the corner of his eye he had seen the Seraph melt away into the surrounding forest, while none of the Enemy had seemed to notice. (no doubt existed in Michael’s mind that The Lord had put his oar in).

In any event... as all eyes were focused on the primary show now between Michael and Lucifer...the Seraph faded into the

background and then disappeared altogether in the blink of an eye.



Earlier, when Michael had sallied forth from Heaven, he had taken the place of one of the Angels of Light, one Farol by name, and assumed that worthy's appearance. Then he had prayed that The Holy Spirit would not inform the Seraph that he was, in fact, the Archangel Michael. He had come (ostensibly) only to observe and hopefully observe some long overdue (in his opinion) smiteings of the Enemy with The Lord's blessing.

After his subterfuge and subsequent following of the Seraph (whom he had observed to be allowed to not only interact with the humans but to manifest on the physical plane as a man), it became evident that The Lord had granted Michael's wishes to be incognito and not be known to the Seraph or anyone as The Lord's Archangel. He took this to be a blessing or at least a tolerance of his actions since descending from Heaven. He had also paused several times since his descent and sought The Lord's direction...but The Holy Spirit had still remained quiescent within him, until now.

Farol had told him something of the events that had transpired to bring that worthy to where he was, and how best for Michael in his stead to replace him in doing the things that Farol had been doing without the transition from a simple Angel to Archangel being obvious to anyone observing, from either side on the spiritual plane. Of course both angels knew that only The Lord could allow such subterfuge to work as regards the Seraph's perceptions. And indeed, The Lord had so far... seemed to allow the deception.

The hosts of demons that were in the air above the gathering of men that Michael had found to be the focal point of the Seraph's endeavors (whatever they truly were as Farol only knew the part in things that he had played) had been taking no actions. And Farol had informed him that he didn't know what part the enemy host was to play...and why they were there in such abundance.

Having just come to stand upon the earth from having been flying about where he had observed the man gathering, while pretending to be Farol, Michael didn't need to be told that upon the horizon yet another massive front of the Enemy approached. He was actually kind of satisfied that they were coming, as he was craving some kind of action that could allow him to witness and maybe even take part in reacting to as Farol. This again, might even evolve to smiteings, in which he would be more than willing to lend a hand, fist, or foot as Farol, or perhaps...as Michael The Archangel...with sword in hand!

With this happy thought, his hand gripped the more tightly the pommel of his sword.

He had blithely been going to follow Farol's advice and simply continue undercover, doing what that Angel had been doing in the protection of the human's in his charge, then had been informed by Farol that the Enemy had yet again, been overstepping what might be termed...the Angel/Fallen Angel interaction boundaries set by The Lord. Even to the point of having dealt a blow to one of his minor Angels physically and to Farol specifically.

At that point Michael had interrupted his Angel, the livid scar on his cheek flushing crimson with his disquiet. "Why wasn't I informed?" Then before Farol could reply, he discerned the obvious answer and voiced the answer to his question: "You must have told no one or I would have heard of it, so the only answer would be that The Holy Spirit led you to bide?" He spoke thus and answered himself all at once, as certainly had The Lord wanted Michael to know, The Holy Spirit would have told him about the affront. The Lord would have known that he would have wanted to put his vengeful oar in the water right then and there, and must not have wanted him to know about the smiting, probably to protect him from enduring yet another episode of impotent wrath.

(As all of The Lord's faithful Celestial Beings continually endured watching man's folly ably abetted by the Enemy, to oftentimes feel impotent ire to whatever extent when they

wanted to take action but obeyed The Lord's dictate to await the appointed time.)



After Farol had taken his leave and Michael had assumed that Angel's duties as outlaid to him for the current situation and seen to the well being of the charges that had been in his underlings care, he had ultimately wound up following above the Seraph. Jon had left the large gathering of men to stride through the woods, on what mission, Michael did not know. While the Seraph was walking, Michael...keeping pace above, pretending to be Farol, had informed him about the massive enemy incursion about to arrive, which from his 'birds eye view' above the Seraph, could now be seen to darken the horizon.

The Seraph had looked at him quizzically for a moment and shrugged as if indifferent to anything the Enemy could bring to bear. (*I wonder if he knows something is different about me, or rather the Farol I pretend to be?* Michael thought to himself.)

He kept pace in the air above the rapidly earthbound striding Jon, while following them both were demons, one of which Michael was a bit surprised to see was the so-called Archdemon Prince of the "North American Principality," the most powerful of Satan's Archdemons, one Torath by name.

Satan had appointed these whom he called Archdemons, or Overlords, to rule over designated areas of his realm on Earth. These designated areas he called "Principalities." Hence, they could also be called the Prince of their Principalities. Under these, and usually appointed by these princes, were their Lieutenants who ruled over sub-sections of a given Principality. There were also the Captains. Captains were leaders of hosts or appointed heads of any size group of demons, whether large or small. Whoever led a host he "captained" it. Any demon who led was Captain of his followers and minions, whether he was an Archdemon, Lieutenant, or simply an appointed underling who headed up any effort.

The little procession came to a small clearing, and the Seraph was making as if to walk right on through...to whatever end he was about. Halfway through, though, several demons that Michael didn't recognize came to earth in front of them. At least one of them must be a Captain from the host of the Enemy that had been above the man gathering, as that host, too, had shifted to follow their path through the woods and slowly descended to where the lowest most tiers of them came to be hovering close by above.

The Archdemon Torath, and his retinue, came to earth behind them, and the tableau seemed just about right for some smiteings, in Michael's opinion. (As far as Michael was concerned, any place where a demon was...was right for smiteings!)



Jon had turned to face the Archdemon Torath, who immediately began to question the Seraph about his mission in/on what that Overlord considered 'his turf'.

"And so...what could possibly make such as you believe that I would deign to answer your questions except with this question of my own?" The Seraph queried in return to Torath's questioning barrage.

Michael had listened to the short repartee with impatience, happy, though, to see that the Seraph was undaunted by the superior numbers of the Enemy.

Then the enormous host that had been on the horizon arrived to overshadow the entire area.



Blowing steam and fire from their nostrils, the chariot's black-winged steeds alit upon the earth with their driver, just a few paces from those who confronted each other. That one of the black stallions had a pine tree seeming to grow from the ground up through its back didn't bother it a whit, as the open space available between the trees couldn't begin to accommodate what had approached and landed.

Baloth, a Lieutenant of the Enemy that Michael also recognized, and several unknowns who must be ranking demons, came to earth behind the imposing figure in black armor, who jumped with a clang of ethereal metal from the chariot to approach them.

The two demons who had descended to block the Seraph and Farol, and the rest of the small group of demons who had alit behind them with the Archdemon Torath all fell to one knee in obeisance in a response, which spoke more than words—that their Master had arrived and was who now strode up to face his Overlord Archdemon Prince...the while ignoring Jon and Farol for the moment.

A mailed glove reached up from the being and opened the visor on the black plumed helmet, and Lucifer regarded Torath for a few seconds through red eyes that glowed balefully at his underling, before speaking.

“Torath, Torath, Torath.” Then another pause, while this purportedly paramount Overlord cringed inwardly, as his experience of Satan’s thrice repeating of your name usually meant that a chastisement, or at least an admonishment, was to follow. The mailed fingers of the right hand on the ebony sword hilt had drummed in cadence with the words. (“click, click, click”)

“I see that you are having a nice little meeting here with the other side of things, which I don’t believe I authorized.” Venom dripped from every word, though the voice was low and surprisingly mellow and melodically soothing to the ear, which those in the know like Torath, knew to be especially menacing when coming from their Master. “Perhaps you are about some kind of ‘plea bargain’ on behalf of the animals I see enjoying themselves by the fire yonder?”

The fist on the pommel of the sword raised and opened to point a forefinger back through the woods towards the clearing that hosted the man gathering.

(Over time, spiritual Beings...both the fallen out of Grace, and those who were still in The Lord’s good Graces, had picked

up the usages of the language of men, to describe worldly and unworldly things for which prior to man, there had been no need for description and hence no words to describe. Demons even went further in their usages of the language of man in aping mankind's expletives and profanities.)



Lucifer's presence was very, very interesting to Michael, as it was known that the Enemy rarely left whatever worm hole he chose to lurk in what all knew to be his chosen (no doubt to inspire fear and awe to his underlings) normal dragon snake form. Michael wondered anew why The Holy Spirit had been leaving him 'high and dry' information-wise, to the extent to where he hadn't even been informed that his primary nemesis...Satan, was out and about.

Jon also seemed surprised at Lucifer's appearance.

He, and he supposed Jon, eavesdropped patiently while the Archdemon tried to explain his presence to his Master, and how he came to be there following Jon. The end of the fumbling explanations culminating in: "I was just trying to find out what this Seraph was doing in my Principality. I was following him as he was manifesting in man form, and I wished to see who he was and discern his orchestrations."

Lucifer finally... then turned to face Jon with his fists on his hips and regarded the two Angels, "Yes, and what did you find out by your observations?" Still addressing his underlings but now facing and eyeballing who he discerned to be the Angelic instigators of his interrogation of Torath.

Torath rushed the words, "He stopped to address me first, my lord, and I figured it wouldn't hurt if I could find out something from it about what it was up to. It is the one who heralded flashes of power, changed to man form and back, and smote Baloth's lack-eyes." He pointed at Baloth who had come to earth behind Satan.

"And...?" Lucifer urged, curious himself.

“And I don’t know, but I did find out that it had interest in the same female that Baloth’s underlings were driving obsessed men to harm, and I watched it ward her spiritually. I do not know what Baloth’s interest in the man cow is, but he somehow inspired and instigated her coming under the protection of the Seraph, though she is only Covered and not uggh...Saved.” (“Covered” being the state of one who has a spouse who has their Salvation, though the covered one has not had his or her Salvation.)

“Well, Seraph”—(Lucifer knew Jon’s name but didn’t deign at this point to recognize him in an effort to belittle)—“what brought you hither to my neck of the woods?” He asked in a sarcastic witticism, while gesturing around them at the trees, but all within hearing knew that the “neck of the woods” that he was referring to was the entire world that he had been given dominion of and not just a pun on the fact that they were in a forest.

The Seraph shrugged and spoke, “As I informed your supposed ‘Overlord Prince,’ I am definitively *not* here to answer your questions. Yet I will bide a while to inform you that had your underlings not overstepped boundaries, Farol nor I would have been empowered to act.”

“Hmmm...” Click, click, click went the fingers again drumming on the pommel of the scabbard bound sword while Lucifer digested this, which went in line with what his Lieutenant appointee under Torath, Baloth, had already informed him.

“So the cow situation was the harbinger of all this?” Satan gestured around sweepingly to include them all and those overhead, while with his opposite hand he jerked a thumb toward where they could all hear the music from the party of licentious men in the large clearing.

Before Jon would or even could answer, Satan continued.

“You cannot lie, this I know, but you are not telling all. From what I have heard, the female was ours by right, as she even studied to summon us to come to her, so there was no trespass.”

“True,” Jon replied. “The trespass came later in your underling’s manifestations on the physical plane, and your feigned con-

fusion is amazing to me, as you of all of your kind know that The Lord is omnipresent, and can and will react at any time in any time, to whatever happened at any other time, even so before the trespass ever occurred.”

Satan wheeled to face those who had come to earth behind him. “Baloth,” Come here and make sense of this things babblings.” He snarled, in a rage at being made to look ignorant by this upstart of a Seraph, who had surely not been a mover and a shaker in the Heavenly Hierarchy when Lucifer had been first among The Lord’s Angels.



Listening to the dialogue between Jon and Lucifer, Michael was still champing at the bit about his Angel of Light Farol having been pounced on by a demon. Michael found himself barely able to hold his Farol guise subterfuge together.

Then came the point at which Lucifer had actually laid a hand upon him to restrain his half-hearted attempt to rise to do the Seraph’s unspoken bidding, and the fabric of his illusionary efforts to just maintain and observe crumbled before his umbrage at the physical affronts to both he and his Angels.

What had happened shortly before was that Jon and Michael (disguised as Farol) had seen and heard Satan being interrupted in his gathering of information from Torath’s Lieutenant, Baloth, and had then in turn overheard yet another imparting to the Demon Master from yet another of Torath or Baloth’s underlings concerning the actual reason Torath and his minions were confronting Jon and of what his demons had been doing.

From overhearing that report, the Seraph could be seen to be alarmed about what was overheard for some reason and had given Michael a look in obvious expectation that he would go see to the matter at the man gathering, which was well within his authority to bid one such as Farol to do. Michael, however, didn’t want to go and look into what they had overheard of the

demon underlings report, but to maintain his disguise as the minor Angel Farol, he had to stay in character...

“Oh well,” he mumbled to himself dejectedly, feeling that whatever else he was to look into elsewhere, right there with the Seraph was a mighty fine place to be if smiteings were in the offing. Another shrug and quizzical frown to Jon, then... when he had barely made as if to rise, a mailed fist of Lucifer’s had reached out to grasp his robes to restrain him.



“Hold and bide, Angel,” hissed The Lord of Hell. “I would hear the rest without you flapping about!” The grip tightened holding the robes, disguising Michael’s armor, while the Archangel made no real effort to dislodge Lucifer’s grasp so as not to betray his true strength.

Jon, receiving direction from The Holy Spirit, said, “It is given that we abide for a time, Farol.”

Michael heeded him (and his own wishes) and ceased seeming ineffectually trying to lift from the grip that held him earthbound.

“Make haste with your tale,” Satan ordered Sinath (the minion he was listening to) impatiently. “I dislike touching this thing I hold, or He Who resides with and within it!”

Not as much as I dislike you touching me! Michael thought... about to burst from holding back smiteings or at least his own return grasp around the Enemy’s throat.



“Yes, lord,” the cringing Sinath had replied. “We sent many to obsess and push the men who did attempt the female’s demise before but find that she is now in company with ahhh...those who belong to Another, and our enhancements failed when those men approached that One’s sphere of influence.” (“Those who belong to Another” being those who have their Salvations and belong to Christ.)

Michael and Jon listened to Satan question and chastise his underlings, and whatever of the matter that the Seraph knew, Michael soon found that Ol' Lucifer had been getting the wool pulled over his eyes by his own henchmen and therefore was so satisfied by the Enemy's confusion that he relaxed a bit in his Farol guise, even though his tunic was still in Satan's grasp.

Apparently, Lucifer like he had done himself, had left his sanctuary to find out just what was going on in his domain and to take a hand if needed, without knowing all of the events that had led to the moment. The upshot being that the "hand" the Enemy seemed to be about to take in things was going to be more appropriately lifted against his own disobedient Lieutenants, Captains, and perhaps even an Overlord or two than against anyone else. These seemed to be of those who were in the upper echelons of the demonic hierarchy appointed by Satan to orchestrate the assailments against mankind. Which meant that the Enemy was "divided against itself" and so was a very fine thing to Michael, considering that the entire well known quote was: "An enemy divided against itself cannot stand."

Yes, yes! Michael thought it through. *A very, very fine thing indeed! But only a precursor to how the Enemy would not be able to withstand in the final days of the ending times.*

Lucifer finally swept his helmet off with his free hand and hurled it to the ground in disgust, shaking his head in bewilderment while steam issued from his nostrils. He made as if to speak and simply expelled a gust of fire and steam from his mouth, at a loss for words. *Boy, if those red eyes of his were twin laser beams, holes would be burned through just about everyone of us around here.* (Michael was thinking happily) *Certainly through he, Jon, Toroth, and Baloth, but also puncturing a couple of holes for general principles through any of those of his minions in unfortunate proximity, however 'innocent' of this particular trespass within his realm.* Then Michael considered the oxymoron inherent in the term 'innocent demon', and chuckled briefly aloud, before catching himself and choking

back any more verbalizing of his humor. Though he did not care and would laugh in Lucifer's face about most anything without regard. *I am just enjoying the Enemy's confusion and wrath kicking butt at and on his own troops, to have Ol' Lucifer redirected to focus on us.* Another chuckle escaped the Archangel, as the thought of his asking Lucifer if he could kick the lesser demons butts for him, flitted through his mind.

Lucifer, hearing the chuckle, turned his baleful gaze upon the Angels, knowing that one of them was the author of the mirthful outburst, but not which

Upon removal of Satan's helmet, again Michael wondered again as he had virtually at every other time he had seen Satan in angelic form, how such a wonderfully featured being could be such an evil entity.

Lucifer released Farol/Michael with a shove that, surprisingly to the dread Master of Hell and of those who were Hellbound, only pushed that worthy back a few paces. Then he shrugged with his mind on other matters before hissing plaintively to no one in particular: "This whole yarn is one of confused babblings and inept orchestrations that only grow more confusing with the telling..."



"Yea, you are in perpetuity lost and confused, O Son of the Morning, but take succor from the knowledge that ye shall dwell there always and thus are inured to the failings of thy state or thou wouldn't have fallen ere."

Michael had spoken in response to the Enemy's musings, and after issuing his pronouncement and judgment of Lucifer, glanced over to wink at Jon, who had turned to face him as he spoke and who suddenly knew no doubts about whom his companion Angel really was.

As was often his wont and had been remarked upon by some in the Heavenly Hierarchy, Michael sometimes phrased his entreaties and praises to The Lord and communications with others in

(and now out of) the Realm couched in the Olde' English of his favorite translation of the Bible: The King James Version.

Man was not alone in the desire to be knowledgeable and armed with an irrefutable copy of The Word of The Almighty God right there in hand. For, as powerful as they were and are, Angels were not given to have the Omni(s) either and also questioned the exact occurrences and timelines off the prophecies in The Word.

To Celestial Beings “without number” of The Lord's creations, it was their history, guideline, foretelling of the future and Bible, just as much as it was mankind's.

If Michael was a gambling sort of Celestial Being (if, in fact, there were any gambling Celestial Beings) he would lay odds that the prophecies in Scripture had been poured over and studied more thoroughly by Lucifer than by any other being, if for no other reason than to be diligently searching for loopholes.

Michael knew this all the more so as during their brief rep-arte, Satan had used some Old English himself, so like as with Michael it seemed that Lucifer perused and had taken to whatever passed for a heart in such a being some of the “Thou(s), ‘Thee(s)’, and whatnots from his study of the King James Versions as well.



Satan wasn't confused about Farol either after Michael spoke out in his brogue, and as only one other in millennia had called him Son of the Morning to his face, and that was long ago, before battle.

He wheeled from his pondering at his underling's duplicities with his mailed fist again upon the pommel of his sword and faced Jon's companion, who had stepped in front of the Seraph. This though even as Archangel, he was still perhaps the lesser of the two in the Heavenly order of Celestial Beings, and it wasn't really his station to do so.

“How appropriate for you to initially join us in the garb of another, Archangel,” Lucifer replied. “Your Hebrews 13:2 has a new import for both sides this day.”

“Forsooth,” the Archangel Michael responded, “And thee and thine kind as a rule, deign ever to not appear as thou were created, as it must remind thee of thy Creator, and that He is the Author of thine own existence.”

The form within the white robes grew taller and wider while the chest broadened to conform to the normally deep rumbling voice of the Archangel, while the face of Farol transformed into the scarred visage of one of The Lord’s favorite warriors. The robes could no longer hide the armored knight of The Lord with the golden circlet upon his scarred brow and dissolved in a mist to waft away on the slight breeze.

The shield and helm were all that were lacking from his normal attire, but the broadsword and trumpet horn still hung from his waist.

“Bah! Michael” Satan retorted with a snarl. “You lick the boot that holds you in your place, worshipping the foot in the boot on your necks, while protecting these animals and striving to get them Saved from me. Thus providing that those you help to Save, after their passage through the flesh, in their turn come to be placed in ascendancy over you, offering their own boots for you to lick.”

“Verily, thee knowest whereof and whatof I speak, and yet ye would to call me addle pated?”

Thus spoke Lucifer to Michael in a language that he had not used often over the centuries, as it left a bad taste in his mouth from things reminded, and was language that he did and would chastise his own lackeys for using.

When Lucifer realized that he had shifted verbal gears unknowingly in response to Michael’s uttering’s, he wincingly took some comfort that though his knowledge of ‘Ye Olde English’ pretty much came of his own studies of Prophets and their prophesies in the Old King James Version of the Bible, it yet was but an earthly “King’s English” simply used in that version, and not the Heavenly King’s language necessarily at all.

It was apparent to all demonkind observing and within ear-shot, that the “Lord of the Earth” who ruled them with an iron fist

literally, was immediately agitated even further than he already had been by his own linguistic slip that would have been received with ill favor by their Master had it been uttered by any of his minions. Those closest to the confrontation of the demonic persuasion held their hands (or what passed for hands over their ears [or what passed for hearing orifices] in a kind of reflex action, as if someone was to speak Scripture to them, which would be like pouring Spiritual battery acid in said orifices. They also had not and were forever forbidden upon pain of severe chastisements and demotions, to ever use prose such as they had just heard, simply because it reminded Lucifer of his so far unrewarding studies in The King James prophesies. Wherein he diligently searched for a loophole to save him from his predestined doom.

They had no clue that their Master was kind of in the closet studying the ending times, as given by The Lord God to the prophets, and simply did not want to keep his minions aware that he, Satan who would be god, but only succeeded in becoming their god on earth, was not a pimple on a gnat by comparison with He who had created them all.



Through the rank and file of the hosts above, word had quickly spread that not only was there an awesome Seraph confronted by their Master and the Archdemon Torath, but that the dread Archangel Michael was being faced as well.

It was a toss-up debate among the demons, which was the more powerful of an adversary should push come to shove, but it was agreed that both were far above the station of the normal Angel, and that neither could be thwarted on the spiritual plain, by any demon, but could only be stymied on the physical plain through the willful disobedience of man, ably encouraged by Satan's hosts of minions.

CHAPTER TWO

Far away from the confrontation between Michael and Lucifer, good versus evil was being fought on another front...directly, yet worldwide this particular battle was a prevalent theme and had been through the ages.



The pitting of men against each other through their differences in Faith was Satan's favorite game plan and pastime. It had also been the most lucrative of his efforts to keep man from Salvation, as he used what The Lord had deliberately caused to be a void in the fabric of His own creations against Him. This was done by using man's inherent desire to fill this "void," (or craving if you will), with something other than The Holy Spirit, for which that void and craving was intended.

Kind of a God-hole, which when not being filled by The Holy Spirit, was an emptiness that man was created to feel the need to fill in order to be fulfilled. Some try to satisfy this craving by buying new toys or by "moving on up to the eastside," a Rolls, a yacht, becoming more powerful...whatever.

Nothing seems to inspire man to kill and torture each other more than their beliefs that their version of The Lord and His Word, by whatever Name, is the only truth, and that anyone who doesn't conform needs "reformation" by whatever means. From spears to swords and then from swords through to bullets and bombs, with a liberal sprinkling of some creative torturing, men have confronted each other over their version of The Lord, His Word, His will, and/or their version of what The Lord wants them to do to bring His Word to the "unenlightened."

It is really so easy to see that the enemy was and is adept at orchestrating this type of confusion by all the atrocities of the

thirteen hundred years of the “dark ages” when the enemy *must* have infiltrated the church, to where tortures, inquisitions, and killings were sanctioned “in the name of god.”

The persecutions of the Jews throughout history, the Roman persecutions of the Christians, the “holy wars” of the Crusades from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries, the Catholics and the Protestants who still have fought in recent times, and the Jihads of today, to name but a few, all have in common that man can be persuaded by the enemy into a vicious “religious” fervor toward other men by somehow confusing/convincing us that even with wars, killing, and tortures, we are somehow acting in the name of The Lord.

The ongoing atrocities of today, where Muslim Shiites and Muslim Sunni sects of the exact same faith kill one another because of miniscule differences in their beliefs are current examples. For Christian purposes in relating, it would be the madness of the Baptists trying to kill off the Lutherans, or the Lutherans the Presbyterians. This type furor can only come to pass with the help of the Enemy.

No other source can be the author of such evil and be capable of such psychological and spiritual subtleties in the orchestrations of lies and deceptions about The Lord’s will to continuously through all the ages keep mankind at each other’s throats, ostensibly “in the Name of God,” except through the adept machinations of the author of all evil...our only true enemy, Satan.



The true human motivating forces for many such confrontations throughout history *diabolically using man’s innate craving to know and serve The Lord* have been those who desire wealth, power, and land and/or mineral resources. The international conglomerates of today in their money-grubbing avariciousness can often be seen by the discerning, to sponsor or actually be of those “forces.” Yet all can see that their puppet figureheads who lead governments, constantly thump the Bible, Koran, or whatever was con-

strued by themselves (or authored by the “powers and principalities” behind them) to be an effective “beating of the tom-tom” in an effort to persuade that there is a moral/religious platform for whatever agenda is being advocated.

Again, humans have that “God-hole” within them and truly desire (often to being persuaded wrongly) that their leaders “have the right (God) stuff” within and will lead them on the path of righteousness.



The evil inhuman forces behind the corrupt human forces who are shaping today’s world have a primary orchestrator pulling the strings of the many demons involved, who in their turn pull the strings of world-wide conglomerates, who in their turn pull the strings virtually controlling far too many governments.

On Tranth’s shoulders oftentimes fell this task. In human terms he was Satan’s Chief of Staff and handled the day-to-day running of demonic strategies and orchestrations already set in motion. However, as the Master was usually ensconced in his Throne room, all-important initial decisions and strategies were determined and set in motion by Satan himself, but again... Tranth would oversee the on-going results and determine changes to keep the effort effective. He also served to field minor issues from the Overlords/Archdemons that didn’t need the Master’s attention and would give Satan a summary of events without all the bothersome details. Of course, anything really noteworthy he would punt straight through for his lord’s immediate attention.

Currently, with the Master out and about (a very uncommon occurrence) Tranth was the final authority in the palace. With his long cape with its golden clasp of office swirling around him, he strode through the corridors towards the Throne room, as he had just heard from a palace messenger that an underling of one of his favorites and the most trusted of his demon henchmen, had sent news, that a palace messenger though not privy to the news content, relayed as being of great import.

Tranth was an imposing figure by any standards and appeared quite human except for his red hue skin color and the two massive horns that adorned his forehead. More so than most demons he fit man's image of what the typical stereotyped devil/demon should look like, sans pitchfork and tail.

As second in the palace only to the Master himself, he was given a wide berth by any except Archdemons, who chanced to cross his path. However, he was not a Prince in his own right, as he had no principality. Yet he was on a par in demonic authority with the Princes/Archdemons/Overlords, to better serve the Master as a go-between in fielding communications of not enough import worthy of Satan's personal attention.

The halls and rooms of Satan's palace were in the spirit realm, but the layout varied, in that Satan had his chambers custom fabricated wherever he chose to headquarter at any given time. Often, he picked earthly mountains and caves to provide reference points to how he built his palace in the spiritual realm.

Within all of the surfaces of the ghostly palace as adornments could be seen diminutive human forms writhing in the hellish agonies of lost souls. Tortured wails and screams punctuated by cries and sobs were allowed to be heard by Satan and his minions, as one would enjoy music.

The walls, doors, and floors were nonetheless solid to any demon, for as their Master visualized them, so they came into being in the unholy realm. Such was their Master's power in being first among them all.



Tranth reached the Antechamber, wherein usually waiting on the Master's pleasure, summons, or the need of messengers, a small host of sycophantic palace underlings lurked, along with messengers from Princes. These could be lowly messenger imps, or depending on the import of the communication...could range up in the demonic hierarchy to such as Lieutenants or Captains of hosts.

Archdemons, even in serious disgrace, were never seen to be waiting with the underlings. The Master would grant them an audience...or not via messengers of whatever stature, and they would arrive at the appointed moment to impart their communication, and/or to hear their lord's pleasure. Or they would be summoned to arrive to hear his pleasure, whether they wanted to or not, but invariably they arrived punctually or else certainly would incur his displeasure.

Today, Tranth noted a significant lessening in the amount of toadies, who hung around the Antechamber just hoping for recognition by any movers and shakers of the demonic realm who might have an audience. It was always possible that at any given moment...from the Master on down through a Captain of any size host, someone might find one of them acceptable to join his cadre, and so...give the sycophant a leg up in the demonic hierarchy.



The sibilant hissings and muted whispers in the Antechamber fell silent as Tranth strode through and mentally commanded the massive portals to the Throne room to open and then to silently close behind him after he entered.

One thing no other demon was allowed to command except himself, by Satan's direct order, was the opening and closing of these doors.

It did not matter if you were a Prince or not, Tranth thought to himself with satisfaction.

The wails and sobs of the tortured and damned, imbedded and imprisoned within the walls, floors, and ceilings of the Throne room greeted him as he strode in. He eyed the black obsidian Throne upon the raised dais, pondered a moment, and then shook his head in a negative.

No, I don't believe that I will sit, even for this meeting. He thought and then chuckled grimly. *He who comes to see me is not one to be impressed by ornate trappings, or even crowns on others*

like our Princes, as he surely is one of few who have no ambitions, so doesn't respect the pomp and ceremony that we who do have ambitions like to awe our underlings with. Then Tranth really laughed aloud as he thought of how his favorite underling would react to the ridiculously bejeweled and pompously vain porcine figure of the Prince of The Pacific Principality, Jankh.

He went to the Throne and stood behind it, leaning his arms upon the backrest while he ruminated. It just wouldn't do usually for him to sit on the Throne, but to stand behind or beside it and summon those waiting seemed to be a more than apt way of visually demonstrating that he was *the* "power behind the Throne" to any who could grasp the significance.

He reached out and yanked the tasseled pull-cord hanging adjacent to the Throne that rang the bell in the anti-chamber, while mentally commanding the doors to re-open.

The summoning bell had caused one Slimeth, the demon who usually served as kind of a 'Major-Domo for the Antechamber, to jump out of his seat on a slightly raised platform, just outside the Throne room doors. Whereupon and wherefrom he dictated the decorum of any and all supplicant's or messengers, which was enforced by two very large and very well armed Throne room guards on either side of the entryway. He had been alerted by one of his underlings that an important messenger had arrived requiring the attention of either the Master or Tranth, which meant Throne room activity, which was Slimeth's bailiwick. So he had donned the garb of his office and had already been in attendance in the Antechamber when Tranth had stridden through.

The green froglike bloated features of Slimeth went well with his station at the palace, and with the description of him by those who knew him as THE "sycophantic toady of the Antechamber."

He appeared at the Throne room doorway, bowing and bobbing in subservience, and Tranth bade him to enter by a beckoning wave of his hand.

"I will receive the messenger from Stanch now," he ordered Slimeth, who with a further bow, scurried backwards through the

opening, about-faced and intoned, “The messenger from Stanch is to attend the Throne room now.”

“Well, it’s about time!” came a gruffly snarled response, and Tranth was about to take offense and chastise whoever dared to speak in such a way when he discerned that it had been a certain gravelly familiar voice spoken by the author of the response.

Sure enough...brushing Slimeth aside with a sweep of a massive and gorilla-like hanging to the knee hairy arm, a huge, lumpy, troll-like apparition filled the doorway.

Stanch came into the Throne room muttering to himself. Tranth could only overhear parts of what mutterings issued through the square teeth that protruded from the over large misshapen jutting jaw that went with the huge head.

However, the gist of the muted babblings seemed to be yet again involving the same Overlord that long since knew to not involve himself in Strongarm/Armstrong issues. In particular to not question or interfere with Stanch or his underling Strongarm, in any way, as regards the Armstrong family.

Here we go again, Tranth thought to himself. That particular meddling Prince of Europa (one Bakah by name) had been and apparently still was, a real pain in the hind-quarters for all concerned. Except, unfortunately, the Master, as their lord didn’t want to be bothered by the petty spites or jealousies of his underlings and had made clear to Tranth to screen out such complaints as he could, and handle them as a go-between.

This he had done and in this case repeatedly, but it occurred to Tranth that had he let some portion of the hassles generated by Bakah that Tranth personally had dealt with over the years also filter through to become a pain in Satan’s rear, an ear or two would have long since been filled with dire warnings from the Throne, to where things would assuredly have changed.

Meanwhile Tranth would do his best to listen to and soothe his henchman...



Most of the success of the Strongarm/Armstrong strategies could be laid at this being's feet. He was an excellent strategist and good at subterfuge, testified to by how he had gone around Bakah's spies to where instead of a purported messenger from him, it was actually Stanch himself who had filled the Throne room's doorway.

Stanch had been in on the Strongarm/Armstrong deal from the beginning, and if there were anyone that Tranth didn't have to pose for...it was this demon who was as avid in the pursuit of his corruptions of mankind, as even the Master himself could wish. Satan had mentioned this to Tranth in private several times and of the fact that Stanch was of the few who had no personal agenda to elevate his station, which was about as glowing of praise that ever issued from the black Throne.

"Stanch..." The Master had spoken pontifically "...acts from a pure selfish desire to personally inflict as much pain, suffering, and 'death without Salvation' to humans, as he can generate. He doesn't care about his stature in our realm, or labels such as being a Captain or even being an Archdemon Prince, unless it would somehow help him to better fry humans physically now, and eternally in spirit after their demise."

Stanch's position over the last thousand years or so had evolved to where his quick access to the Throne and/or to Tranth had become known, and was the envy even of a few of those who were Archdemons and Princes of Principalities. Any questions as to why Stanch was so in favor, was quashed so vehemently from the Throne, that all except Bakah knew to keep their noses out of whatever this simple of no real rank Captain of no real Host had going with their Master and his Chief of Staff, Tranth.

The Archdemons ruled Principalities that in general still had geographically and politically dictated boundaries, but economic spheres of influence had more and more become powers that were

fast becoming permanently superimposed over the geographical continental outlines and country borders during the last century.

This had resulted in decline of the geopolitical governments bowing to the powers that controlled world economics, who were ever increasingly...coming to be the true forces/"powers" to be reckoned with, in orchestrating world events. And these spheres of influence knew no borders.

Stanch, as the Captain who on-site directed what the Master called 'The Strongarm/Armstrong Strategy' with an iron fist, was the one who received direction about his efforts straight from the black Throne, or from Tranth. He, along with Strongarm, and the demonically controlled human Armstrong family...comprised one of these "Powers."

(Eph 6:12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high [places]. KJV)

Strongarm is the name of the insidious demon who was chosen millennia ago to obsess and often possess through the generations different members of the Armstrong family, whose holdings have become so vast that they wield "power" rather than merely enjoy the fruits of a financial empire. As their influence had no boundaries set by mere national or continental borders, the political and economic power wielded by the family was now far more than that of most of the smaller countries. Subsequently, their demon controllers, Stanch and Strongarm, had authority over more of mankind than that of almost any single Prince, except perhaps...Torath, "Prince of the North American Continent."

Satan and Tranth were both aware that Stanch, and even his henchman/underling Strongarm, could have risen in the demonic hierarchy, perhaps even up as high as Archdemons, should they have cared to apply themselves to be equal to, or to supplant one of the existing Princes.



Stanch had been the lieutenant of an Overlord (Bakah) back in the days of the Caesar's, when one of his underlings, Strongarm, had come to him with an idea. Mankind had only been proliferating upon the earth for a few millennia at the time, at least as far as being in numbers great enough and widespread enough for demons to specialize in what they were most apt at in corruptions. The last two thousand years had seen demons having to expand their own awareness's of what they were best at to serve Satan's game plan, and so...to keep abreast with modern man, modernized individual demons now specialized in one or more of the temptations, such as of lust, fear, hate, jealousy, rage, and so on. Though, even in ancient times, their Lieutenants or Captains usually would find what best use to put them to by their aptitudes for whatever sins that they had shown that they were best suited to tempt mankind with.

The last couple of hundred years some demons even had had to learn a working knowledge of mankind's technologies, politics, entertainment mediums, and the ecology of earth as it supports the life of man, etc... All this to know how to inspire the humans in control of such things, to make the wrong choices for mankind, and for the well-being of the planet that supported them.

It need hardly be said that without The Holy Spirit to guide them, the fallen angels/demons were left with whatever passed for intellect inherent within them, and that some had been left behind the door when the "grey matter" was passed out. So, some had what it takes to be the best at what demons did in the tempting and corrupting of man, and...some surely couldn't head north with a compass, and so...were messenger imps and lesser menial workers.

Stanch came to find on the other hand, that Strongarm must have been at the front of the line when the brain grey matter had been passed out. From having a finger in the pie prodding Judas Iscariot, to swaying the Roman Senate of various things, to even

persuading the Caesar's of the delights of feeding Christians to the lions, Strongarm had repeatedly shown himself to have skills far and above the fallen angels of the time, to torture, obsess and/or possess men, in order to bend them to his will.

Based on realizing that Strongarm was a prodigy in this regard, and that he even had the smarts to use his skill in wonderfully inventive ways to torture and cause to be slain...the animals called men, Stanch had gone around his Overlord Archdemon Prince of two thousand years ago, one Bakah by name, to directly whisper his thoughts to Tranth, who even then served as Chief of Staff, to the Master.

Stanch knew that had he used the chain of command and gone through Bakah, that that unworthy would have seen that ultimately, something in his Principality would not have been in his control, and would have been jealous to the point of quashing the idea.

As it turned out, Tranth was taken by the idea of 24-7 corrupting and protecting one already black-hearted human family, and sponsoring it into eventually becoming an insidious world power. Tranth approached Satan with the idea, and in short order a meeting between Stanch, Tranth, and the Master took place, where and when the beginning of the "Strongarm/Armstrong Strategy" was formed and initiated.

Long ago, Tranth personally went at the Master's request, dressed in the garb of his office, to meet with Stanch's, "Europa" Prince of the time (Bakah), to inform him that Stanch and his cadre, most notably Strongarm, would henceforth be responsible to, and under the authority of he Tranth, and through him the Master personally, and was not to be interfered with.

Some serious gnashing of crocodilian-like teeth ensued, causing Tranth to snarl in return, "And further, neither you or any of your underlings may tempt, sway, assail, or in any way affect the well or unwell being of the Roman Senator Armstrong, his family, or servants, that Stanch and Strongarm are going to focus on. In fact, you will render assistance if and when asked for by

Stanch, who is appointed Captain of the small detail assigned for this initial effort!

With that, even though Tranth knew he had overstepped his mandate in ordering Bakah to do anything above and beyond what he had been directed to relay from Satan, he had turned on his heel and imperiously stalked off. For how long the gnashing of teeth continued behind him after his departure, he could only guess.

PROOF

CHAPTER THREE

In the time of Christ, their family name had been different. It had been a corrupt noble Roman family that Stanch and Strongarm had chosen and then Strongarm had obsessed all too easily into coming under his sway. He began by insidiously whispering to them in their sleep that Jesus, Jews, and the Christians were sub-human and easily hypnotically suggested that the family had a direct line descending from the gods. And that the Roman gods were the true gods. He even did what the superstitious family took as miracles from one of their god's who favored them in particular, some minor signs and wonders to convince them to worship even more the pagan gods of the Romans. So as not to come to the attention of any Angels, he did very little in physical manifestations but did hypnotically direct them in their sleep to efforts that paid off so handsomely in obtaining wealth and power that the family spoke of their dreams to one another, and readily followed whichever of them said he had a revelation from the god who had chosen their family as a favorite.

The family had become convinced that they had the favor of the gods, and of one in particular, but they didn't know which of the many Roman gods to specifically sacrifice to. They simply erected an altar in a room in their house that had statues of the twelve major gods of their time, from Apollo to Vulcan, and it was a matter of much debate by the family which of the twelve was actually the author of their good fortunes, and who specifically was the one who spoke to them in their dreams.

Stanch and Strongarm had worked together to keep the household under demonic control through hundreds of years. They had kept their efforts secret from other demons not in their immediate cadre, as Angels might overhear demonic babblings should it become common knowledge that they were grooming

this family to affect all of mankind adversely. They had even kept the family from proliferating into branches and numbers, which would affect how well they could control the wealth and power that the family was obtaining. In this way they could focus on the few that actually wielded the empire that was in the making.

The way they did this was by enhancing in his dreams the normal Greek influences of the time to engage in homosexual practices, to affect the brother of The Patriarchs of the family. The leader of the clan they encouraged to lust after women until he had produced the male heir and a backup heir, of the Armstrong bloodline. Then, Strongarm would start working again in various ways, to limit further procreation so as to limit how many male offspring that he needed to control.



Centuries passed...and the family had moved several times from their point of origin.

Then a list had gotten out, of some of the family's more evil and bloody occult practices. The local priest had gone to his higher ups, and the wealth that they even then had couldn't shelter them from the wrath of the inquisition. They had barely escaped with their lives, but had also escaped with most of their wealth and property which even back then they had had the foresight to put under other names.

At that time, the leader of this family of corrupted humans had been so receptive to Strongarm's machinations that it had been easy for the demon to suggest his own name in the mind of the father of the clan. However the small change from "Strongarm" to the clans new name..."Armstrong" was deemed appropriate by Stanch and Strongarm, so as not to confuse when reporting what Strongarm was doing as opposed to what the Armstrong family was up to.

However, as far as the demons were concerned, when they spoke of *the* Armstrong, or "Armstrong," they were referring to whoever of the current generation was head of the family or 'The Patriarch'. "The son" would be he who was the oldest son or heir

apparent. There was a concerted effort made to make sure the blood-line had a back-up son, just in case of accidental death or that...somehow, the eldest son and heir apparent...would not prove susceptible to Strongarm's machinations.

That had not happened yet, through two thousand years, as truly, the sins of the fathers seemed to get consistently visited upon the eldest son, whose dream states were frequently targeted by Strongarm.

(Neh. 9:2 "And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins and the sins of their fathers." NKJV)



Having never gone to public or even private school, Gavin Armstrong's education was the very best that money could obtain in private tutors since he was virtually in diapers. His younger brother, Aaron, was only two years his junior and seemed to be as able as he was to excel at what was taught them. At twenty years of age, Gavin was done with "formal education" via tutoring, and was, his father had explained, now ready for the hands-on education that his schooling had been preparing him for.

That he and his brother's education had been *sadly* lacking in history, science, and many other major subjects that were deemed to be outside of what his uncle and father had deemed as his needed curriculum...he dismissed with a shrug. His awareness of these teachings was that they were useless studies for someone elite, with a preordained position to step into. And that the common youth were forced to study such mundane and boring subjects, that unless in line with their majors would be soon forgotten. Gavin and his line had long been against useless knowledge, which commoners had foisted upon them simply to have what was construed to be a "rounded out education". For what? Simply to get diplomas and degrees on the off chance that having such would impress potential employers. Then, within months or years of studying such drivel, most of the useless knowledge crammed

into their minds for fifteen years or so faded away, a when not applied in their post-graduate lives.

Armstrongs didn't have learning time or memory capacity to waste in what was not needed for what they were destined for from before their birth.

His father, (like all the Armstrong Patriarchs that Gavin had heard stories about, or had heard referred to that came before) who was referred to even by his own sons as "Armstrong," or "The Patriarch", had told he and his brother the same thing that with minor variations (considering the times) The Patriarchs had told their sons for centuries:

"We are not cut from the common cloth, and what you need to learn is the history of our family up until now, and our future goals and your part in obtaining those goals, and then...everything you need to know to help you to obtain those goals. For instance, you might need to know how to manipulate our empire to apply pressure to persuade some banana dictator into giving us off-shore drilling rights, far more than you need to know when Columbus sailed the ocean blue, or how art through the ages devolved to be the messes one sees today's artists supposedly create to sell at a hundred grand a pop.

"You need to know how to position arms and armaments in proximity to where and when there is going to be a conflict between factions or nations so we gather the fruits when the commoners need the tools to kill one another, and you need to know how to provoke such conflicts in the first place. While...you don't really need to know who invented the telephone, a nuclear bomb, or when they were invented, or the sciences involved.

"You need to apply yourself and gear your studies to what you have known since childhood, that our family has a god, a... guardian angel, and if you beseech him with prayer at our altar, you will usually awaken the next morning with the answers you seek. You need to know that he is more powerful than the other gods the world worships, as look at the plight of the world in

comparison to we, and others of the elite, who must like us...have their guardian spirit who hears and answers their prayers. In like vein, you need to know a spectrum smattering of the commoner's beliefs, as you will find that they are easily convinced to do virtually anything that they believe their respective gods might want them to do. Using these idiots' beliefs against each other has been most useful in amassing our family's fortunes."

"Political and financial advisors we have. Lawyers and Judges we own, so you don't need to know each country's politics, or each country's laws. Science advisors we have to tell us of new technologies that we might take, or buy the rights to, or that might affect our fortunes in some way."

"Armstrong men just need to know their math, languages, geographies, psychologies, and how to shape the world by knowing 'The Current Status of Armstrong Holdings Worldwide,' and then by using 'The Study of Manipulation,' to apply the many different formulas and courses tried and proven by our family. You will be taught our, 'How To Control Governments' course. These last three are exclusively Armstrong family members graduate studies, and are part of your last two years of personal tutoring by myself, or other Armstrong family members, as no one outside our clan is allowed to learn these family teachings, and to know about our personal relationship with our personal god."

"From the first day after you graduate your conventional studies, you will be learning on the job, what are our current strategies and objectives to dominate the world through economics, and... you will know who currently stands with us, or against us in our efforts, and what stumbling blocks are in the way of our goals."

The Patriarch cleared his throat and said, "You must pardon my slip a moment ago. We have already dominated the world through economics, so your task would be to maintain our dominion and enhance upon it. And not just know our enemies and our friends, but to destroy our enemies with the help of our friends, and overcome any stumbling blocks that remain."



Gavin woke up on one of the family's jets. He yawned and stretched luxuriously in the private quarters at the rear of the Gulfstream that he had outfitted to be for his personal use. He was on his way to meet his father; he knew not where, and today was the first day of his life after finishing all of his schooling and conventional tutoring studies. He suspected that Armstrong had some surprise or other up his sleeve to celebrate his coming of age (so to speak) in the Armstrong clan.

He knew one thing...his coming of age wasn't coming any too soon, as all Armstrong Patriarchs seemed to live a long time, but just seemed to beat the heck out of themselves driving themselves feeble, by running way too fast in too short of a time with very little help, and their last years of life were as they were burnt out. So, as the Armstrong interests had grown over time, it just seemed that not enough family members were born to help wield the reins of power.

Armstrong himself was fifty-five years old and had fathered Gavin when he was already thirty-five. Now the old man looked just that...old, though he was in perfect health. Gavin mused that if his grandfather hadn't turned gay right away after having his dad and his uncle Gilbert, then maybe the current Armstrong Patriarch would have had more progeny to help out. But as things turned out for he and Aaron's education, and apparently for other heirs before them, it had always been that it was essential that a male adult Armstrong was needed to tutor the children in the family secrets and courses that no outsider was privy to, and so his father's only male sibling, his uncle Gilbert, hadn't been able to help much with running the family interests, as he had to be available to tutor Armstrong's sons.

In fact, good old Uncle Gilbert hadn't helped out at all in the procreation department.

I've got my own thoughts on that subject. Gavin mused while on the way to the Gulfstream's private rear bathroom while his

early morning thoughts were turned by his youth to imagine his mistress being available. *I'll take on any of the concubines right now.* He grinned and scratched, then thought about heirs, children, and marriage. His inclination was to fill his house with plenty of offspring which ultimately would be on hand helping to keep the grey hairs, the bent back, and the weary expression that his father had now, off of him when he was Patriarch and his father's age. Having never been deprived of access to women from the day he had reached puberty, Gavin was not lustful through the lack of female companionship, but also knew his own voracious appetites. *I am really going to enjoy remaining youthful when my father's age, by virtue of having absolutely no virtue now and remaining virile to make and continue making an army of sons and daughters now, to help me when Dad's age.* Then his brow wrinkled in perplexity, as he had reminded himself that he could only let the as yet unborn heir apparent help him with the deeper and darker issues, so perhaps, except for the pleasure, having a bunch of brats running around wasn't such a good idea after all.

Well, I have to make two boys at least, out of whatever wife mother chooses.

Gavin didn't know for sure, but he kind of suspected that his uncle Gilbert might have some pansy in him too, judging by how the subject of women seemed so repugnant to him and the fact that he wasn't married and had no children though about fifty years old.

No, it was Gavin's mom who had taught Aaron and he about the birds and the bees, and it was their mom who had explained how Armstrong males didn't just go out and pick pot-luck for a wife but that suitable young women were brought for Armstrong. Genealogy, physical stature, beauty, virginity, and long life expectancy were part of the criteria, but even these things were only looked at if the girl came from what was termed...the suitable elite who ruled the world.

No prospective wife was going to come from what was referred to as the Armstrong harem. This was a bevy of mid-teen to early

twenties women who were chosen by the Armstrong women to service the males through the years when young men required young women, as young men's minds just seemed to not be able to focus when they weren't sated physically. It was explained that common youth wasted half of their youth and thoughts being in lust and in the pursuit of the pleasures of the flesh, whereas an Armstrong male could pleasure himself whenever he wanted and then get about his business with a clear mind unencumbered by dwelling on biological needs and desires. The women were clean and virginal upon arrival, verified to be so by one of the trusted Armstrong family physicians, and close attention was paid that no one other than an Armstrong male could get close to them. They were well paid, lived at one or the other of the Armstrong lavish estates, and usually were able to retire for life from less than five years of "employment."

Their father had advised them to make use of the women, and had explained that Armstrong men had no need or use for fantasies but dealt in the real world...to live lives that others only could only fantasize about.

The family wives were as royalty at home and abroad. Once married, the Armstrong wives soon learned that their former families held no further sway in their lives. They were told immediately before the marriage ceremony, by Armstrong's wife (if she were alive and able) or whichever of the most capable of the Armstrong Matrons was that came to rule in the absence of a Patriarch's wife...the females on the island, that death was the only way a wife left the family...period. It did not matter if her husband died before she did; she was an Armstrong until the day she passed on herself.

No Armstrong family member ever traveled without an entourage. No Armstrong drove or ever put themselves in a position to where they *had* to directly deal with anyone unless they so chose. The entourage provided buffering levels of intermediates for any given eventuality. And...the Armstrong security forces were like

a small army, while an attending bevy of executives and attorneys were on hand to be the go-betweens for any business, legal, or political communications needed.

PROOF

CHAPTER FOUR

Some weeks before, Aaron had attended a concert of his favorite female rock star. Gavin had long suspected that the infatuation that his little brother had with the singer, was more inspired by her fresh wholesome American country girl way of either acting or actually being than he'd been by her vocal and musical abilities. This was in addition of course to her natural beauty. Whatever the case was initially though, Gavin had heard rumors that Aaron had become somewhat infatuated with the girl to where he had even met with the singer privately in her dressing room after the concert. *Even worse*, The elder brother thought bemusedly. *Aaron did this dastardly deed that Dad and Uncle will have a cow about cause he did it off of the island in public privacy (so to speak) to where none of his retinue could oversee, protect, or overhear what had taken place.*

Armstrong security, of course, had moved swiftly to cover all the accesses and egresses to and from the singer's dressing room, but without direct orders from Armstrong himself or their uncle Gilbert, security had had to obey Aaron's command to allow he and the singer privacy, which Gavin knew should have been unthinkable, except that it had been Aaron's 18th birthday and some permissiveness had been allowed to even let the boy becoming a man off of the island.

The whole deal had, in fact, been somewhat of a fiasco in that Aaron had dismissed key members of his retinue when he had apparently arbitrarily decided to push their father's tolerance levels, and in essence to "crash" this concert for which he had no tickets.

The young heir's cavalcade of limousines, security SUVs, and attending motorcycles at front and rear of the procession had literally blocked off one of the entrances to the concert, while

Aaron had two of his staff deal with the management to negotiate his admittance and seating.

That an Armstrong heir deigned to attend the concert and enter the establishment was in and of itself enough to gain admittance gratis, as no mere promoter or establishment manager would willingly risk the displeasure of the richest and most powerful family in the world. Further, from the promotional side of things, to have even as a guest one of the reclusive Armstrongs patronize your establishment was about the best endorsement a business owner or manager could wish for.

In any event, Aaron had told his staff to not only negotiate for his entrance and for that of his security detail but had insisted on reimbursing at \$5,000 a seat to the current ticket holders of the center-most seats from the first through the fifth rows.

The start of the aforementioned “fiasco” portion of the impromptu concert attendance in Gavin’s opinion, was that Aaron had insisted that only his somewhat small permanent in-house cadre security detail accompany him within the concert in the first place, leaving all of his staff, lawyers and buffering go-betweens outside in the limousines. This left the far larger security contingent outside and ineffectual to protect the young heir. *This was unheard of in recent Armstrong history.* Gavin thought with a smile, and then frowned as he considered what he had never had to think about before. *What if Aaron had been hurt or kidnapped? I would go out of my mind!* Gavin resolved then and there to give Aaron a piece of that mind when next he saw him.

Even though Aaron had just turned eighteen and was what some would consider being an adult, his actions in leaving his staff out in the cars was grounds for a flurry of calls to his father, via the Armstrong’s staff, to report the current situation.

Armstrong’s response came back in short order through his staff to Aaron’s own staff repeated verbatim. He had said, “The boy is feeling his oats now that he is eighteen. I don’t want to spoil him spreading his wings a bit as long as security has him covered.”

Unfortunately, by the time the concert had ended, Aaron had decided to go further with his “oats” and “spread wings” than Armstrong tradition and policy allowed in general and certainly far past what his father had intended to allow in this particular, Gavin mused.

Then he shrugged as it was all a done deal and there was no use crying over his little brother’s moment of birthday euphoria.



“Hey, you! I forget your name.” Aaron called to the closest member of his security detail right after the concert had ended and the performers had left the stage.

He almost didn’t mind how distracted the guard was considering the performance by the talented beauty that the security guards to a man, could scarce have totally ignored, no matter their job’s dictates. Yet Aaron somehow was feeling a bit proprietary about the star of the show and couldn’t help but be a bit jealous about any other man’s interest in the pretty young performer.

Aaron really couldn’t be blamed too much for his tunnel vision, as his spoiled upbringing virtually dictated this type of response from an Armstrong. After all, what they saw and desired in the things of the world or in female companionship, they inevitably bought, coerced, or bribed into their possession or to be under their control.

This is why, had Aaron’s staff thought to impart to his father’s staff that the boy had any other than musical appreciation on his mind, his father when apprised, would have personally had Aaron hustled out of the concert.

An Armstrong potential heir to being “The Armstrong,” as Aaron and Gavin’s father currently was, consorting with an unknown female (or any unknown for that matter) in private...possibly putting the Armstrong dynasty at risk via disease, kidnapping, or whatever...was unthinkable! It wasn’t supposed to even be in the realm of possibility that an Armstrong heir would even want to directly communicate with anyone outside of the family that hadn’t been exhaustively investigated and approved for association.

To deal directly with a commoner without at least one buffering intermediary from your own staff just wasn't done by tradition and by the dictates of secrecy and security.



“Hey, you...yeah, you.” Aaron targeted the security guard. “Pay more attention to your job and less to what’s on the stage. Heck, I could have expired over here for all you knew.”

“Now go tell what’s-his-face...Brooklyn, the head of your detail, to go get me whoever rules and regulates this place, and tell them I want to meet this Zoe in person.” Aaron could never remember his head of security’s name, but because of the man’s accent he called him Brooklyn, and as the head of his security detail responded to the label, well...so be it.

The guard he had just addressed turned away from Aaron and began rapidly speaking into his two-way. Hardly a moment later Aaron could just hear over the noises of the departing crowd a distant expletive in response to the two-way message, which had likely been inadvertently wrung out of the mouth of Brooklyn, who was obviously in earshot somewhere backstage.

In short order, two of Aaron’s security detail escorted a thin, nervous-looking, middle-aged man over to him.



Aaron had been allowed to leave Armstrong Island by his father through his Uncle Gilbert to celebrate his eighteenth birthday. He could have gone anywhere in the world but chose L.A. because of the glowing descriptions of his architect, Michael Corporeal, who had his offices located in downtown Santa Monica.

At Santa Monica Pier, he had bought the highest-dollar “strand cruiser” type bicycle that the shop had to offer and spent almost a whole day getting from Santa Monica through Venice on the beach strand or as some would call it...’boardwalk’ then had to get back in the motor cavalcade at Marina Del Rey as per his security details dictates, to go around some places that would expose the young heir to motorized traffic, which would be whizzing by.

Back again on the beach bike path at Playa Del Rey then off again to go around an oil refinery then on and off until at Manhattan Beach, Aaron called the bicycle expedition a done deal.

As four of his security detail had also had to purchase bicycles back in Santa Monica, though granted that they bought from the rental and used selection at the store, they all wound up in Manhattan Beach with five bicycles. The limos and SUVs had their trunks and rear doors open yet again to fetch the bicycles like they had been doing several times during the trip. Aaron just wasn't allowed to risk himself by being imperiled while exposed to bumpers on things that weighed tons, possibly driven by under the influence drivers or simply just poor drivers.

The Patriarch's Chief of Security who oversaw all Armstrong security had gotten an earful from the august Armstrong that "not a hair better be harmed on my child, or heads will roll, and... I mean that literally!"

The Security Chief had recorded that and played it back to Aaron's head of security, Brooklyn, while mildly adding a caution of his own, "Obviously it is not your bad if the kid trips over his own shoelaces, but if that boy gets hurt because you let him endanger himself, and I am told to put you down...I will."

In any case, the bicycle trip had ended up with Aaron just handing the bicycles out to passersby, who had been giving the all black bogarding traffic stopping vehicle cavalcade some pretty dirty looks. For one thing, this was a colorful area, in both personal attire and in shop fronts and items displayed therein, and in the vehicles all around parked or otherwise. So the all black cars and attire of the security detail of the cavalcade stood out somewhat depressingly. Some of the otherwise usually passive good natured visitors or residents on the street, were beginning to honk their horns angrily as well.

Aaron said, "Lets go," to Brooklyn and ducked into the rear seat of the closest SUV. Brooklyn lifted his arm and forefinger raised spun his arm and hand in a circle then pointed forward.

Wagons ho! Aaron put mental words to the gesturing then sat back contentedly, contemplating what next he was going to do for his birthday excursion.”

“Hey.” He leaned forward to tap on the shoulder of the security dude who sat shotgun. “Call Brooklyn and have him rent us a helicopter to fly us around so we can get somewhere. This traffic is ridiculous.”

“Yes, sir.” Shotgun dude answered him deferentially, probably as one whom no Armstrong family member had ever deigned to address before.

While the man in the front passenger seat was informing the other vehicles in the cavalcade (specifically Brooklyn who had jumped in Aaron’s limo, which lead the procession) of Aaron’s orders, the now in bumper-to-bumper traffic driver heard Aaron mutter under his breath, “Rush hour my hind end! This mess should be called slow hour!”



Zoe sat in her dressing room wondering how to dissuade charmingly so as to provoke no affront, the attentions of someone like Aaron Armstrong.

Just moments before, the stage manager had come bustling into her dressing room after the briefest of courtesy knocks, dabbing nervous sweat from his brow with an already damp white linen handkerchief. He informed her that Aaron Armstrong was the young man she couldn’t have helped noticing sitting all alone in the front center rows, and that he wanted to meet her.

Zoe had wondered who the young man was who had been surrounded by so many empty seats, that a short while before she had known were filled. Especially so when she knew that those seats were the best, and priciest seats in the house. She had also been told weeks before that the concert was sold out, so there should have been no empty seats available anywhere in the house.

ZOE is how she was billed as the main attraction and had either had top billing in this way alone or shared top billing with

other stars of like stature in the entertainment medium for several years, in spite of her youth.

Zoe was her stage name, but she had been born Amanda Cabot. She was twenty-one years old but had been pretty much on her own since she was sixteen and found herself estranged from her parents. Her father was a Christian Pastor (Pastor Bob), who in his youth had had his share of folly. Doing drugs and minor theft crimes, though nothing really major in the “cosmic scheme of things” according to the laws back in those days. From what Zoe/Amanda knew of her father’s past, though, her dad would be a felon several times over if today’s laws were existent during her father’s youth in the 60s.

In any event, Amanda, as she was then, fell out with her mom and dad over how strict and inflexible they were about her music and the lifestyle towards which she was leaning. Her music was “demonic,” and she was “surely going to hell” if she continued to follow her current path.

She gave up, ran away, and became Zoe at the age of sixteen. Some friends in music put her up and got her school ID saying she was eighteen, and very carefully she lived below the radar until she actually became eighteen, at which point she finally, after two years of estrangement, called her parents and told them she was all right and was going to surface legally to reassume her real name.

Her parents were relieved at first but in short order began voicing their critical judgmental mindsets...even during her first contact with them in two years. She had hung up on them, and when she turned twenty-one she had legally changed her name to Zoe.



Zoe usually peeked out at the crowd sometime during the opening act to gauge whether the opening acts on stage were actually being entertaining for the crowd, and pumping up the excitement and anticipation of the crowd for her own performance.

When she had looked out during this particular opening act, all of the seats had had someone in them for as far as she could see. Certainly the front center rows had been filled by the affluent who could afford them or by those who had received complimentary tickets from herself or perhaps one of her band members. She had even recognized a few of those who had been sitting in those seats.

So, she was very much surprised to find that from the time she had peeked out, through two more numbers by the opening act to when she herself strode out on stage, twenty-five or so of her presumably most ardent fans in the area had vacated their seats. More surprising still was the lone young man who had apparently supplanted them all.

Zoe was also not unaware of the hovering obvious security detail that surrounded the youth at an ostensibly discreet distance. They had, however, stood out like sore thumbs with their dark, almost military, garb against a backdrop of the bright attire worn by most of her young fans. Then came their earpieces and jaw microphones. Not to mention the severe military type short haircuts. Then also noticeable was how they stood attentively immobile against the swaying young crowd.

They were about as subtle as the youth who glaringly stood out in what appeared to be Armani, while sitting all alone among a protective buffering zone of empty seats.

The lonely-looking young man had hardly moved during her performance either. He hadn't even stood up, not that he needed to do as some who had seats behind where the rows in front of them rose to their feet to dance in excitement, which forced those behind them to do likewise if they wanted to see the stage. No, the young man had just sat basically immobile, like he wasn't too familiar with moving to music, but she was intimately aware of how his blond curly head turned so his eyes could follow her every move across the stage.



Zoe was aware that she was considered by most males to be a very desirable and attractive young woman, and while her looks surely helped her professional career, she knew that nine out of ten supposed friendly or romantic overtures made towards her were inspired by her desirability, her fame, her wealth, or a combination of the three. A meaningful amorous relationship had been and was contraindicated in her experience if supposed “love at first sight” was the precursor. She believed that it would be from among those who were her friends, or at least preexisting friendly acquaintances, that she would find love.

So, she had begun to ignore every spur of the moment supposed friendly or amorous overture, after finding she had to question the motives of almost everyone who sought her out for whatever purported reason. This was so even after Merv, her manager, had nervously informed her of the identity of the young man in the front row and that he wished to see her in private.

Yeah, well, I ain't no gold digger. She told herself in the county drawl that she sometimes affected when she wanted to act all ‘countrified’.

So, she was still at that point of trying to figure out how to be political in denying him a meeting in private.

She voiced her reservations to Merv, though in the back of her mind was that in Aaron Armstrong’s case, perhaps she should “lower the bar” a bit or at least give someone of his importance the benefit of the doubt. In her thoughts, he was someone who not only looked good enough to be with almost anyone, his family wealth and power insured that he could see anyone he wanted to in any event, so maybe she should feel complimented. She was also curious, as everyone knew that the Armstrong family was the richest and most powerful of the elite families, while at the same time being the most reclusive band of people the world press strove to publish anything about. This, while at the same time

the press admitted that virtually no personal details about the Armstrong family was public knowledge.

Zoe's economic and history teachers had taught that the Armstrongs were mentioned intermittently, virtually throughout recorded history. But through the past up to contemporary times, the Armstrong thread could be discerned but defied researchers trying to pin them down to even of a certainty identify their genealogy, never mind define or categorize their impact on history, through the ages.

The Armstrongs just always seemed to be there in the background behind the political movers and shakers, though they were never totally invisible as they were always at the top of the social order in whatever period they were discerned.



Zoe decided to make Merv happy and assuage her curiosity at the same time. She informed the nervous Stage Manager that she would see Aaron Armstrong briefly, in short order, but to give her fifteen minutes to change before bringing him backstage.

As with most entertainers, Zoe's stage costumes were shiny, bright, light reflective, bedazzled, or a combination of any or all of these that made one stand out under lights on stage.

Typically, off stage, she wore very casual attire. Jeans, jean jacket, whatever blouse came to hand, and when out in public she might wear a hat and large dark glasses to try to go incognito. Things were rapidly getting to the point to where as her star rose on stage and as a recording artist, her life off stage was becoming harder and harder to live as she wanted. Just walking in the park or down the sidewalk window shopping could become a hardship if she was recognized. She would sign a few autographs and ultimately have to flag a cab down and go elsewhere just to get away from her fans. Hard to enjoy yourself when in mid-enjoyment you have to stop what you are doing.



Aaron was getting a bit impatient. Not used to waiting on others whims but rather having had others always waiting on his timing, he eyed the stage manager sourly. His only balm was that he could tell that the nervous buffoon waiting to escort him to Zoe's dressing room was, if possible, more impatient to get through the "fifteen minutes" of waiting for Zoe to change than he was. Aaron reflected that if he was the underling before him, *I wouldn't want an Armstrong impatiently eyeballing me with disgust either.*

PROOF

CHAPTER FIVE

Stanch sourly eyed Tranth standing behind the obsidian Throne . It wasn't that he had a case of any kind against Tranth; it was just Stanch's normal way of being. Sourly smart, or smartly sour depending on your perspective.

Actually, it really wasn't for any demon to be a happy camper, in any case. Chortling evil glee at human misery might be as close as a demon could come to being happy in the normal sense of the word. Or, perhaps satisfied that a corruption went well, or that for whatever reason a captain or overlord in authority approved of an effort, might be grounds for a bit less of a sour disposition.

Stanch, however, was kind of like Michael on the opposite team; in being perpetually dissatisfied with the restrictions imposing limitations on how he could do the things he felt burdened to do. Sourly disgusted was his personal norm to where it had become his perpetual mind-set. What might equate to "happy" for him would be if he always could follow his druthers and be the cause of the tortured hell-bound demise of every human animal before they had any possibility of Salvation.

He wasn't, however, at all inspired to tilt at windmills and be tempted to try to smite The Lord's angels in the process. On the other hand he knew that the angels...and specifically their leader, Michael, virtually lived and took breath to smite demon-kind. *Yea, and what are you all going to do with yourselves after the second coming, play tiddlywinks?* He was thinking gloomily, for he was one of the few that didn't have the wool pulled over his eyes about his fate. *We and the humans just keep dancing about, pretending to ourselves that we don't know our fates. The humans know that they are going to die, and yet go about their short pointless earthly lives accumulating wealth, power, and such. While we go about our business also pointlessly, except to thwart Dude and His Son's having their*

quota of human souls, and because we hate the thought that humans will have ascendancy over all of our kind...including those still in Dude's good graces, that slip past us to get their ugh...passports. Yep, he gloomily pondered while still eyeing Tranth, who though they never discussed such things, had to also once and a while dwell on their ultimate fate. Yep, we are all heading south, stupidly with our heads a looking firmly north, like south wasn't even there.

Stanch consoled himself again with the thought...the thought that had somewhat appeased him repeatedly over the millennia since the advent of mankind. *I may be a fool to strive in simple jealous hatred against my former brethren and The Big Cheese, considering that I know nothing I do now will alter my eternity, but I hope I get to laugh at the humans in the fire with me, who all were told in one way or another that they had a Way out, and were too dumb and stupid to take advantage of it.*



Tranth wasn't fazed or surprised at Stanch's ever-present gloomy disposition. He was, however, alarmed somewhat that Stanch had come in person to the palace. His presence had to be in regard to Strongarm and/or the Strongarm/Armstrong Strategy, as that was his only, though all-important area of endeavor...period. Tranth also knew with some trepidation that the next one up in the chain of responsibility over the Armstrong clan after Stanch was Tranth himself. As ultimately, though Satan was directly involved in most of the major Strongarm/Armstrong Strategy decisions, Tranth knew that in the event of mishap or things going seriously awry "The buck stops here" would ultimately entail dumping the blame in his lap rather than in Satan's.

Tranth came from behind the Throne and stepped down off of the raised dais that supported and elevated that symbol of Satan's power. He came to within a few feet of the visually misshapen brute that was Stanch.

It was a sign of respect that he did so, for Stanch's brutish troll-like body and misshapen hairy features belied the fact that

he was one of the brightest of demons. He even used his blatant brutish façade to fool the unwary among his own jealous promotion oriented kindred, to trap them into exposing their (in his opinion) unworthy goals.

“Stanch.” Tranth greeted and acknowledged the oversized demon by name.

“Tranth.” The troll replied through his tusks in like manner in a deep rasping voice. “I bear news of import. Something is going on with the younger Armstrong that doesn’t go in line with the plan or with the proscribed genetic disposition of the clan. I begin to suspect outside interference beyond our own.”

“Just the younger brother and no problems with the heir apparent?” Tranth queried his underling, concerned about the older brother, Gavin.

“None that I or Strongarm can see or discern, my Captain. It even appears that the elder brother is as confused by his little brother’s actions, as we are.”

Tranth pondered things for a moment before stating, “I doubt a machination, or that something is being orchestrated by our enemies from on high. The logical target would be the older actual heir rather than the brat back-up younger brother.”

“Yeah, well even so...” Stanch grumbled in reply. “The younger sibling also has an important part to play in the scheme of things. I need not remind you that in case of something untoward happening to the nominal heir, the surviving sibling must then take up the mantle.”

“I know, I know...” Tranth agreed. “I also well know that even if the older brother is fine and assumes his place as the Armstrong patriarch, the younger brother still must do his part in teaching the next generation the Armstrong family secrets.”

Stanch grunted what Tranth took to be an agreement with his statements before shuffling around Satan’s chief of staff to turn and lower his hindquarters and unceremoniously plant his posterior upon the step of the dais. Tranth couldn’t be sure whether

the groan that subsequently issued from Stanch was relief to be sitting or an ache being vented or perhaps something else.

Who knows what lurks behind the brow of Stanch that forever gives him such a demeanor to always project such a perpetually sour disposition. Tranth pondered far from the first time. He took a moment to do what he knew from past experiences to be futile, and attempted again in futility, shrugging off his henchman's motives. He knew without discussion, that Stanch was undoubtedly (as the Chief of Staff himself was), kicking himself mentally for having followed the Master in the first place, during the rebellion, before mankind was even a thought. Not for the first time Tranth wished that they had access back before Lucifer had cajoled them all to follow him in futility against God...to the prophesies that were inspired by Upstairs, and subsequently came to be documented by man. *Shoulda. Woulda. Coulda...* Tranth bemoaned himself, and then realized that sans the brutish tusk having visage of his underling, his own features were probably projecting the same type of feelings and thoughts, as his visitor had.

And though their Master denied all but Tranth access to the Bible among his hosts (which the only copy allowed in the palace was sequestered in the throne room, anyway), Tranth supposed that such as Stanch had read of the 'fallen from Grace angels/demons, eventual downfall into the 'bottomless pit', 'lake of fire', etc... Many a time and now again, Tranth wondered: *How can a 'bottomless pit' have a 'lake of fire' when there is no bottom to hold a lake.* He shrugged mentally and physically. *I suppose if One could create the universe, One could suspend the reality and concept of gravity and have a lake of fire floating in the middle somewhere, while the pit continues endlessly. Matter of fact I suppose the lake could be as bottomless as the pit, and both just continue without ending.*

All of these musings having taken but mere seconds, Tranth shook off his endless rat on treadmill contemplations.

In short order he found himself hearing yet another groan followed by an imparting that he reasoned explained the groans and the seeming overall weariness of his underling.

“I tell you, Tranth, when we started up this plan millennia ago, none of us could foresee how complicated human society could get or how they would proliferate across the earth like cock-a-roaches.”

Here Stanch sighed moodily and placed gnarled elbows on knobby knees before cupping his lumpy chin in what passed for his palms. This posture resulted in his four jointed, elongated, taloned fingers virtually wrapping up the side of his face to where he could and did drum his nails reflectively atop his sloping browed Neanderthal shaped head bone.

Tranth patiently waited for Stanch to vent whatever was on his mind that was vexing him. He knew from long experience with his favored underling that Stanch wouldn't just complain and throw his hands up in despair over a problem or problems but would have been working on a solution and have come to see him and/or the Master to resolve upon a solution and plan its implementation.

And sure enough, in very short order, his patience was rewarded.

“You know that I don't come running every time things take a turn, but I am here now for two reasons. First is as I just told you... None of us predicted from the old Roman days just how complicated and technological the world of man would become. The secrecy under which we have been dealing with the Armstrongs, hidden even from our own kind, has prevented Strongarm and I from getting help that with the complexities of man's world today, we have come to realize that we need now to even begin to cover the bases.”

Not for the first time, Tranth was digesting his underlings impartings while at the same time having to digest their casual use of human words and terms that they had had to learn just to describe halfway knowledgeable what Satan and his hosts were up against. Words like “technology”, and terms like “thermonuclear war” wouldn't exist without mankind's own creations and their descriptions. Tranth shook his head and wondered if like

himself, Stanch had a human dictionary (another relatively new and ever changing creation of man) hidden away somewhere. Tranth himself had a collection of them in his quarters. *I hope Stanch doesn't come out with something that I haven't heard before, I hate seeming like I am not contemporary...well, I didn't get far without even in my thoughts using a human term that I just learned the meaning of!*



Tranth, who rarely left the palace, wasn't privy to the fact that both Stanch and his protégé Strongarm, had found over the last century, that to even know what the Armstrong's were discussing, never mind planning, had both demons using man's own learning devices and access to knowledge resources. Like the reference books they had squirreled away in various places, which had given way in recent times to their accessing human knowledge by watching and hearing the news and learning all manor of information by using such inventions as televisions, satellite radios, and computers. Some of their favorite haunts during the wee hours when The Patriarch was fast asleep along with virtually all of those worthy of mention upon the island, were the great libraries in Athens.

Strongarm, in fact, had begun standing behind The Patriarch some years before, and watching the news and other information programs, but found that he also watched spy movies with him, and seen Armstrong actually taking notes, and so Strongarm began doing likewise. Science fiction movies were also gist for the mill, as it seemed that in the arena of technology, what man could creatively imagine and call 'fiction', they could soon turn into reality. Strongarm learned first how to understand and use the language of technology along with the Armstrong Patriarch, while both of them learned how such things could be used to advantage. He had to go a step farther though in the learning of the application of his studies, in that he had to personally put 'bugs' in the various offices and quarters of the Armstrongs, and

record things to review later, as he just couldn't be on a jet going wherever with the Patriarch, and also be at a meeting elsewhere.

Stanch had of course been apprised of Strongarm's efforts, and had been 'kept in the loop', so to speak.



Stanch's deep voice continued. "Of course it continues to work in our favor that the "sins of the fathers" have been pretty much reliably been "visited upon the sons." So, the initial efforts eons ago to enhance the family's greed, lust for wealth and power, and absolute faith in their pagan gods have all remained fairly well entrenched through the generations. We have luckily not needed much in the way of on-going persuasions for the family to remain sinful."

Stanch began drumming agitatedly upon his head bone with those long fingers before continuing.

"You know, Tranth, the reason that I say the sins of the fathers deal is a lucky thing for us, is that Strongarm and I are stretched to the breaking point just trying to keep up with Armstrong the father's activities and associations. Never mind also trying to keep up with the ridiculous advances in human technologies and political changes. And then to keep any kind of a close eye on the doings of the Armstrong brats as well? Well, something has to give."

"And so, what is the solution that I know that you are thinking of that you have come to me for help with?" Tranth asked his lumpy green underling.

"Simple, from the hindsight view," Stanch answered. "We need to scrounge up some more eyeballers to assign specifically to each one of the existing brats and to every significant male Armstrong that squeals to life from now on. Further, we need to assemble a specialty team specifically to monitor politics and technologies that we can get advice from to use to help the Armstrongs further dominate to preeminence their station in the world of men."

“We could scrounge some bodies from your old friend, Bakah,” Tranth volunteered semi-sarcastically, knowing full well in what low regard Stanch thought of the erstwhile “Prince of Europe.” He was not surprised at Stanch’s snort of disgusted derision before he replied to Tranth’s facetious suggestion.

“I was telling you that we need skilled ones of our kind who can advise us how to use today’s human politics and technology against them or to further the Armstrong clan. I was not asking for such beings as Bakah could supply from his hodgepodge of miscreants.”

Stanch emphasized his judgmental statement with yet another snort of derision before continuing.

“Then there is Granth as you suggest drawing labor from. His crew however, might know about Cuban cigars or the mating habits of Antarctic penguins or mayhap about voodoo rituals on some backward third world island or two, which is about the gist in a nutshell of what is going on in the Atlantic Principality anyway, but...that’s about it.”

Tranth sighed. He marveled that with all the dissension... jealousy, greed, and ambition to advance in the demonic hierarchy by cutthroat means...that Satan’s realm prospered at all in their primary goal of harvesting human souls. *Boy, if the humans themselves weren’t so busy killing themselves and fighting and killing each other off before obtaining eternal succor from damnation, we might not have any real successes at all.* Then the thought came home to him that the thought prior, had just been about how demonkind was fighting each other in the same way as the humans. *Boy, I am the pot calling the kettle black.* He well knew from his own experience before the fall from supposed Grace that the omnipresent Holy Spirit within The Lord’s faithful Angels brooked no dissention among them. Just like he knew that almost any two demons he could think of would find something to be at odds about if they were in close proximity to each other for any period of time.

His reverie lasted only moments and then he spoke to in regard to his demon henchman’s reservations.

“I think the importance of the Armstrong clan has come to the point to where we can certainly justify the summoning of those who are skilled among our brethren from among any of the various Overlord’s principalities. I believe, in fact, that we might have some who might be of qualified assistance to you right here in the palace as we speak.”

Stanch rose to his feet slowly. “Well, I’ll leave scrounging up some qualified but discreet help up to you. It need not be spoken of much between us that whoever you get cannot talk about our plans for the Armstrongs, as they might be overheard by any enemy who happens to flap by with big ears.”

“As far as the younger brat Aaron Armstrong’s infatuations and apparent dissatisfaction with his responsibilities, obligations, and destiny as an Armstrong male heir, well, I am going to have Strongarm look into that personally and immediately,” Stanch avowed.

With those words Stanch started shambling towards the door, which opened at Tranth’s silent mental command. As the broad-shouldered, huge, troll-like figure exited the Throne room, Tranth wondered anew how such a brutish, dumb-looking creature as Stanch could have come up with such a keen mind that belied his outward appearances.

The portal closed and the Chief of Staff turned his own not inconsiderable mental talents towards thinking on what his Master was doing and how it fared in the confrontations that most of demon-kind in Toroth’s Principality knew were in the offing, or actually happening at the very moment.

Tranth knew that Stanch having touched base with him was mostly to show respect to the Throne, and apprise he and Lucifer of the need for more demon power, while also not too subtly advising that Tranth was going to have to bump heads with the Archdemons that it was necessary to perhaps coddle in order to get the cream of the crop. Meanwhile, Stanch would handle whatever needed to be addressed in the Armstrong/Strongarm

Strategy. And then supervise the training and educating of the new recruits with a watchful eye that they didn't get to know too much, or talk with each other about what they did end up knowing. And certainly not get the opportunity to 'talk out of school' to anyone not in even the limited loop that they were in, including their own Archdemon Overlords.

PROOF

CHAPTER SIX

I've got about the best thing going that can be had, Gavin thought to himself smugly.

He was twenty years old, the primary Armstrong heir, and had just recently been admitted to the innermost circle of power, and therein being taught the secret inroads towards the fulfillment of the Armstrong family destiny, that he was to help bring further along the path to fruition.

One wouldn't say that he and his father and the Armstrongs before them were really bad guys, though some might consider them as such, he reflected.

It was just a realization of their destiny combined with the surety of same given to them in their dreams after prayer to their god that justified their perceptions of themselves.

Gavin had simply come to his own realization, that Armstrongs were just not the same as others of the race of man. They were above and apart in all ways. Whether this came from heritage passed down or from their gene pool being different than the common man wasn't of import. The fact was, they were superior, and that was as he had come to know (he thought) of his own volition, and was now what was being taught to him by his uncle Gilbert.

Gavin & Aaron had somewhat (without the details he was now receiving) been weaned on these truths, and as he grew older, he looked out at the world of lesser men and knew "these truths to be self evident" that all men were *not* created equal when the Armstrong family were factored into the equation.

Gavin had been taught the specific standard studies that his father and immediate forefathers for the last few generations judged to be needed for him to become a future patriarch. These were "normal" studies that with major variations were taught to the common student in school.

After graduating from these somewhat tunnel vision-oriented normal studies, the real Armstrong learning had begun.

It was only after his eighteenth birthday, that he and Aaron's (demonically inspired to be) gay uncle Gilbert had begun teaching him about the Armstrong family's behind the scenes influences through the centuries and how those persuasions had helped shape the world into what it had now almost become—a world that could be controlled by a single person without the world realizing it.

Gavin had been learning how the insidious long-range avaricious planning of his forefathers had spanned the ages so subtly as to go unnoticed by historians.

They covered their tracks to where no discernable plot or plan to change things for an Armstrong to gain an advantage or become a power in his own right, was ever left hanging out in the open to be causative of the focusing of attention. Jealous attention by contesting parties in some immediate short-range power struggle is what in a lot of instances, channeled attention. Simply to gain power in a country for just a few years or for even a decade or two, or for that matter...of even an entire continent, had not been an Armstrong motivation through the years, and so attention by potential political rivals had never been focused on Gavin Armstrong's forefathers.

In fact, many behind the Throne and/or behind the out front figurehead maneuverings had been to highlight the status and notoriety of the current leader, and even further his or her immediate political/military/conquering objectives, in order to keep anyone from noticing the gentle long range maneuvers of the Armstrongs, and that they were the true "powers behind the Throne(s)."

And now things were coming to a head nicely, his Uncle Gilbert had told him in today's study session. The family's long range plans and far flung empire objectives had been accomplished to where Armstrong interests controlled those who controlled most of the world's resources and wealth.

This was due in large part because the Armstrong family's bloodline remained essentially pure, kept so in large part by Strongarm and Stanch's maneuvers to insure that the "sins of the fathers (continued to be) being visited on the sons". The bloodline also determined how the Armstrong sisters, their husbands, and their progeny from whatever generation still alive, were used in their many numbers as leaders of the Armstrong interests.

It was also a given that Patriarchs and true Armstrong heirs such as Gavin and Aaron had through the centuries bastard offspring, who also were incorporated into the empire.

Some of these far-flung relations had been put in public offices and were even in place as Heads of State. Some, many in fact, were the heads of huge financial empires and were right out front today, and not behind the scenes as movers and shakers of current world politics and financial world events.

All were, of course, subservient to the current Armstrong Patriarch. Secret meetings were held on the island to coordinate efforts, but thankfully...per spy proofing technological inroads, physical face-to-face meetings were becoming unnecessary or not as necessary.

Although it was definitely harder now to hide the comings and goings physically of these "movers and shakers" from the private sector paparazzi than it was to make sure that video communications were infallibly and indecipherably scrambled so even the vast resources of government couldn't have access.

This wasn't all that hard to do when the brains at the forefront of such technology were controlled by the Armstrong interests in the first place.

Gavin looked forward to the upcoming meeting that he had with his father and suspected that Armstrong would divulge something of import that only The Patriarch and Gavin's uncle would be privy to. At the very least he expected to be party to some machination that would further his understanding of the Armstrong holdings and exactly how far away from obtaining the goal of world dominance they actually were.

“If Dad doesn’t tell me, I am flat gonna’ ask,” he vowed to himself, hoping that it would happen soon or at least by the end of his own tenure as Patriarch.

Gavin knew himself and knew that he really wanted to rule the world and was power hungry to do so. It was his destiny his uncle Gilbert had told him. His uncle had also told him that most of the pieces were in place to accomplish the goal so long sought by the family and that in fact; Armstrong interests did basically control the world but couldn’t as yet claim sovereignty, even just privately within the small intimate innermost circle of their closest associates, without risking possible repercussions.

Gavin didn’t want to control things from behind the scenes as his father was doing. He wanted to claim the world was his to rule unassailably with the overwhelming authority provided by the proofs that his family had been working to be able to provide.

That being that they had the solutions to world poverty, water for arid lands, and food for the hungry. Gavin’s uncle had told him that merely being in position to claim world dominance by virtue of having these answers was not good enough...that the world had to acknowledge the Armstrong Patriarch as its leader and ruler for things to work out as had been planned for so long. After millennia of patience, there would be no jumping the gun right when the prize was within their grasp.

Taking blatant control by force, whether they already really had control over the primary armed forces of the world or not, would stick in craws, and foment rebellion and ultimately bring about yet another world power’s downfall. Theirs in this instance.

The Armstrong clan had witnessed far too many of just these same type of dictator usurper downfalls on a lesser scale to follow that same path themselves. They had worked too hard and too long to get in a hurry and be greedy in the final stretch.

Gavin sighed and knew that he would be ready when the time came for the world to acknowledge the Armstrong’s as the saviors of mankind and the logical choice for leadership of the world.

Well, I am going to ask Dad when he thinks will be the right time for it. The 'it' being the disasters that the Armstrongs were going to perpetrate on the world...before coming along with the solutions to the disasters and other preexistent problems that had been fomented and encouraged by the Armstrongs and their cohorts, which would come to a head at just the right time, with a little bit of our strategically timed help. A nice natural disaster could kick start the plan, Gavin was thinking. Hmmm.

PROOF

CHAPTER SEVEN

“Come in.” Zoe answered the knock on her dressing room door. Aaron was a bit ruffled, having had to put Brooklyn in his place. The man seemed to want to be breathing down his neck no matter where he went or what he was doing. Aaron knew his dad would veto his having a private visit with the singer, but now that he was eighteen he ought to be able to count on some confidentiality from his own security detail. Heck, he wasn’t going to meet the gal to have unprotected sex, he just wanted to speak to her in private without anyone’s prying ears around. Especially when the ears in question belonged to those whose mouths were reporting his every move to the family watchdogs, who in turn reported to The Patriarch via his uncle.

After the concert manager stooge had escorted him to the backstage dressing rooms, and specifically to the door with a temporary “ZOE” hung over a permanent star indicating that this indeed was the star of the show’s dressing room no matter what show was currently in the house, Aaron rapped on the door.

Invited in, he opened the door and his breath caught in his throat at the vision before him. Zoe was the picture of health and loveliness. Her on-stage garb, geared to show her to the best advantage while performing, even to those in the “nose bleed” sections, didn’t do her natural beauty justice, in Aaron’s opinion.

The somewhat non-descript drab form fitting clothing she now wore showed/offset by contrast, her creamy skin and pixie cute features to perfection. She did not have the fine classically chiseled features of a professional model but rather rosy cheeks with dimples; a pert, up-turned nose; beautiful, clear, baby blue eyes with a hint of laughter crinkles at the corners; and soft, downy, obviously natural, blonde hair. Petite perfectly formed little ears with small humble pearl earrings peeked out from under the golden hair.

With right hand pulling at his chin, Aaron stood for moments in the doorway to Zoe's dressing room just drinking in the up-close sight of her.

Zoe had turned from her makeup vanity when he opened the door. She had tried to keep the edge out of her voice when she had said, "Come in", as she was offended a bit by the way the knock had sounded. She wouldn't have previously thought she could be offended by a knock, but this one had been a kind of insistent preemptory rapping, rather than a soft knock like she was used to from the privileged few who were lucky enough for her to allow them to visit her backstage.

In any event there stood the young man who she had seen alone out front and center in the audience. Now that he was standing she could see that he was somewhere around six-foot-tall with an athletic build and clean-cut, even features. There was a presence about him that she hadn't seen before in one so young...an air of assured confidence seemed to exude from him. *One way to put it is that he is really all too "comfortable in his skin".* And a further thought struck her...*And you know what Zoe...if anyone should be comfortable in their skin, it surely would be anyone from this kid's family.*

This thought was enhanced by the penetrating hazel eyes and the firm jaw line. She could tell right away that Aaron Armstrong was not going to be in any way typical to other young men who fawned over her while stammering their words out to her in the throes of infatuated puppy love, desire, or just simply being star-struck, as the case may be.

As these realizations flitted through her mind, she cocked her head and with a one hand on her hip observed Aaron, who was in return, obviously "drinking in the sight of her" (that's the best description she could think of). Only a few moments really went by, but still she grew uncomfortable with his silent appraisal and finally decided to break the verbal ice.

"You know you could take a picture...it lasts longer." She informed him sweetly, though her accompanying smile left

something to be desired in comparison to the radiant smiles she was capable of when sincere.

Aaron quirked an eyebrow in response, stepped into the room, and closed the door behind him. For such a small room it certainly held its share of flowers, presumably from her admirers, and Aaron wished he had had the foresight during the concert to send for some from wherever, to have delivered to her right after her show so he would seem a bit more appreciatively conventional. *I'll send her a boatload from the limo*, he made a mental note.

"I'm sorry for my rudeness in staring," he responded. "It is just that I wasn't prepared for you to look so much better up close and personal than you did on stage."

"Well, thank you very much...I think," Zoe replied. "But I am supposed to be paying pretty much top dollar to several people whom I depend on to make me look my best on stage, and here you are telling me I look better in my grunge jeans and a tee-shirt."

Aaron, uninvited, walked over to the guest lounge chair and casually made himself at home by dropping in to it before responding.

"I can only speak from my own perspectives, but all that glitter and chrome flashing around lets people know where you are in the dark of the theater or wherever pretty good, but you might just as well have wires dragging your costume all over the place without you even in it," Aaron declared authoritatively.

"I mean, you had so many blinding reflections going on that I could not even make out your form and certainly not your features. And...I have to tell you that as you are cuter than anyone has a right to be, you should always have one of those large screens behind you on stage showing you in close-up."

Aaron had spoken his thoughts in what she took as a compliment, like he was discussing the weather. It didn't seem like he was trying to pick up on her or get in her good graces, but more like he was just being chatty with a peer or an old friend.

Strange, Zoe thought to herself.

“We never did get around to introductions,” she said. “But you know that I am Zoe, and I know from news photos, besides what my manager just told me...that you are Aaron Armstrong.

Aaron nodded his head thoughtfully, but before he could speak she continued. “Usually I don’t allow visits to me in my dressing room unless I know a person quite well, and I must admit to you that I would not have allowed you to see me in private if I wasn’t curious about you and your family and all the secrecy about you guys.”

She made as if to continue and was somewhat shocked to see Aaron put a finger to his lips in the universal gesture for quiet before he interrupted her.

“It’s the same deal with me,” he informed her. “I am curious about something that I want to ask you about. I know you are a babe and all that and probably think justifiably that I must be knocking on your door with only one thing in mind, but that isn’t so.”

Zoe opened her mouth to respond and was again chagrined when this kid held up a forefinger and shushed her yet again before continuing.

“I am going to tell you something that I have never told anyone. Not my family or even my brother. Being born an Armstrong has its drawbacks. In fact, this is the first time I have ever really appeared in public without any preparation by my family or the staff in my retinue, and I know I am going to get an earful about this later from my family. But I want to know what it is like to be like us, you know like you or I...famous, infamous, whatever... and yet free to do what you want when you want. Free like you is what I am saying. Not like me. You are free, I think.” Here Aaron looked at her questioningly. “Or are you? Do you have someone dictating your every move like I do?”

I’ll be doggoned, Zoe thought to herself during Aaron’s little expose. He is the richest, most powerful kid in the world besides his older brother, and he is smothered by his family just like I was by mine. Heck, I already feel as if I’ve known him for quite a while.

She pulled her chair out from the vanity and spun it around to face Aaron, then sat down astride it with her arms folded over the back of the chair.

She stared at Aaron, who after his monologue, had lounged back and was staring at the ceiling, obviously in further contemplation of whatever it was that was on his mind in going to such extents to speak to her.

Zoe didn't know how to take the whole deal. First this ridiculously rich kid from the most reclusive family on earth, (*If that is, he can be really called a kid*, the thought intruded) who barges into her concert then insists on barging in to see her personally. Then when given the chance, besides the odd backhanded compliment, seems not motivated by her feminine charms but mainly by her star status as being on some kind of plane with his own lofty state in the worldly scheme of things.

Once again she thought to herself, *This is one young man who doesn't fit any conventional mold.*

"Okay, Aaron, if you are done shushing me, for which I am going to let you slide though I'm going to ask you not to do that anymore... Anyway, I think I gather why you wanted to talk to someone like me, but there must be someone else besides a rock singer more suited to helping you with advising you how to deal with fame and your family issues. I mean, how or why did you pick me out of the hat? Heck, as rich as you and your people are... I mean, your family can't be all that bad, can they?"

Aaron, still apparently fascinated by the ceiling, responded, "You have no idea." Then he sat up and turned to look into her eyes before speaking earnestly.

"Look, I have seen you on cable, online, and heard you on the radio. I have seen and heard many different celebrities over the years by whichever entertainment medium and wondered about how they deal happily with their fame, wealth, power... whatever. Personally, my situation is like being in some kind of prison. I am told that I am a lucrative target for kidnapping by almost anyone

who wants wealth or even to force my family to use its influence politically. I am not just limited in what I do or who I see...but am flat hamstrung.

“I didn’t plan to stop and see you because I picked you out of the celebrity hat. In fact I didn’t really choose you from among others at all. The truth is that I just turned eighteen yesterday, and my staff and I were on our way back to the hotel, when I saw a sign about your concert and that it was today, and not only that but today, close by, and beginning in short order. Well, I just decided right then and there to see if I could get in to see you and pick your brains. You were not too far out of the way and convenient enough to where my staff didn’t get much chance to report my deviating from what was planned for my itinerary and routes. Besides, I have always enjoyed your appearance, and your music.”

Zoe still didn’t know what exactly she could do to help Aaron out and wasn’t sure at all that she wanted to sign up to help him in the first place. *Well, at least he came clean about my looks having an effect on him, or I would know he wasn’t being straight with me.* (Zoe was under no illusions, and knew she was for whatever reason per the individual, attractive to all male heterosexuals... period.

On one hand she liked that he wasn’t just inventing something to get close to her because of his hormones, but on the other hand she wasn’t feeling very encouraged to even be friendly, when it initially seemed that he didn’t care about her as a person, but just as a famous peer to pick the brains of, which she couldn’t help but feel was belittling to her as an individual. Like she was no one special that he’d chosen, and that he was only here with her as an accident of proximity, timing, and coincidence. She could be anyone famous for all he cared, it had seemed originally.

“Look, Aaron, your sheltered life isn’t all that bad. There are ups and downs with being rich, famous, whatever...across the board. For my part, I can never tell if someone just likes my looks or my money, my fame or even just likes my music. None of those

things make me who I am or even are indicative of who I might actually be under all of that. So, when someone approaches me holding out their hand either figuratively or physically, I have to question their motivations.”

Zoe leaned forward and rested her chin on her arms, which were still resting across the top of the back of the dressing room vanity chair.

“Like you, I have to wonder what people might want from me. Do they want me as a friend for real, just love to be around fame, want me to endorse something...what?”

She waggled her head introspectively, and Aaron could hear the wistful tone in her voice. “I really wish there was a magic wand that I could buy that I could wave and separate the real and unreal and the good from the bad. I’ve wasted so much time giving the benefit of the doubt to the wrong people that now I am maybe too skeptical and hardly give anyone a chance to get to know me now if they didn’t already know me before.”

“Hey, I thought I was coming here to cash in by picking your brains on how you deal with fame and fortune happily, and here I am listening to your tale of woe instead of visa-versa.”

Aaron grinned when he said this and actually focused on the girl as granted...a fellow trialed and tribulated celebrity, but also as a person. *While a beautiful one at that, who is entirely too attractive for me to talk to without looking away so I can halfway keep my thoughts objective, and in some kind of order.* He suddenly grinned like a schoolboy, which Zoe saw and wondered about.



This entire exchange had only taken perhaps ten minutes or so, but Aaron knew that the wheels were turning outside of Zoe’s dressing room, which would ultimately result in this little get-together being cut short.

Not too surprisingly, he found that the star of the show was not only easy on the eyes but had a friendly yet reserved air about her that he felt he could really enjoy getting used to. Except for

the Armstrong women, Aaron had never had the opportunity to relate to any woman as any kind of an equal. They were always subservient underlings “not worthy of any real conversation” (his uncle Gilbert had informed him).

Aaron knew that his brother Gavin had been getting introduced to potential suitable wives, all of whom had been carefully chosen to be submitted for his perusal. As far as he knew, Gavin had not found any of them worth committing to, even to just the limited commitment that Armstrong men needed to commit. This, in essence, was to commit to the producing of two Armstrong male heirs. After or even during the time that it took to produce male offspring, Armstrong men could embrace whoever they wished from the many women made available for that specific purpose.

As far as Aaron could discern from his exposure to date of Armstrong history, in every instance it seemed, as with his uncle Gilbert...if you didn't become “The Armstrong Patriarch,” potential heirs found their pleasures in the arms of other men.

Not going to happen to me, Aaron vowed to himself, knowing full well how avidly he made use of the young women made available to him.

Aaron knew that Gavin had been getting exposed to potential wives since his brother had turned eighteen. Even before then however, Gavin had been told by their uncle Gilbert to expect a parade of suitable females when his eighteenth year had been reached.

Aaron had received no such advisement before his eighteenth birthday.

Initially, when Gavin had been advised early in his seventeenth year about the whole potential wives deal, and that he should prepare himself to choose one, he and Aaron had spoken about it in private, though of course Aaron was only fifteen at the time.

Both had long since had intimate relations with women and girls provided for that very purpose, so it was grounds as youths

for some giggling wonder how to go about choosing a wife without knowing how she would be intimately.

Armstrong heirs were taught that the ‘concept’ of love was just that...a feminine concept. It was an “idealistic state of some type of oneness with a woman”, above and beyond what men were psychologically even geared for. It was alien for any male to think otherwise, and again, Armstrong men were sheltered from what uncle Gilbert had called “the insidious wiles of women” that would use the male sex drive to bend men to their purposes and perceptions. No persuasion by the deprecation of intimacy was possible. “You can’t have me unless you love and marry me” wasn’t going to persuade or sway an Armstrong male to anyone’s way of thinking. It was actually their mothers who wouldn’t allow any other woman to have influence over their sons, just simply because they were well aware of how nubile charms could sway a young man who was deprived of release.

This standard norm of female wiles was to be found in the outside world and was not to be tolerated being applied to an Armstrong heir.



Zoe liked the way Aaron smiled at her having taken a moment to vent her own brand of frustrations at the impositions of fame. She hadn’t meant to begin with for it to sound like a venting but as an informative relating to Aaron’s own situation. In any event the youth took it well, and it warmed Zoe to him even more.

Some of the similarities between them were, in fact, kind of like she would expect with a younger rock star brother. Zoe was an only child, but like any girl who didn’t have them, she wished she had younger siblings, and more than once when she didn’t want to ask her somewhat prude religiously legalistic mother about something, she wished she had had an older sister.

Aaron stood up and stretched. “I’m going to bone out before someone comes knocking and ruins how pleasant this has been by reminding me that prison awaits, no matter how gilded.”

“Well, it was nice to have met you,” Zoe said.

“Really,” Aaron responded with a smile. “I would have thought from your initial response to me that you didn’t care for me much.”

“Now that is not completely true,” Zoe flipped her hair to one side and tilted her head to cock an eyebrow as in great thought. “I told you that most of those who come to my door have some kind of agenda that I don’t want to have to deal with.”

“In your case, since you have been here I think that I have thawed to where I find you quite nice, and if our lives allowed, I wouldn’t have minded becoming your friend.”

After that statement, Zoe gave Aaron her sad face. Her effort was to show a woebegone pursed lipped “woe is me” and “no one loves me” look. She said in accompaniment, “Too bad all I am is one who you didn’t really chose from among the multitudes to visit, but who just happened to have the right qualifications and be in the right place at the right time.”

Aaron laughed and said, “I see you have been taking acting lessons to go with your musical abilities. You know doggone good and well that I said some of those things so you wouldn’t get any fuller of yourself than I assumed that you already were. I think that I know you a bit better now and can safely say that I am very glad that I got to know you a bit and would have chosen you from among anyone else before, had I the opportunity, and known you even just this little bit.”

“And, the truth is, that I did only notice and pay attention to your billboard as I like your music and thought you were a talented musical babe from watching your videos, or I wouldn’t have gone out of my way to see you.”

“Okay, then, its official,” Zoe replied. “I like you too, and I am going to give you my cell number so you can call me, but I am letting you know right now that I am categorizing you in my mind as kind of a ‘poor but rich as heck little brother,’ so you know my interest is platonic, and I expect the same from you.”

She stood up from the chair, turned to her make-up vanity, and wrote on a post-it note.

Aaron stepped up beside her and couldn't help but laugh outright at all the feminine junk that an entertainer accumulated to accentuate their appearance on stage.

When she turned toward him and gave him a questioning look, he explained what he had found to laugh at. Then he coughed and swallowed his mirth to ask to use the tablet and her pen so he could write down his own cell number.

Zoe handed him the tablet and pen with her name and number on the top page but wasn't going to let him get away with laughing at her stuff quite so easily.

"I assume that by your laughing at my cosmetics that you don't have any sisters?"

"What, is all this stuff standard for every girl, or is it as I suspect...you got more junk here than any two or three normal non-star-of-the-shows regular girls?" Aaron asked, obviously stifling another laugh.

"And no, I don't have any sisters," he added.

Back she went to the hand on the hip stance that he had first seen her in when he arrived at her dressing room door.

"I am only putting up with you because somehow you remind me of the little brother that I never had, but don't push your luck." Then sweetly she asked, "May I have my tablet, your number, and my pen back now?"

"Oh yeah, here ya' go." Aaron handed her the items and headed for the dressing room door. "If you call me and I sound strange or talk gibberish, it is because you caught me when I can't talk cause someone with big ears, a big mouth, or both...can hear my conversation."

Just then a knock came on the door just as Aaron was reaching for the doorknob.

"Crud," Aaron said, "I told you that they were going to be knocking soon, didn't I?"

Aaron had pulled the door partway open before Zoe called out, "Stop!"

She walked toward him and when close leaned forward to whisper, “My Christian name is Amanda, Amanda Cabot. If you don’t want anyone to know you are talking to me, use Amanda rather than Zoe.”

Aaron grinned, and since she had placed her soft cheek by his to whisper her Christian name in his ear, he turned toward her and gave her a quick peck on the cheek before disappearing out of the door.

When the door closed behind him, Zoe had frowned for the barest moment, before muttering “little brat” and breaking into her own radiant real smile, reserved for few.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Gavin had come into his own after having done with regular tutoring and being well on his way after two years of private tutoring and counseling from his uncle Gilbert, which were studies specifically for Armstrongs and taught by Armstrongs. The god they prayed to who answered their prayers in their dreams about their legal and illegal activities and their plans for world dominance both politically and financially, were the primary subject matters of these lessons. He was relaxing on the jet in the hot tub after such a session with Uncle Gilbert when the phone rang.

It was line one, which meant that it was his father. Line two was his uncle, three his mom, then Aaron was line four. As his father was kind of distant and tied up in business most of the time, they had been raised mainly by Uncle Gilbert, the household staff from nannies on, and somewhat by their mother. They usually got messages from their dad through his own staff, to their staffs, and ultimately to themselves.

For instance, their dad would tell his own people, "Get word to Gavin that I got those tickets he wanted." Then his staff would get the message to Gavin's staff to get to Gavin. Same thing in return to where Gavin would tell his staff to get a message to Armstrong.

So, a phone call from Armstrong himself was an exception and not one that was usually wanted by his sons, as direct impartings from The Patriarch were invariably some kind of chastisement or other bad news. Especially so when Gavin was flying to meet with his father and should be there in short order in person, so why the haste to communicate with him, which is the only thing that would justify a phone call now when he was going to be there in person in just a bit.

Gavin reached out and picked up the waterproof tub handset off of its cradle.

“Hi, Dad,” he said.

“Yeah, hello yourself,” came the familiar gruff voice. “You know that I don’t bother you during your studies unless it is something that needs doing. This time, I need to ask for your help a bit with a problem with your brother and some woman. Appreciate it if you could help the family and I out a bit.”

Oh boy, Gavin thought to himself.

“Sure, Dad, what do you need me to do?”

“Well, it seems Aaron is stepping off the reservation a bit and has formed some kind of relationship with an outsider. It just happened, and we think coincidentally, but we don’t really know what is going on. Security looked into things a bit and found this woman to be from very common stock, though she is an entertainer of some renown in the music industry. We just don’t know what Aaron can be thinking to even consort with such a person.”

A pause ensued, and Gavin could just picture his father pausing to wag his head back and forth, which was a characteristic of The Patriarch when he couldn’t fathom someone’s personal actions. His father, as Patriarchs before him, was bred to be a mover and a shaker of international finance and politics, but like all Armstrongs that had come before, any focus on interpersonal relationships during their tutoring and “formative years” had been strictly business oriented.

Mature Armstrong men, once set in their ways, were actually fairly anti-social and introverted to where as far as any kind of relationship was concerned, only family counted, and friendships and intimacies outside the physical were virtually non-existent.

So, The Patriarch could probably not fathom Aaron’s motivations in stepping outside their safe planned life to spend time with anyone not scheduled and screened, when all outsiders were carefully screened and almost invariably ostracized. This was long before they could even hope to get through the buffering layers of underlings to speak to one of the Armstrongs immediate staff, which was the pinnacle of how high in the Armstrong hierarchy

any outsider could hope to get to. Forget reaching an Armstrong family member personally. Not going to happen.

“Well, sure, Dad, I’ll look into it and talk to Aaron. I think I know the entertainer you are talking about—”

“Her stage name is Zoe,” Armstrong interrupted his son. Then a pause while the Patriarch read...*No doubt he is head wagging again*, Gavin was thinking. “And the report I have here says her real name is Amanda Cabot.”

“Yeah, Dad, that’s the one I was thinking of. I know Aaron likes her music, how she moves when she dances, and he’s said she is a babe.”

“I still don’t understand it,” replied the elder Armstrong. “Your mother and the other females find the most beautiful women in the world for you two to indulge yourselves with, and yet this kind of thing happens.”

Another of The Patriarch’s pregnant pauses, and Gavin was sure, more head wagging, before his elder continued. “Your mom must have gone into things with you by now...I mean... you’re both grown enough now aren’t you? Yes you are,” Armstrong answered himself after a second to remember their ages.

“You both know that if you want something, you tell it to our people, and they will bring it to you if it is at all possible. So, if Aaron wanted this singer, then he should have said something and maybe we could have rented or bought her.”

Dear old dad still thinks everyone and everything has a price. Well that is one thing that I know we have different opinions about.

“Hell, Son, you are now just learning your personal Armstrong eyes and ears only instructions from your uncle Gilbert, but you know a bit about how we go about things. If you don’t know yet, you will learn that for us...if money doesn’t get it, and we really want it, we sometimes just take it!”

Now that...I agree with as an option to paying for things that should be ours as a right. Gavin was thinking about some lesson or other that his uncle Gilbert had used for an example of how

those in power set the boundaries of things. It was something or other to do with the Normans being in ascendancy over the Saxons in old England, and how the Norman lords of the realm had the “right of...” something Latin sounding, to just take to bed the wife of a newlywed Saxon couple.

“Yeah, Dad, I’ve been wrapping my head around a lot of the stuff I have been learning from Uncle Gilbert, and it’s taking a minute to soak in. Absorbing the fact that through history we seem to be the most money grubbing, avaricious, world dominance-oriented family the world has ever known, and integrating that into my way of thinking about things is going to take some time. I mean, don’t we have enough power and money to relax a bit and enjoy life...especially at my and Aaron’s ages?”

Gavin continued before his no-doubt head-wagging sire could respond. “I don’t have a problem with having it all, while others who are unworthy starve...I really don’t. It is just that I wouldn’t mind cruising the world on a big yacht or something before I buckle down to gobbling up whatever we don’t already own or control.”

Armstrong responded firmly, “You were prepared for this through your tutoring, as much as we could divulge through those instructors without letting them become party to the family secrets. That is why you had so many different ones. Each didn’t know that they were only teaching a facet of what you were learning in any particular to prepare you to be an Armstrong heir. All together, the combination of teachings prepared you to know your place as a leader of the commoners, but not bound by the rules that we place to govern them and keep them in their place. The case truly is, though, that the desire to yacht about aimlessly will be taken from your will if you pray to our god about it. You should know and/or should find out that we are not a frivolous family by any means. We are ahead because we heed our god, and we keep our objective, which simply put, is world dominance, always in mind.”

“Call your brother and find out what he is up to with this woman,” Armstrong commanded. “This will be your first opportunity to practice what you have been taught. I will leave you with these thoughts. If anything serious is going on with Aaron and this girl, it needs to be controlled and then to stop. As your uncle Gilbert no doubt taught you, assimilate and control a threat to the family if you can. In low profile, preferably, but if not... eliminate the threat!”

“And mind you,” The Armstrong warned his firstborn, “This gal is a threat, as she may be in position to influence an Armstrong heir. I am going to have your plane turned around and send you back to get together with your brother in person, and get this thing squared away. Keep in touch with your uncle about all this mess, and he will let me know if I need to know anything other than that this has been taken care of. You might as well get used to controlling your brother now, as that is going to be part of your heritage.”

There was a pause, and then Armstrong added, “By the way... one of the unacceptable things about this untoward tryst of your brothers is that his bribing a bunch of people to relinquish their seats at five grand a pop got to the paparazzi and into the Los Angeles papers. Our people had to dance to discourage the attention going any farther. As you know there is enough speculation about us going on in the world without focusing attention on our family or our family’s doings, and certainly not when we are so close to fulfilling our destiny. Tell your brother that.”

Gavin wasn’t sure whether his father hung up angry at him or just at Aaron, but he surely didn’t say any goodbyes before the phone went dead.

In short order the airplane banked and headed back the way they had come.

Gavin got out of the tub after pushing the button that summoned his masseuse. He lay down on the massage table and thought about his father and what he knew about the singer that

he hadn't told his father. He hoped Aaron's little joy ride off into the common world was over, and that he wouldn't have to do anything drastic to discourage his brother or the entertainer from whatever it was they were up to.

Whatever he did do was going to have to wait on his massage, as that was an integral part of his ablutions and was done by a very talented and beautiful young woman whose skills in conjunction with her feminine charms ran far above and beyond that of a traditional masseuse.

As he relaxed on the table, he wondered where the jet was taking him. He knew that the pilots had received instructions to take him to wherever Aaron was and that Aaron would be there as when his father orchestrated something or deigned to "put his oar in," so to speak...the orchestrating usually worked.

Oh well, he thought to himself. I'll find out where I'm going soon enough. No doubt to the island.

CHAPTER NINE

Aaron was hard at work exercising on a treadmill in the new mansion allocated to him to move into as one of the perks of turning eighteen years old. His mansion had been built somewhat to his own specifications, as he had been asked by the architects what his interests were and what he wanted the house to emphasize. On what floor he wanted what, the motif, themes, etc... Sample drawings and then models had been submitted until Aaron had chosen what he wanted built on his personal piece of land on the vast Armstrong estate that comprised the entire island, that their family had purchased from a government long just a memory, among the many islands off the coast of Greece in the Aegean Sea.

Of course there were many other huge mansions reflecting the architecture of the periods within which they had been built for whichever previous Armstrongs that had resided in them. Often, even though incredibly ornate and in perfect condition, these palaces/mansions had been reduced to rubble to make room for future generations. Some remained in pristine condition with artwork, paintings, and furniture of inestimable value. Some of those remaining that did not currently house an Armstrong family member or staff had been turned into Armstrong museums of sorts. Pictures of Armstrong ancestors and depictions of some of family's noteworthy successes could be found hanging in some of these ornate edifices.

Aaron had pushed the button that controlled the sliding floor-to-ceiling glass doors to open, allowing the warm fresh sea breeze in to his fantastically equipped exercise room. Aaron once again enjoyed the fact that as per other technologies, he personally didn't need to clutter up his memory and waste his valuable time to read the instruction manuals on the complex 'state of the art' equipment. He had a trainer whose livelihood depended on

knowing those things and who was monitoring Aaron's workouts in a control room geared to remotely control everything in the extensive fitness center without imposing his presence in Aaron's space.

Architecturally, the house was imposing by any standards. Certainly as it was considered to be a multi-storied twenty-three thousand square-foot home...it was imposing enough just in its dimensions.

The unique feature of Aaron's new home was not in its size, however, but in the rotating floors. The second floor and the third floor were circular, and the upper most rotated in lateral circles lazily at all hours, while the second floor could also turn if he wished, but was normally stationary. Aaron rested better with a sense of movement, yet he could certainly stop the lazy rotations if he chose to, or if someone had motions sickness or something. Centrally located atop the otherwise conventional rectangular bottom floor center and outer wings, his bedroom and balcony on the uppermost floors were seventy-foot diameter spaces that housed the rooms of his bedroom chambers above and his fitness center in the lower level. Just outside the second floor exercise area was a swimming pool and whirlpool spa tub, inset into the roof of the ground floor on one side, and a tennis court on the other.

Aaron's house had been built atop a promontory, three sides of which had cliff faces going straight down to the crashing waves of the ocean. As his upper rooms rotated, you could almost envision yourself in flight above the sea. That is, until the view became the side that was island, and one could see the winding road leading up to the mansion through the carefully gardened landscape.

Yep, it's a rough life, Aaron told himself, looking at the monitor in front of the treadmill as the machine was in cool down mode at the end of his workout. The usual, reflection mode surface had just moments before been a screen upon which Aaron had been watching his newfound friend Zoe in a music video. He shut off the satellite feed to the monitor, whereupon he could watch and/

or listen to virtually any program that he wanted, live or from his own collection. Or he could make and receive a video phone call, or go on line. These features allowed him to do his studies while exercising, do his emails while exercising, not have to stop exercising while exercising, etc...

All of the features were installed on almost all of his equipment, and used voice activation and recognition technology, while the built in camera would serve as a video cam, or simply as a mirror if in 'reflection mode.

He had watched a taped performance of Zoe, of course, but ever since they had met and spoken, Aaron had a thing about watching and admiring the freedom and zest that Zoe seemed to have in so much abundance in her life. As far as he could tell, and he was trying to see any sign during her recorded concerts, that she wasn't happy per their conversation about how her fame intruding on her private life. *I guess she is only unhappy when off stage and trying for privacy, because she sure looks like she loves entertaining, or she is one heck of an actress.*

This as opposed to how he more and more perceived his own lifestyle to be one of regimented boredom that allowed no leeway for a social life whatsoever.

It had been a bit over a week since he had crashed the entertainer's concert, and Aaron wished he could look into those baby blue eyes again and see them light up when Zoe smiled. He suspected he had a bit of a futile crush on the her, given their two-year age difference, but that was only to be expected considering the fact that in the boy/girl over all perspectives, they were in a close enough age bracket for either to find the other attractive and/or desirable.

Admitting that Zoe was beautiful and desirable on a physical plane wasn't an incentive to Aaron, though. His tastes ran to a less robust look. More the delicately feminine and less the healthy, voluptuous, pixie-cut, wind-blown-haired farm girl like Zoe. No, Aaron's primary attractions had been, and still were, to

her obvious free-spirited persona that blatantly manifested in her songs, her dancing movements, and in every flip of her head to throw the long, blonde hair over those incredible blue eyes.

In addition to his initial attraction, though, was how he had come to know that underneath her stage swagger, she was still just as sweet and unspoiled as could be, even considering her fame. Aaron wanted to be able to go out in public as Zoe did and be able to smile and greet the down-trodden masses on some kind of plane other than how Armstrongs for centuries had treated them. After all, if everyone was beneath them and/or beneath their social notice, then...the only ones they were allowed to notice were those who they forced into subservience or coerced into compliance. Who then was really left to befriend?

He shrugged as the cool down cycle ended on the treadmill and stepped off the machine. He walked to the open semicircle that was the glass door opening, stepped onto the balcony that ran the circumference of the fitness floor, as well as the one around the upstairs living quarters, whereas the ground floor had a perimeter fence that ran along the edge of the cliffs.



Zoe's manager had scheduled her with back-to-back events, and when she wasn't performing or making an appearance for some purpose or other, she was en route to or from something her manager kept assuring her that it was essential for her to do.

She was just so doggone tired, and there never seemed to be enough time to satisfy the demands of her schedule, never mind anything she might want to do for herself personally.

She was scrounging through her carry-on bag that doubled these days as her purse when she came across the post-it with Aaron's cell number on it. It had somehow gotten stuck to the side of one of her cosmetic cases, or she would have run up on it before.

Dang, she thought to herself, I hope youngster doesn't think that I have forgotten about him after all the trouble he went through to

meet me. Then she right away realized that that is exactly what she did, and without the post-it jogging her memory, she probably would have gone on forgetting because of her all consuming schedule.

I am going to call him right now no matter where he is or what time it is wherever he is, she thought to herself. This train of thought led to another in that she recalled hearing that the Armstrongs had holdings virtually in every country but that no one really seemed to know exactly where they might call home.

Well, awake or not, or busy or not... here goes. She reached for the hotel phone on the end table next to the couch upon which she was lounging. She still had some time to kill before the concert was to begin, but she soon had to get over there to her dressing room backstage, to start getting on her war paint and wardrobe.



Aaron's cell rang in the charger cradle, while simultaneously throughout the mansion the intercom speakers also broadcast the ring to where he could answer from anywhere in the mansion that had the intercom panel.

His designer sweats had no pockets anyway. Aaron mused that his fastidious clothes designer would faint if he saw what a phone bulge did to his fashions.

He stepped over to the nearest panel and pushed 'answer' on the touch screen display.

"Hi, this is Aaron," he said.

"Hey Aaron, this is...Amanda," Zoe said. "I thought I would give a call and see how it's going with you. Are you okay to talk now?"

"Yes, it's all good," Aaron replied. "I just got done working out and was enjoying a bit of fresh air. Matter of fact, I just watched one of your videos and was thinking about you and wondering if I should give you a call."

"Oh...yeah, which video?" she asked and then realized how trivial the question was. "Ah, who cares?" She threw out before he

could answer. "I was calling to apologize for not calling sooner. I have been so busy, but also your phone number was stuck to the side of something in my bag, and I couldn't find it." *Oh you liar*, she thought to herself.

"Well, don't trip...been meaning to give you a call too, but just moved into my new place and am trying to get all my toys and gizmos how I want them. I didn't even think about my own helicopter pad until just now that you called. If I want to see someone, I have to meet them inland at one of the community pads and then all my business will be out front street."

"Helicopter pad, huh? What's up with that? I can't just drive over your way and say howdy, huh?"

"Well...yeah." Aaron was befuddled for a moment then snapped. "I forgot, of course, you don't know that I...we head-quarter on an island and you can only get here by sea or by air."

Now Zoe was curious. "Where would I find a boat that goes there if I wanted to?" She was calling from Miami and couldn't help just thinking from her own geographical location of islands in proximity to where she was, like the Keys and the Bahamas.

Aaron laughed. "We aren't easy to find...deliberately, and we surely don't have a public ferry service of any kind." He gave thought to something that he had never had to dwell on before. "Heck, I don't really know how to arrange for you to get here on a boat. It's never come up for me before. I actually don't believe that we are located on too many maps as such, but we call the island Armstrong Island." He didn't want to tell her then that, that was a deliberate bid for secrecy and intentional by the family from time immemorial.

"Don't tell me that *you* don't know where you are," Zoe facetiously chided but also asked with genuine feminine curiosity.

"Yes, dear." Aaron snorted peevishly, "I pretty much know where I am at all times but am chagrined to have to admit that I never have had anyone stop by that someone else didn't arrange the transportation for."

“Well, look into it. I’m in Miami right now and maybe you are close and I might be able to swing some time for us to do lunch or something, if we could meet somewhere.”

Aaron laughed in response. “Basically, for your ears only, though it isn’t the best kept secret in the world...we are in the Mediterranean between Greece and Turkey. Not exactly a hop, skip, or a jump away from Miami, though the new jets we are getting are supposed to go Mach One and should cover those kind of distances in short order.”

Yeah right, Zoe thought to herself. “The new jets” had a nice ring to it, especially the plurality part of the statement.

But, notwithstanding all that, Zoe was agreeably surprised at how the call was going, as she recalled their first meeting a week or so ago as a kind of strange encounter with someone who she identified with on one level, but wondered at as one who had developed a persona outside the norm so far as to be...a...well, frankly...a curiosity. She had been then also agreeably surprised at his frankness and open ways. No doubt some of his ways were because he had never had to fear rejection or ever had to adjust his ways to suit what was the prevalent “norm,” and so had developed like some alien life form in a womb of unimaginable wealth and power that the common folk couldn’t even imagine.

Zoe, of course, couldn’t know that such things as fear of rejection or subservience to even his Armstrong elders were taboo and groomed out in the raising of Armstrong heirs. They were raised to respect their family elders of course, but not to be submissive in any way to anyone at all. They were, in fact, raised to own and to rule the world and to care about what anyone else thought or to be subservient to anyone at all...was not only not in the scheme of things but something their elders were careful to discourage. Hence when security had called about Aaron’s straying from the path so to speak when he met Zoe, Armstrong had deigned to let him do as he wished though it was not what Armstrong himself wanted.

She was glad to find that her memory of their first meeting was of something that had been refreshing to her... as something different relationship-wise. Happily, that memory was now being reinforced by the same surprising camaraderie she had experienced with Aaron before, when they met. There was a big difference in her budding relationship with him in comparison to how things went with other men she would first meet, and certainly how she related to her many admirers, most with not very well hidden agendas. The difference was being reinforced in a nutshell, simply by the easy and comfortable way that they had of speaking their thoughts to one another. Like they had long known and been at ease with each other.

It was refreshing to her that he didn't seem to have a care in the world if she liked or even wanted to hear what he said. He just blathered right along as if they were just continuing a long-standing relationship discussion. And in spite of the fact that in her experience he might as well be an alien from outer space, she was again struck by how she felt in him a kindred spirit, and in some way how she delighted in his behavior as that of what she thought a spoiled little brother of her own would act toward her.

"Hmmm..." Aaron's mind had been percolating. "Gimme' a week and I will get stuff ready over here. What's a helicopter pad take to get done?"

Yeah, like I would know, she thought.

Then he answered himself.

"I think a bit of concrete and a couple of lights or even just land it on the grass outside, as long as things were lit up for night flights and clearly marked for daytime landings."

"Lemme call my architect about all that, and you know what? I'm thinking about the boat deal. How come I don't have my own boat launch? I could have an elevator put in to sea level. Have a breakwater jetty built. Boat docks and things like gas and diesel and boating stuff...hmmm. Racing boats, parasailing, scuba, and stuff...hmmm."

Either this kid is a human dynamo, or it is just that he has a super-human jaw muscle. Zoe had opened her mouth several times to interrupt the excited monologue, to no avail.

Aaron paused in his headlong planning to make his new house accessible to whoever he wanted to meet with, and his digression into the “toys and wonders” vistas opened there from, as a thought had struck him to impart to Zoe.

“We better table the boat ride stuff for a bit cause my architect’s guys have got to drill down through solid rock and put an elevator in, then the breakwater jetty and docks and all...well... all that will take a bit of time no matter how fast I want it done.”

“Drill down through rock, huh?” Zoe responded, thinking she was getting dizzy just listening to Aaron’s spontaneously enthusiastic building plans. “How far do you have to drill down?”

“Couple of hundred feet, I imagine.”

Then Aaron began describing his new home and really got into describing its size and some on the unique features. The funny thing to Zoe as she listened to him, considering that she had only recently come into her own to where she started hobnobbing with the rich and famous, was how he glossed over or ignored altogether in his descriptions the enormous costs and complexity that must have gone into the building of his home.

In contrast to the way Aaron thought of things in creative ways of applying his fortune, her new supposed “rich and famous” acquaintances, who continually boasted how much such and such had cost sounded like mere braggarts by comparison, and frankly, sounded like they had no clue of how to enjoy their wealth or apply it to anyone’s benefit. Including their own.

Then, the additional size and cost of the project Aaron was just now formulating in his mind and proposing to her just so he could have seaside access from his home, well...he was speaking of the project as nonchalantly as if he were simply considering ordering a custom pair of shoes.

Zoe was again, as at her first meeting with the Armstrong youth, trying to wrap her mind around what it must be like to

virtually own the world as Aaron's family might as well as be said to do. Her "rich and famous" new acquaintances were so far away from the rarified stratus of the Armstrongs that she and they might as well as be paupers by comparison. Frankly, she doubted if anyone was in the same class as the Armstrongs. History hinted at their presences behind the thrones, for almost as far back as history had been recorded. Talk about "old money"! Everyone else was new money by comparison.

"You *are* going to tell me what the heck you are talking about sooner or later aren't you, Aaron? Breakwater jetties, docks, and drilling two hundred feet through rock to put in an elevator. I mean, I just called to say hi and apologize for not calling and somehow I started you on a construction project."

"I didn't get a chance to finish describing my house is why you aren't getting it." Aaron bubbled enthusiastically. "I was describing my house to you but not where it is located. I told you about my rotating upper two stories but not why I had them done that way."

"Are you ready for the big deal?" he asked dramatically.

"Sure, Aaron, give me your best shot." She challenged, though from the way Aaron had already described his home, she knew with rotating floors and all... *This guys "best shot" is probably going to be a doozy.*

"Okay, ta-da-ta daaaa..." Aaron verbally trumpeted a version of some kind of fanfare. "My house is built on a rocky peninsula that I had trimmed down to be narrow enough for my house to extend to the cliff edges and a bit over on three of its four sides. Like a glass-bottom boat I had my flooring that hang over the cliffs done in something transparent... Plexiglas or some such, so you can look right down to the waves crashing on the rocks and against the cliffs, and at night see the phosphorescence. I had the rubble that fell into the sea dredged to clear the ugly and now stand on my balcony and see the sea out of seventy-five percent of my windows. I can stop the three-hundred-sixty-degree rotation

and limit the movement of my upper floors to just an arc back and forth to where at or in any given area of the uppermost two floors. I don't have to see the land at all if I don't want to."

"You had your island trimmed down to build your house?" Zoe asked.

"Yeah, they blew stuff up and away with whatever they blow stuff up and away with these days, and *wham!*...trimmed things right up so we could begin reinforcing what was left to start putting the house on."

"You know, they had to put plumbing and all that kind of stuff in there too," Aaron stated like he had just given Zoe an important structural tip. He was youthfully proud of what he had had built but didn't really have a clue how it had been done, and surely didn't care what it had cost to have it done.

He continued, "Now, after talking to you I realized that I have essentially cut myself off from any possibility of directly interacting with anyone without using the family community facilities. And, I want to be, pardon the pun, an island unto myself. I want to be able to see and entertain a friend like yourself without parading you in front of my mom, dad, or uncle's staff, or worse yet that they happen to see you personally themselves..."

Zoe tried to interrupt his monologue to ask why his folks would be so averse to his seeing her as a friend, but Aaron was on a roll and wouldn't be interrupted.

"Anyway, I need an elevator down from my house through the rock to sea level so I can receive visitors by boat. And also because I personally love the ocean and boating is why I had the house built to overlook the ocean in the first place. I want my own fleet of boats and yachts and water toys to go down and play with, and...that is basically what you just now inspired by asking how to get here by boat."

"Oh yeah," he continued, "I want the helicopter pad with my own helicopter right here either outside or up on the roof if it will fit, cause, really...the only logical way off the island is by air."

Usually, though, we drive or just hop by helicopter to our air field on the island and take our jets off-island from there.”

Boy oh boy! Zoe had been marveling to herself listening to Aaron’s nonchalance in inadvertently describing some of the things in his life that were part of his day-to-day lifestyle. Psychologists would have to come up with a new classification for how the minds of the super duper and snap of the fingers powerful people of the world perceived things. They got things done for all purposes as far as they were concerned without any consideration for any hardships entailed in the doing with just a wave of their magic wands.

She could extrapolate some things from listening to Aaron just enthusiastically babbling on... and fantasize how such people as he desired something and just ordered their underlings/staff to simply “make it happen” or “make it so,” like a science fiction character with a careless gesture of the hand.

She had to smile as her imagination pictured this while whoever demanded such subservience was lolling indolently on a luxury royal purple divan. One pantaloon pant wearing servant would be slowly fanning them with a feathery ostrich plumed huge overhead fan, while another servant fed grapes one at a time by popping them into the overly indulged one’s maw from a golden platter.

Zoe shook her head to dispel the images. Specifically she had envisioned Aaron as the “overly indulged” one, and that wasn’t fair as he clearly wasn’t the fat, lazy, Sultan-type character that her fantasy image portrayed. Further, she couldn’t get the bygone days’ rich Arabian Nights stereotype image in her mind transferred into or onto a twenty-first century Midas type. And most certainly not...when she pictured Aaron as the designated modern-day indolently fat turban wearer.

“Whoa’ there, Aaron!” Zoe snapped her fingers by the pickup on her cell to get his attention, as he seemed bound to ignore that conversations were supposed to be two-sided. “Lemme’ get a

word in here edgewise, will ya?’” She informed the sudden silence that greeted her “whoa” and finger snapping.

There was a pause, and then, “Sorry, I don’t really ever get to talk to someone like me, except my brother, and I got carried away. But also I just moved in and things are kind of exciting and new now that I am eighteen. Plus, you got me thinking about what else the house needs,” Aaron said, though he didn’t sound very sorry and she suspected his opportunities for apologies were few and far between.

“That’s okay, but I really have to take care of some things, and I can’t stay on much longer,” Zoe said. “See what you can do with your helicopters and stuff, and maybe we can meet up somewhere soon in person.”

“I’ll be all over it!” Aaron vowed. “Soon as I get off with you, me, and my architect are gonna’ have a pow-wow, and I guarantee that the next time we talk a place for a helicopter will be built here.”

“How do you know that I won’t call you ten minutes from now, and your helicopter spot is still just a spot in your mind?” Zoe tried to trip him up in his promise.

“Ha-ha!” He crowed exultantly. “I told you next time I ‘talked’ to you, not next time you called. What if I don’t answer your call till the helicopter pad is done? Better still, I will call you when it is done and undermine your whole plan to make me out as a fabricator of falsehoods, a prevaricator, a procrastinator, or whatever you think is clever.”

Zoe didn’t get a chance to respond...again, before Aaron zoomed off on another tangent. “What’s your email address, by the way? I looked at your ‘ZOE’ website, but I’m not going to spin my wheels there. Texts are a pain on my cell, as that one-at-a-time-spell-out-stuff-hunt-and-peck deal takes too long. A full keyboard and/or voice recognition software is what I am talking about!” Aaron declared.

“All right all right all right.” Zoe was forced to loudly interrupt Aaron again. *Boy this kid has a fast mind and can hit on two three topics in a breath*, she thought to herself.

She gave him her personal email then said, “I really like talking to you, and frankly I enjoy hearing about and thinking about what it must be like to be you, but I really have to go now.”

“Okay, okay...one last thing,” Aaron rushed. “I will be letting you know by email how the construction is going, helipad first, and you get back to me with your itinerary so I can try to schedule to hook up with you somewhere...maybe another concert. Okay?”

“Later Bye.”

The phone went dead in Zoe’s hand, and once more as at the end of when they first met, she muttered, “Brat” before smiling to herself again and closing her flip phone. 8/8 12:50pm.

CHAPTER 10

What a mess, Lucifer thought to himself. Here I am with every eyeball upon me, and I really have no way to bow out of this fiasco without coming off weak.

He balefully glared around at those whom he considered the authors of his current dilemma. In essence, they were everyone and anyone except himself. He had come to see what was going on in what he considered his realm and suddenly found himself and his own actions to be the thing that was mainly going on because of how his underlings had in some way managed it to where he had the Archangel and a Seraph in his face.

He still wasn't entirely sure of what had been transpiring in his realm, while being convinced that his confusion had been orchestrated and wasn't just accidental.

But, Satan mused to himself...Michael isn't known for his subtlety. He was kind of known for his "take the bull by the horns" strategy (if that could be deemed a strategy at all), rather than patiently spinning a web that smacked of subterfuge and deceit.

Hmmm. He stroked his chin in the moment or two of silence since he and the Archangel had spoken.

For his part Michael was still resting still with his hands on the pommel of his sword, which was also still slightly imbedded in the earth. For all intents and purposes he looked as if he would remain there forever. He awaited The Lord of Hell's move, as it was surely Satan's turn at bat, having just found out that who he thought of as a minor angel, was in fact, the Archangel in disguise.

The other thing that caused Michael to bide was that The Holy Spirit had gotten back into the swing of things communication-wise after an unusual (as far as he was concerned) period of silence. And had led him to know to keep the Enemy focused on himself, so that the Seraph (for what reasons Michael did

not know) could sneakily melt away into the forest unnoticed. However as Lucifer had just called him a boot licker of The Lord now, and a future lackey of man, he felt called upon “to bide” physically but not to hold his tongue.

Finally...

“I would not bandy words with thee but rather with swords, but am to bide, however as hosts of thy minions attend, I would remind all that in the end The Lord God Of Hosts will provide that all his faithful Beings are rewarded. This then leaves thee and thy unfaithful kindred to the fate foretold for thee in Scripture. As will be so with the mortals who died in their sins, or who were even yet alive in their sins at the end...to go to their fates in accordance with the Prophet’s Revelations.”

“Rewarded how?” Satan responded, wheeling from facing Michael to lift his chin skyward and address his now combined hosts in a loud voice. “Rewarded by having flesh bags of at most, one hundred years of existence placed above you and those you call The Faithful?”

The Lord of Hell had spread his arms in a dramatic gesture and turned slowly so his host in every direction could behold his theatrics before continuing, “In what warped future can anyone such as we eternal Beings, both those you call ‘The Faithful’ and those I vow faithful to mine own vision, be happy with a creature such as man being in ascendancy over us?”

“Please!” Michael responded in his own stentorian voice. “Save the drama and performances for someone who cares! Even thine own browbeaten lackeys know that the time is coming when the petty triumphs in which thee now all take delight, will be over unto eternity.”

Lucifer wheeled to step toward Michael and hissed in a far lower voice, “I am not deluded by some idea that I will prevail now. I had cast my lot before the fall, not to replace Him so much as to be on a level with Him over all. To be a god with Him. That didn’t come to pass as we all know, in the heavens, but I have been

the god of this realm, and will be over all the man things that I keep from being saved. I would rather be ruler of my smaller kingdom than a lackey in a greater one.”

In response but still in a huge voice, Michael reminded Lucifer of what would be after the ending times;

“Thou shalt find that unto the end, when all are either in Heaven or in Hell, without being able to satisfy thine own ambitions to sway fresh victims from Salvation to give thee variety in eternity, thy kingdom will become but a tooth gnashing bore, whilst mayhap it becomes your very own private Hell.”

“Oh...and thus you propose for my doom, whilst perceiving your ‘reward’ to in part be an eternity of licking the boots of creatures now barely capable of perception, and this you would have me to believe to not be a bore?” Satan asked, now speaking at normal volume, truly introspectively thinking about the future and somewhat enjoying the repartee with someone whom he felt to at least be on some kind of an equal plane with him.

Satan could care less if all his hosts were chomping at the bit to be about their business or pleasures, though he knew his captains and overlords close by were straining their ears to hear things that they had never before heard discussed between the sides. Never mind what was turning out to be a verbal confrontation by those who would surely be the primaries in leading either side’s spiritual hosts in the coming showdown.



It was an interesting discussion of perspectives by the leaders, to say the least, and no matter what the underlings in the hosts might be thinking about, the few of Satan’s leaders who were somewhat privy to the repartee, needless to say...were all ears! (Some of them had big enough ears sprouting from their heads in any event, qualifying them to be described as “all ears”! Some even had a directional type of ear that could swivel to be aimed at the source of whatever they were trying to hear, as long as whatever passed for their head was vaguely facing the right direction.)

The repartee could undoubtedly not be heard by all of Satan's hosts, though Michael didn't think "The Enemy" really cared much, as his underlings had surely 'made their own beds (during the rebellion) and would have to lie in them'. For even had a 'loophole' existed for a fallen one's redemption after the rebellion somehow, their continued jealously hateful actions against man assured that said eternal 'bed' would be very uncomfortable indeed. This, no matter what they heard or thought of in regards to consequences at any time after the fall, and surely not just because Michael convinced any being that overheard now, that hard times were coming because of who they had chosen to follow millenniums ago.

"Aye. That being as it may be, Morning Star, ever ye fail to factor in The Omniscient, Omnipotent, and Omnipresent Holy Spirit, as integrated into, and One with The Faithful. The joy and peace of The Lord will unite all of the faithful, and be upon us always, both His Ethereal Beings and with Man. How, then, with the shared joy and peace of The Holy Spirit built in, can we take offense at another Creation of The Creator who also has The Holy Spirit indwelling?"

"Michael responded to Satan's goad about the tediousness of what the fallen one perceived to be The Lord's Angel's extrapolated future. He spoke in a normal tone of voice now and, like his enemy, really didn't care a whit whether the immediate audience in close proximity could hear or the swarms in the combined hosts overhead.

"I will answer when you are done." Satan allowed the Archangel to have his say. "I perceive that you have not arrived at your primary imparting and would allow you to finish your view of things."

"Fair enough, deluded one," Michael replied before continuing. "I would to wind this up in short order. Verily in truth...I canna even fathom the why I purpose to deign to bandy thoughts and words with thee." (That wasn't the whole truth but neither

was it a lie, as Michael knew he was to “bide” for a while to allow the Seraph time to sneak off, but why he bothered to seriously converse with the Enemy eluded him, though he knew he felt somehow compelled to put his own convictions out there.)

Michael finished his thought. “Yet...I question as to thy tunnel vision outlook enough to also ask if thee art so blind to the Truth that thou actually believeth in thine own spouting forth and implications? To wit that when all is said and done, and in making use of thy own intimate knowledge of The Lord, and the indwelling Holy Spirit as is in all The Faithful, that you delude yourself to believe that+ The Holy Spirit in one being could or would let a negative feeling toward another being also filled with The Holy Spirit...be even a possibility?”

“Is it my turn now? You want to be the all knowing sycophantic toady.” Satan asked Michael with a label slap.

“As you wish,” Michael responded in a low, gravelly voice that those who knew him would know to be evidence that he was growing angry. “I would that you use the words you bandy about a bit more carefully when addressing me, though.”

(Michael, had dropped the use of the affected Scottish brogue he had begun to assume some time after the Tyndale Bible had come out, after perusing it’s pages in ‘Ye Olde’ English’ and hearing it read by the English of the time. English was after all, a very recent assuming on his part, as he had been old before the beginning of the world. He and his kind were fascinated by the truths put plainly down, and had perused the Bible since it’s beginning in Greek, and in Latin. As no Angel had ever been given visions of the future, of mankind’s advent, or Prophecy about the ultimate doom of The Fallen, or even the Salvation and ascendancy of man over even the Angels on one hand, or their doom not unlike that of the Fallen, if without He, Who could have been their Savior. Yet all could be read in the Word of God, or heard out of the mouths of God fearing men.)

“Very well,” Satan responded with a semi bow in some kind of an aping of human graciousness. “I will strive to temper my invective while in range of your delicate sensitivities.”

“Now, let me explain how I will proceed into eternity, even without new humans to add to those whom have already been so kind as to turn their backs on ‘Daddy.’”

Here Satan struck another pose to derisively point a finger upward so who ‘Daddy’ was, wasn’t in doubt. “But...first...unless you are claiming to be having the Omnis’ yourself, which...” (Satan changed his voice volume down to a low hiss) “...you will recall that I kind of tried to obtain to no avail. Anyway, you have no idea of what you are talking about, as we are not yet at the time that you speak about. Remember: ‘Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is.’”

Satan paused here and pointed the same finger directly at the Archangel’s chest and once again addressed Michael in a loud voice so all within ear shot could hear.

“You have only *your* conjecture of how The Holy Spirit might affect you in regards to an eternity of sharing the heavens with these spawns of muck! You don’t think that I have knowledge that you lurk around Heaven because you can’t stand to be around these things? Bah, hypocrite!”

Lucifer was endeavoring to drive his point home now with what was (to him) not only pure logic, but an unassailable truth.

“Further,” he said pontifically (if such a description could be applied to him), “what you are describing as what you basically hope is how things in the future are going to turn out is belied by your every breath in the present.”

“Tell me right here and now how you feel about being in any way under or subject to such as man? Can you even perceive of such a happenstance to where these animals, even so as the ones you can hear at the man gathering right over there...in truth between us as once brothers: can you imagine them being in ascendancy over you?”

“I mean really?” Satan repeated the question with what Michael knew to be whatever passed for sincerity in a being whose very essence was normally one of deceit.

“What exactly does the Scripture mean when it says to the human animals in 1 Corinthians 6:3: “Know ye not that we shall judge angels? How much more things that pertain to this life?”

And also in Heb 1:4: “Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by

Inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.” Satan prodded Michael.

“What do those Scriptures do to your senses now, never mind what you hope The Holy Spirit will help change in you to make them more palatable in the future? Hmm?”

Satan wound up his sermon/third degree with another quiz-zical uplifting of his brows and waited with his hands on his hips for Michael’s response.

So, too, waited with baited breath the hosts within hearing and Satan’s retinue, along with such as Baloth and Torath who with each verbal exchange wished they were elsewhere, and had not gotten caught up in things. Baloth and Torath, of course, had their own agendas to think about during the discourse between the former Archangel and the current Archangel.

Namely, that focus on them and their failings and shortcomings would be hopefully deflected or lost as their Master’s attention was totally on the battle of wits, words, and in essence...theoretical after-ending times theologies that had somehow come to pass between he and Michael.

Michael had listened carefully at the end of Lucifer’s waxing forth and wasn’t real happy about having to formulate a logical defensive response to his Enemy’s pointed accusatory questions from that unworthy one’s perspectives. This was as his enemy’s logic, unfortunately...wasn’t entirely off base.

Even though the Archangel knew the Scriptures well and assumed that The Creator’s plan for cohabitation (so to speak) of

man in Heaven with the Angels was all going to be a fine thing indeed, nothing was in Scripture to say what the Angels would feel and think about it all.

During Lucifer's diatribe, Michael had known that he would/should have a good and powerful answer to Ol' Satan's blow-harding. And then an unfortunate occurrence came for Michael, in that though he knew he hadn't really had an answer himself, he had expected The Holy Spirit to give him one in a timely enough fashion to answer The Lord of Hell.

Lord, please don't fail me now, He glanced aloft hoping he could see a huge Divine ear catching his prayer. I know You are listening in to this, and probably are not chipping in with 'pearls of wisdom' because you are letting me know that I either shouldn't be here at all, or...if it was ok for me to be here, I should have kept my mouth shut...

"PRETTY MUCH." The Lord let him know.

Michael wasn't surprised to know The Lord's response, as it immediately came back to answer his prayer thoughts. It was typical to also *feel* a communication from The Triune God rather than just simply hear it, and so Michael was given to know by feel the humor that God felt over his predicament. It made Michael feel better that The Father wasn't being just stern with him, but that didn't allay his problem in answering Lucifer either.

First he had to dredge his memory to remember what had been said. "Oh, thank You, Lord," He thought, for The Holy Spirit in that instant refreshed his memory to where Satan's harangue was crystal clear in his mind. Then, in addition came from The Lord:

"TO QUOTE MAN, 'YOU HAVE PUT YOUR FOOT IN YOUR MOUTH' ABOUT WHAT YOU DO NOT KNOW, BUT I WOULD THAT YOU CONTINUE YOUR EFFORT TO DEFEND THE WORD, MY ARCHANGEL."

Well, there it was. The Lord had, in essence, thrown down His own gauntlet in addition to the verbal challenges that Lucifer had put forward in his arguments. The Lord had reminded Michael that he was Archangel, and first among The Lord's Faithful now,

as Lucifer had been before him, and that he should be able to hold his own against the former Archangel in repartee or riposte, whether verbal or physical.

All this had taken place during Lucifer's tirade and up to just a short time thereafter, but it was hard to pull the wool over the eyes of The Deceiver himself.

Satan's eyes had narrowed at the far off look in Michael's eyes, which undoubtedly meant that a Divine communication was in progress.

"Aha, you cannot answer me on your own, without His help!" Satan crowed in his loudest voice yet.

"Hold your blather Son of the Morning," Michael responded irritably, "As you know that I cannot lie as compared to your busy forked falsehood fabricating tongue, I will tell you this to allay your donkey brays."

Michael jerked his sword loose, and took a step toward The Lord of Hell while lifting the weapon merely to jab the air emphatically in punctuation of his words, then hearing a responding preparatory rattling of weaponry, stopped it's upward swing to horizontal. To instead point his left hand forefinger at Lucifer before beginning to shake the hand and finger up and down in an admonishment, while expostulating: "I didst' indeed ask The Holy Spirit for help in answering that which I did not know and was somewhat chastised for my bandying words with thee at all." Suffice it to be said that The Lord vowed to give me no help in formulating a reply to thee, and in my opinion this is as The Divine Creator does not wish to sully Himself with even indirect communication with such as thee."

Michael sheathed his sword, and folded his arms in what he hoped appeared to be a sufficiently authoritative posture before continuing...

"As is true with every being who knows that The Lord is, and that He is Omnipresent, Omnipotent, and Omniscient, we too know that He does not divulge all to anyone. The future is fore-

told in Scripture, but with rare exceptions, the visions that were given to a few men and then written are what any of us has to go on.”

Michael paused to drive home a point that had just occurred to him.

“It is also significant...again in ways known only to The Lord, why these visions have only been given to man, and not to we who granted, consider ourselves superior and eternal. Suffice it to say that the visions and dreams *were*, in fact, given to these inferior Beings for a reason—”

“AHA!” Lucifer exclaimed and interrupted. “You even classify these mud ball spawn as inferior, so—”

“SHUT UP,” came the stentorian bellow from Michael, which caused even the highest demon in the phalanxes of the Enemy’s host above to wince. Then the Archangel continued in a lesser voice.

“You had your long-winded oratory, now give me a minute to spout uninterrupted in response. That is, if you are capable of such a thing as fairness.”

Satan didn’t like it one bit, but even his fawning underlings could clock that he had been allowed plenty of time to have his say and that Michael had a point.

Michael waited a moment while Satan fumed with laser beam like eyes, with steam coming from his flared nostrils. But surprisingly...he had his spate of temper quietly.

“Now, as to lumping those men in their present state yonder (he jerked a thumb towards the gathering) in with what kind of Beings they will be for eternity in Heaven, that makes no sense and we both know it. They art now but newly created as a race, whilst individually new each in their personal physical bodies. The part of them that is eternal will not have dominance until these bodies die. Then man will emerge from the shell...from the womb...the embryo, to become that which will share our eternity. That they are inferior to us in their present state is redundant.”

Satan made as if to speak, and Michael held up a hand to stop him before saying, “One moment more and thee can again wax forth. We know not how we will relate to that which we have had no experience with. We just have The Word of God and Faith in His righteousness, just like man has...to believe in. And again, as I said before, I personally deem it hard to believe that the Author of Love is going to allow any bones of contention as man comes forth into his own in Heaven.”

A shimmering haze formed in the air, and as soon as Michael finished speaking and before Satan could respond, the Prince of Demons saw the Archangel begin to fade from sight, and he knew that it wasn't of Michael's volition, as he could read the surprised look of confusion on the Angel's countenance.



As the forest and Lucifer began to fade to black, a different, unfamiliar scene came into view. Michael was wondering what the big idea was when a Divine thought bombarded his consciousness; “You have moped about the heavens, and i would that you are allowed some autonomy to do as you will with my blessings.

“Cast about you as you will soon find yourself, and do what you will.” What Lord... is this to be some kind of test???

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Strongarm, who was directly behind the happenings in almost all of the Armstrong/Strongarm strategies, was observing Aaron while waiting for Stanch to get back from the palace and tell him what the results were of his Overlord and Tranth's meeting of minds...as regards the Armstrong son and secondary heir.

The burly demon was one of few upon whose brow could be seen the light of real intelligence. He also didn't affect an appearance other than almost how he had appeared back when he had been an Angel of Light.

Stanch had sent one of their few trusted minor demon messengers to inform him to pull off of Armstrong senior and stop in to see the "bone of contention". IE: one human female named Zoe, whom Stanch had already sent yet another minor demon to watch over and to report his observations to Strongarm when Strongarm arrived.

After seeing the female and discerning any obvious threat that she might pose, Strongarm was to find Aaron and then stay close by and observe him. He had, of course, been aware of Aaron's little bit of straying from the path, because he had been stationed with Armstrong when the call from Aaron's security forces came through for the senior Armstrong's determination. He was also woefully aware of the fact that because of all the secrecy surrounding the Armstrong/Strongarm Strategy, that they had few close-mouthed, loyal henchmen they could use to obsess or possess men they wished persuaded to any specific course of action.

Normally, they would have had hosts of demons at work and even had help with the corruptions of the Armstrong clan itself. That those hosts were sadly lacking was because minor demons had a habit of babbling to one another about anything at all,

never mind anything deemed noteworthy. And thus could possibly get overheard by an Angel.

Without The Holy Spirit to reinforce awareness, some fallen angels/demons had mentally fallen even further to where it wasn't unusual at all for an Angel of Light to listen in and overhear whatever was being babbled. Usually, of course, no one cared as the same old tug of war had been going on for millennia, and whatever temptations and sinful natures that man had had centuries before, such as greed, lust, hate, self condemnation, and so on, were still the most effective tools today and for the foreseeable future.

So, Angels weren't usually known to bother deliberately maneuvering to overhear a minor demon babble, but accidents did happen, and it was known in demonic circles that keeping secrets from The Lord's hosts was hard to do over long periods.

It was also known by demons such as Strongarm, Stanch, Tranth, and of course Satan himself that The Holy Spirit by virtue of the Omnis, knew all, even about the Armstrong family, though of a certainty, His minions in the Celestial Heavens did not.

This was something that through the ages all ethereal being came to know: That though The Lord knew everything didn't at all mean that He shared, even with His own team.

Satan and his immediate cadre would put forth feelers/pawns in the great game of who got Saved and who didn't, just to see if The Lord would allow the move(s) without moving his pieces/Angels to intercept...or not.

Long ago when initiating the Armstrong/Strongarm Strategy, Stanch and Strongarm had carefully watched for interferences attributable to Angelic interference, and having found none, were careful not to step on The Lord's toes (so to speak) and encourage any to be initiated.

They did this "Angelic interference" checking all of the time and specifically after encouraging some new machination by the Armstrongs. They didn't possess, or unduly obsess anyone in the Armstrong family or their immediate retinue and even danced

quite a bit in how they helped persuade other movers and shakers of mankind to comply with the Strategy.

They didn't want any attention and surely didn't want any Angels to quirk any eyebrows, even of their own volitions, without Divine guidance prodding them.

Strongarm had been watching over Aaron for some time since Stanch had first suggested to him that the younger heir might need supervision. That "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely" didn't seem to be doing much in the way of corrupting this young man thing. Likewise the sins of the fathers didn't seem to be getting visited to corrupt this particular son and potential heir.

There had been so many new technologies in the last one hundred years that there became a need to share communications capabilities, just to share, teach, or sell other technology. This was out of all proportion to how in the past the sharing of new inventions or innovations because of possible military applications, were not universally known before, in the history of man.

Strongarm knew without a doubt that as much time as this kid had probably put in on his computer in his short span of life so far, undoubtedly put Aaron far ahead of his own knowledge's, though he had millennia under his belt. The kid probably had learned more about worldwide history than Strongarm knew too, though Strongarm had existed and been a part of that same history.

As Strongarm had bounced in and out of both of the current heir's lives through his close supervision of their father and uncle, he knew that they knew more than he not only of current events but of those same technologies that allowed them to know and pick up things blindingly fast.

"These computers and this doggone internet!" Strongarm grumbled to himself.

Strongarm knew, perhaps as no other demon had done before now, that this information super highway deal was both good and bad. Corrupt man was having a field day using the internet

medium to corrupt others as well or better than television had done and continued to do. A couple of the bad things (in his opinion) as far as those with wealth, were that virtually everything was for sale and was displayed and purchasable by the touch of a keyboard, and virtually all the knowledge's of the world could also be accessed by the same touch.

When you could have anything you wanted at the drop of a hat, if you were rich enough, what cravings were there to work with for such temptations as Lust and Greed to work their corruptions? Power? When your family already had the power to cause wars, dictate to, and/or topple...governments...what other power available to man on this planet could be dangled before someone such as the current Armstrong Patriarch, who had been previously defined by the term "power mad" until even he was sated.

There was nothing left to tempt such with or to cause them to lust for, figuratively speaking...when you already had it all, and had it all from birth.

If such were available, to the old he could dangle a "fountain of youth," but that would not work on the still young, perhaps. *Offering to make one a god? Hmmm... Not that I can do that either.* But a lie that got results for Strongarm's purposes was just as good as the truth any day.

In mid thought, Strongarm paused to look around him at Aaron's new mansion. He didn't even know, nor want to know what all the doodads and modern day wizardry would do if one knew how to push the right button. He had been shaking his great head in wonder at the technology combined with the opulence of the rotating room he stood in, all the while listening to Aaron's phone call from Zoe.

He overheard Aaron's enthusiastic plans for enhancing on what to Strongarm was already ridiculously luxurious, albeit not to Strongarm's own ideas of what he would do if he built and furnished something opulent himself. His tastes would be more to the Arabian Nights type of draped and curtained festooning.

In any event, while listening, Strongarm was trying to pin down how to sway the young man thing to being suitably rottenly corrupted and power hungry, which was a veritable perquisite for whoever succeeded to become “The Armstrong.” Fear of outsiders needed to also be installed in the young man thing, so it would not go out among the masses as it had when meeting the female.

The only thing the he could think of was to somehow get the heir denied something he really wanted, so to encourage desires, cravings, or a lust for that which he could not have. This could lead to angers, frustrations, greed, and even rages coming to the fore, which were things that could be demonically worked with.

As far as frightening the young heir into not going out among the masses without proper supervision and protection, well...that could be easy enough to accomplish.

Perhaps a combined machination could be generated that would kill two birds with a stone, and allay the concerns of Stanch and Tranth on one side and coincidentally the concerns of the Armstrong family, who for years now had all unknowingly had about the same earthly goals and desires as their demon Masters.

They, of course, did not know that they were doomed pawns in the far greater spiritual endgame. All that they knew for sure was that they prayed to their nameless god, who might answer them in their dreams, and so guided...had been richly rewarded.

Hmm, Strongarm’s fiendish mind was percolating with the possibilities that were coming to the fore to accomplish his new objective, which was to administer corruption to Aaron along with a measure of fear and basic hatred of the common man.

Aaron should have been corrupt had he been a normal boy who lusted even after what a richer peer might have that he did not. But since Aaron had no peer in wealth except his own brother and just calmly accepted their station as the wealthiest of all in the most powerful of families, he wasn’t corrupted as his station in life was just the norm to him.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Gavin's plane landed, and after it taxied over to the arrival and departure staging area, he got off and strolled over to the waiting limousine.

A half hour or so before the plane had landed he had called his little brother and found out that he was home. He told Aaron that he would be arriving shortly and that he needed to hook up for a minute about something, but also wanted to see how the new house was coming along.

Gavin had found humor in how enthusiastic his brother had been that he was going to come over to ostensibly see the new mansion. Gavin knew that like himself, Aaron really had no one to talk to that either of them would consider as a peer, and so was probably just dying to show off his toys to someone that would appreciate them instead of perhaps just being in awe of the blatant extravagant expense involved.

Gavin had known about Aaron's new mansion's location as any who visited, never mind lived on the island knew of any large new structure. For most family members and denizens of the island had at one time or another during the course of any building being built on the island, flown in or out of the Armstrong private airport. From the air they could all see pretty much the entire island at a glance. The blowing off of the cliff faces had been a not too subtle giveaway also that something was being destroyed and built on that side of the island.

The Armstrongs used helicopters frequently to go from even just one home to the next in order to save their valuable time, and of course helicopters were the favorite vehicles used for short trips to nearby mainland resorts or shopping or whatever and certainly for island hopping. Not that the island was so big that

one couldn't drive across it in short order were the roads straight and the hills leveled.

On Armstrong Island, though, the opposite of the norm had happened. As technology had allowed, instead of leveling things or cutting through hills to allow better or straighter roads or even roads made out of old goat paths, the Armstrongs were deleting roads in favor of air travel. Soon, some opined, virtually all travel between the mansions by Armstrongs would be by air, and, in fact, things were in the works for a separate fleet of small 'stealth quiet' helicopters to be ordered to be used only back and forth across Armstrong Island.

As the current Armstrong Patriarch had put it succinctly, "Why travel as the peon masses do and waste time when in a few seconds we can go anywhere on the island by air?"

(One shortcoming to this that some would have pointed out had anyone dared to contradict The Patriarch's expounding was that the "peon masses" were in part comprised by the maids, butlers, and cooks [to name just a few] who did not have access to air transport and, though living on-site, had families and outside interests.)

Gavin had opted this time to use a limo, as Aaron's new house was really so close that he just didn't feel like getting windblown by the rotors getting in and out of a helicopter for the minute or so difference to be gained by going by air instead of by car.

He didn't know that had he ordered a helicopter to be standing by for his arrival, he would have been informed in short order that Aaron's new house didn't yet have landing facilities.

Aaron heard the muted chiming sound that in most Armstrong homes meant that an Armstrong family member had arrived at the automatic front gate. The staff and delivery also had to use the same gate as guests did at Aaron's new house, as opposed to other Armstrong mansions that had a separate gate for the lowly delivery and staff workers. The coming and goings of workers and such were not heralded by any audio warning, though, no matter what entrance was used.

For Aaron, this was delete comma in fact, the first chime announcing the arrival of a family member that he had heard in his new home, as no other family member or guest had come to his new place before.

He heard the sound of his butler's voice as his brother was greeted and let in, then the familiar sound of Gavin's voice in the imperious tones he used with servants. No doubt his brother was getting directions on where in the new mansion that Aaron could be found, from the hapless servant.

Footsteps approaching lent credence to that this was probably so.

"Aaron, where are you?" Gavin's voice echoed from the hallway.

"I'm in here," Aaron answered.

"Yeah, well...where is here? I need a roadmap. Why did you need such a big house? You could play baseball in here." Gavin mumbled to himself primarily but loudly enough so his little brother could still hear him.

He rounded the corner that led to the sunken living room, where Aaron had been looking through an antique brass barreled telescope. "This place is too doggone big," he said. "You need some of those two wheel gizmos that you stand on and ride around, you know those gyroscope deals? You might also want to do something with the acoustics in the halls. I couldn't hardly hear myself think from how loudly my footsteps were echoing. Rugs or something would work."

"And now, ladies and gentleman, we have heard from the voice of experience," Aaron crowed while striking a theatrical pose with arms widespread as if addressing an audience.

Aaron remembered how just two years before his brother had moved into his own new house, which had been also prepared for him by his eighteenth birthday, and was still today trying to get it all together to where he wanted it. Their hectic scheduling didn't allow much time for the frivolous niceties of décor, but Aaron did recall how some of the spaces in Gavin's house had been echo

chambers just like his own still had, long after his brother's mansion had first been moved into.

Gavin had finally had a designer and sound engineer come in and install carpeting where necessary and huge decorative sounding boards and numerous pictures to help with deadening the echoes. It had taken a while, as no one could hang or install anything until Gavin approved of the appearance of any given item.

The fact of the matter is that most every Armstrong family member continuously changed the appearances of their dwellings from either boredom or from an effort to do a "one-upmanship" kind of deal, in comparison with and/or to do something exotic over and above what another family member had. With unlimited budgets as no one cared a whit about costs, all was fair. The Armstrong women had long ago set a kind of limit of twenty-five thousand square feet for living space, so sheer enormity alone wouldn't be able to constitute being one up on your peers.

Interior walls were changed around and it became a long-standing tradition among the Armstrong women to always live in a home that was in some state of structural or decorative flux. The men believed that so occupied, their womenfolk would be less inclined to begrudge their virtual "confinement" on the island... not like that of a cloistered nun or sister in a convent. Not that the men didn't want their bowling alleys and billiard rooms and such to be richly appointed as well.

Gavin smiled depreciatively in recognition of the truth of his brother's chiding about the already (in his opinion) never-ending changes to get his own home just right. That his house had been an even worse echo chamber to begin with than Aaron's was now, both knew to be a given.

This was as Gavin recalled all too well how Aaron had bugged him in the planning and developing stages of decorating this house so to have a head start on some of the issues that Gavin had had to go through before his house had become *his* house. Echoing hallways being a noteworthy problem when one had cavernous spaces and high ceilings.

“Okay...touché,” he told Aaron while looking around at the nautical décor of the living room. He knew, of course, that his brother was into the things and stories of the sea, shipwrecks, and heroic sea battles from the Napoleonic Wars with Nelson at Trafalgar, to World War I and II stories. The huge battleships and the nuclear vessels both under and over the waves fascinated him as well.

“I know you’re just dying to show me around, so let’s get on with it. I have to call dad after a bit and get home to dinner on time for once or have to put up with Marianne”—Gavin’s current live-in girlfriend/concubine—“hanging a face again.” Gavin rolled his eyes at the end of his little spiel to punctuate having to satisfy the women folk while waving an arm to indicate that Aaron should lead on and give him the tour.

“I just made some more plans today and made a few calls to get the ball rolling, but I have some trippy stuff going right now that you’ll dig. You can see all the stuff that I managed to order new and bid on at auction to get this room going how I want it, but upstairs is where things are really cool.” Aaron pointed above his head before taking off across the sunken living room floor to mount the two steps to the standard level of his ground floor in a leap.

He strode past Gavin back into the hallway, and with a, “Come on,” thrown hastily over his shoulder; he headed back toward the center of the first floor, which was close on to where the foyer that Gavin had stepped into when he first came in the mansion.

Sure enough, Aaron, with Gavin at his heels, got back to the foyer and hung a right down a short hallway that opened out into a circular room with a high ceiling. In the center of the thirty-foot-diameter room was a round elevator that stood open with a portion of what appeared to be a semi-circle couch for the occupants to sit on as the elevator went up or down. Aaron stepped inside and beckoned Gavin to do likewise.

“This bad boy is key to the house’s security, as without it there is no way for anyone to get into or leave the upper floors. They

are, in essence, built around the elevator and you will see why in just a minute.” Aaron told Gavin as he hit the button marked two on the control panel.

There were five levels indicated. One said ‘G’, then ‘1’, ‘2’, ‘3’, and ‘R’, respectively. Gavin knew these to be as indicated on his own elevator in his own house as from garage through the living spaces, and up to the roof.

Aaron had punched the 2 level, so it was fairly obvious that the entry and floor that they had just left was the first floor.

The ultra quiet smooth elevator came to a stop and the door silently opened; even Gavin was impressed by the vista to be seen through the curved glass windows of the enormous exercise area, that dwarfed anything that was possible for anyone to paint in a land or seascape.

Then he noticed that the ocean was moving and at first thought that it was in fact a huge video screen like he had seen years ago in a museum, but then the faintest of vibrations could be felt under his feet through the floor, and he spun around to look at the elevator.

The door to it was already being rotated away from, and Gavin could see the line around the circular tube shape that continued up through the ceiling and again was separated from the ceiling panels by another demarcation line. He took a step back toward the tube to look more closely and could see that the carpeting ran just shy of the tube, and that any given spot on the modern deco wall paper on the tube was slowly being left behind as the entire floor rotated around the elevator shaft.

Gavin chuckled aloud and delightedly turned to Aaron who had stood there grinning, awaiting his brother’s recognition and then reaction to the marvel of engineering that the rotating floors represented.

“Pretty cool the rotation deal. You really got it going on here,” Gavin said. “Are you actually going to use any of this stuff that you have all over the place, or is it all for show and to make someone think that you are a little Hercules in the making?”

“Hey,” Aaron exclaimed indignantly, “I was just working out a while ago before you called. I don’t know if I will use everything, but my trainer said to get things and try them to see which ones I like. My trainer is in a control room and can monitor all the doo-dads and my workout. You know, heart rate and stuff...to make sure I do what I am supposed to do.”

“You mean he is trying to get you to do what he knows you need to do to get where you told him you want to be, even though he knows you aren’t even going to come close to doing it.”

I cannot believe that all that gobbledygook he just said, actually made sense, Aaron contemplated a bit before comprehending his brother.

Gavin noticed the look Aaron gave him and smiled a bit wolfishly. He had gleaned this from experience with his own personal trainer, but also from knowing how his little brother would get on a kick, buy a bunch of stuff with the sincerest good intentions of the moment, but then end up going off on another tangent and spacing out what he had started out to get done. *Of course our servants just love us when we buy something and then tell them to get rid of it.* He grinned again remembering one of the few occasions when he had last been in the servant’s quarters. *Boy, these guys have some pretty nice stuff! We must be paying them pretty doggone good!* Then the realization hit him that he had seen most of the better pieces before, either in his own house, or in another of his family’s houses.

Gavin wasn’t really interested in anything pertaining to Aaron’s house, and certainly wasn’t much interested in his brother’s exercise gear except to be polite. He was specifically there to satisfy his father’s wishes that he check in on Aaron and see what was going on with this “Rock Star Chick,” as Gavin was coming to think of her. He, as with all the Armstrong clan, had such a full schedule that usually even when flying from point A to point B they had something that they were supposed to do so to not waste time in flight. And there was always their never ending

schedule of learning, which in itself was grueling to the point of being as one in a salaried position, and far exceeded a mere forty hours a week.

So this thing with Aaron that his father had suddenly laid on him was not scheduled, and while obeying his father (like he had a choice, he thought wryly) other things scheduled still had to get done, and trying to figure out how to get back on schedule after he got done with his impromptu Aaron visit, while seeming interested in Aaron's new bells and whistles was....*Well, no wonder Dad and Grandpa looked like one did and one now does, at such an early age.* Once again, Gavin resolved that his tenure in power was not going to put him in the dirt at such a young age as his forbearers.

He was trying to think of how to politically get around in short order to asking Aaron what the deal was with the Rock Star Chick, and why specifically he had stepped outside of protocol just to see her when the thought occurred to him to shoot straight from the hip on the deal. (This was kind of new for Gavin, as it wasn't the norm for how his type of Armstrong went about their machinations, which was usually as crooked as a dog's hind leg.)

"...upstairs is the same way." Aaron was still describing his mansion, not knowing that what he had been saying had somewhat been falling on deaf ears, and taken a distant back seat, as far as Gavin's paying attention.

"Yeah, that is really cool," Gavin said, only dimly aware of what Aaron had been babbling about, but he had decided to take the bull by the horns...so to speak...

"Hey, Aaron, what's this I hear about you having a thing for this Zoe chick, enough to break security protocol for?"

Aaron stopped in mid-stride on his way to get the controller that would allow him to open up one of the power-actuated, sliding, semi-circular patio doors so he and Gavin could go out on the balcony deck and look out over the ocean.

He wasn't really surprised that his brother knew about the Zoe deal, as he had expected his uncle Gilbert to hit him up about it

days ago. Another thought was that maybe even his father might have had something to say about it.

Some time had passed, though, and he was happily coming to believe that his little side jaunt hadn't been noteworthy as far as ringing any bells that he would have to deal with and/or be criticized about by the powers that be.

He turned toward Gavin and put as innocent and indignant of a look on his face as he could muster before replying, "I knew it... See, I was thinking that everything might be taken out of proportion.... And I don't "have a thing" for her. I just went to see the gal in person to celebrate my eighteenth birthday, and I wouldn't have even done that if I hadn't just happened to pass by a sign that told me she had a concert just then about to start a short distance away."

"Doggone, Gavin, you know how much I like her music anyway, so why are you of all people asking this goofy junk for? Did Uncle Gilbert or someone put you up to it?" Aaron asked.

"For your information, it was Dad who asked me to find out what you are up to and make sure that you don't do something dumb. But you know Aaron, that unless I get run over by a bus, soon I will be running the show around here, and I am going to be the only one that has the authority to hold you accountable in the long haul, so pretend it is just me asking and forget about Dad and Uncle Gilbert."

The two brothers looked at one another for a long moment before Aaron (kind of shiftily Gavin thought) broke eye contact, and Gavin pounced.

"What's up, Aaron?" Gavin asked pointedly. "And don't give me you were just there for the music on your birthday line, okay?"

"This sucks!" Aaron declared. "I thought that for once I could do what I wanted, especially as it was my birthday. And still I get the third degree about something that wouldn't even have lifted an eyebrow if I wasn't an Armstrong."

"That's the point," Gavin said with a tired sigh that was more suited to someone far older. "We are different, and you are an

Armstrong...and an Armstrong heir to boot. Don't you feel it? I mean look at the news. Look at our staff and compare yourself to even the executives, politicians, lawyers and spokespersons that we have in our retinues. It is hard to believe that we are even from the same species, never mind think that we can just mingle in with them on some kind of equal footing, even the ones who are carefully chosen, never mind a commoner off of the street."

"Yeah well...that is kind of *the* problem, Gavin....."

"You graduated two years ago, and since then I hardly get to see you. Who else do I have to talk to around here?" Aaron questioned, not expecting an answer. "The servants are so submissive and in awe of us that it irritates me. I tell them things like; 'Dude, lift your head up and look at me when you say something, I'm not down there on the floor,' and they look up at me like I am trying to get them to grow a third eye or whatever, like its an impossibility."

"Man, I tell you, Gavin, I don't know how you stand it having everyone kiss your butt all of the time."

Gavin hadn't realized until this very moment how different he and Aaron were. They had had camaraderie during their pre-graduation years that he thought meant that they were kindred in development, but it seemed that his brother saw things quite a bit differently than he did.

"Whoa there! Are you saying that you would prefer to have staff that are not subservient to you? I mean...we could talk to mom and them and see if someone from the family would come over and run the household for you so you had a peer to speak to sometimes instead of only just having your servants around. Really Aaron, I thought we agreed that we couldn't wait to get away from having family in our face all of the time, and get our own pads"

"No, Gavin, you aren't getting it. I am just using the staff for an example. They are in such awe of us that they are useless as someone to even hold the shallowest of conversations with. I mention the ocean and they think that I am nuts because I spoke to

them about something that wasn't specifically in relation to their job functions. They are useless for conversation or for any kind of inspired thought...I mean that they don't inspire thought...I mean...heck, I don't know what I mean...but I might as well be talking to a post for the all the mental stimulation that I get from any of them in return, and it is not because they are stupid, it is simply because I am an Armstrong."

Aaron had been getting quite excited as he warmed to trying to explain the nuts and bolts of his discontent to his brother whom he had been sure would easily relate to where he was coming from. For both had the exact same roots, though the problem must be even more accentuated now for Gavin, with two years of advanced study with their uncle under his belt...and as he was the Heir Apparent.

Then he tried to explain some of his jumbled feelings about, and justifications for... his dealings with Zoe using this context for a premise, but had to admit to his brother that he couldn't figure how to tell even Zoe, about how it was to be an Armstrong and therefore forced into being a reluctant isolationist.

Seeing Gavin's quizzical frown, Aaron realized that they were not on the same page at all, and so stopped short in relating that he had come to believe that no one except...another Armstrong heir could understand what it was to be an Armstrong heir and a potential Armstrong Patriarch as they were, was yet another level unknown to anyone, even another Armstrong.

But...*Dang, not even my own brother gets where I am coming from!* Aaron came to a conclusion dejectedly.

"Man, Aaron!" Gavin exclaimed. "You know that almost without exception our staff and servants are descendants of staff and servants before them. They were raised to be how they are by their parents and grandparents. Some of our servant's families have been with the Armstrongs for a thousand years. How else do you think they are going to act if raised on the island among we few and our executive staff, and having been indoctrinated

since birth by their parents to be subservient to us all, then be specially appointed to serve you, I, or even Dad or Uncle Gilbert?

“Aaron, they watch the news too and know that for all intents and purposes we are so far above them in the scheme of things, that our word can mean life or death to them and their families. How did you think they are going to act when you try to make like they are your buddies or something? Geez!” Gavin exclaimed distastefully as if the thought was totally unpalatable or repugnant to him (which it was).

“You still aren’t getting it, Gavin!” Aaron declared and waved his arms wildly to encompass their surroundings, as if his brother could see his gestures.

“I know that these guys...who work for us here are flunkies, whatever...and I know it is virtually useless for me to try to relate to them! That is the point. That is why I suddenly stopped to see Zoe, frankly...mostly out of sheer loneliness. I was trying to celebrate my graduation, which we both know means more than just from school in our family. It means that we are graduating from the humdrum studies and moving into learning things that are exciting and specifically designed for our edification and educations. AND, I had no one to share this supposed momentous occasion with because you weren’t around.”

“Well, if that is all that got you tripping, why didn’t you call me or someone in the family to see if one of us could break loose and do something with you?” Gavin asked.

“I left a message with your staff,” Aaron answered. “Anyway, that is how when I saw the concert ad and figured to go do some celebrating on my own. I didn’t really plan to meet the gal, but I wanted to relate to someone...anyone, who wasn’t an Armstrong puppet and who wasn’t going to be nodding their head no matter what I said. I wanted someone to be real with me who was on some kind of equal plane with me.”

Gavin knew one thing for sure, and that was that in his opinion unless you had your head buried in the sand and had never

heard the Armstrong name, you couldn't help but be intimidated by the power and wealth that Armstrong himself, or an Armstrong heir, represented.

"So, you think that this Zoe, a simple rock and roll person, whom Dad told me is from humble stock, was *not* intimidated by who you were? You have got to be kidding me!" Gavin said this with a depreciating laugh.

"Go ahead please and tell me what you talked about, and how she reacted to who you were and the things that she must have noticed about you that were different from anyone else she could possibly be at all familiar with. Please enlighten me." Gavin demanded.

Truth to tell, Aaron now had Gavin's complete attention, and the older brother really was interested in how the meeting between his brother and the entertainer had gone, for Gavin himself had never had such an encounter in his sheltered life and was truly curious. It was an undeniable fact, that everyone who was not his brother, his father, his uncle or his mother, looked upon Gavin as the next Patriarch and therefore someone far above their station in life. So yes, even those of his family who were not in his immediate family behaved in a subservient manner to him, and justifiably so, in Gavin's opinion

Being treated as an equal, or unbelievably...as an almost unwanted intrusion as this Zoe had almost done to his brother (if Aaron's security team's report was any indication) was unknown territory for Gavin unless you were an immediate family member.

Aaron, for his part, thought about the initial meeting with Zoe and how to put his feelings into words that his brother could relate to. That how he had thought and felt in the original interview with her had been impacted by his phone call with her just shortly before Gavin's arrival was a given. So, he was trying to compartmentalize his thoughts and feelings to only encompass the first meeting with Zoe for his brother's benefit. He wasn't trying to hide the phone call but wanted Gavin to experience by proxy how that first meeting had gone and was now remembered.

“Okay, first...and you might not believe this...first; she didn’t even want to see me though her manager had told her that I was one of *the* Armstrongs. She had too many admirers and hangers-on who wanted something from her already to give the time of day to anyone no matter how puffed up with their own importance they were...”

Gavin had sat down in a nearby chair to listen to his brother’s description of things, and his mouth virtually fell open a bit in wonder of such an almost censoring of an Armstrong. If these things ever happened when an Armstrong sent out feelers through their staffs, no rebuffs had been reported that he knew of in any recent memory.

Aaron continued, “And she told me so exactly. She did say, however, that she only allowed me to come see her because she was curious from all the publicity we have had about our reclusive lifestyles and from all the blather about how powerful we are... owning the world and Master of the universe hype type stuff...”

“See, I told you—” Gavin began when Aaron said

“Stop right there, Gavin, and let me finish!”

Gavin’s mouth snapped shut and his lips formed a bit of a grim line, but he let his little brother have this small triumph simply because he was really curious about what he would hear next.

“As I was saying...” Aaron continued. “She told me that there were so many people who wanted to get next to her just because she was famous, for her wealth, or because of her looks...that she just about stopped seeing anyone new or that she didn’t know... period.”

“What I’m telling you, Gavin; is that there *are* people in the world that have similar problems as I have, if not exactly the same...” Aaron’s voice kind of began to die out as their exclusivity hit him again which made him finish his thought with, “... as someone *like* we are, because there doesn’t really seem to be anyone else like us. Is there?”

“That is what I am trying to tell you, Aaron. We are unique, and even our wives and ladies are carefully chosen and educated for

us to know their places and ours in the cosmic scheme of things. You can't just go out and say, "Howdy, I am Aaron Armstrong and I want to be your friend, lover...whatever."

"Well," Aaron continued stubbornly, "she wasn't all in awe of me like our servants, or virtually anyone else that I have met. So in spite of what you are saying, and though I agree some of it has truth...there are people like Zoe out in the world who know of us but don't have us up on the pedestal that you seem to think that they should have us on. I think our servants have been, as you say, 'indoctrinated' from birth to hold us in awe and as on a higher plane, but it is not the natural order of things as you suggest it should be, with outsiders."

"Aaron, you are starting to get me mad." Gavin fumed. "You know for absolutely positive that we are *not* the product of natural selection or came to be from the natural order of things... whatever that means. We are the products of millennia of careful breeding and enhanced educations to foster superior intellect and superior bodies. The only natural thing for the commoners to think and feel about us is that they should naturally look up to us as superior Beings...period."

"Gavin, what do you want from me? What does dad want from me? I enjoyed talking with Zoe, and it was a refreshing difference from talking to anyone on the island, who are practically the only people that I have talked with in my entire life. I know that Dad and Uncle Gilbert have to have communications with outsiders who don't bow and scrape to them, so this might be a good thing for me to just get to know how people perceive us off of the island."

"Yeah...maybe," Gavin grudgingly allowed. "So, you are telling me that this Zoe Rock Star gal has no special significance to you and that everyone should relax? You aren't getting romantic with her or anything like that?" He continued before Aaron could answer his statement-like questions.

"Dad didn't really seem too bent out of shape about it, but you know how controlling he is, and you don't want him to think

you are going outside of his area of influence too much or too far. Anyway...you're saying you are cool about this Zoe person and not going to do something to get Dad's nose out of joint, right?"

"Yeah, I'm all good," Aaron replied. "Now did you want to see my pad or not?"

Gavin looked at his watch, sighed, and got up to with a wave of his hand indicate that Aaron should proceed on out onto the patio, whose door had stood open, beckoning, during the exchange about Zoe.

Gavin stopped Aaron just before they went outside on the veranda by laying a hand on his brother's arm.

"Why don't you just text or give me a call right away when next you get any wild hairs, and I'll tell my staff to put you through no matter what, unless...I am with Dad or Uncle Gilbert. Okay?"

"All right," Aaron agreed. "But I still am going to reserve the right now that I am eighteen to try to adjudicate what is and what is not a 'wild hair' as pertains to what I propose to do. I get the feeling that what is a wild hair to you isn't the same as what might be one for me."

Gavin glanced at his watch again and shook his head at his younger brother before responding. "Aaron, I am out of time for this little gabfest. You already told me what's up, and I told you what's up. As far as wild hair determinations...you and I both know that for now, the great and all-powerful Armstrong...our Dad, decides what goes."

"Now, hurry up and show me your toys and whatever so I can get home to Marianne before she blows a gasket again.

"I'm surprised you haven't traded her in yet," Aaron responded as he led the way outside.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Jon had gone back to Heaven pleased with himself and with his charges Ben and Morty. The Seraph actually came within a fudge of being what wasn't really Angelically permissible, and that was to be proud of himself.

Of course, Jon knew it surely wasn't only by his personal efforts, that what had been accomplished had been accomplished, but as he had basically a free hand to comport himself as he willed in getting his goals realized, he felt a little self-congratulations were in order.

He had only just returned to Heaven when The Holy Spirit spoke to him advising him that he was needed back on the world of men.

This is unusual, and he only had a moment to think before God the Father answered his unspoken question of why such activity after such a long period of slack.

“As you know, the ending times are near. The enemy has had free reign in areas unknown to you. I would that you observe their actions toward, and their influences over...a certain female of man, and child of your lord, and persuade the enemy to abide by the rules in her regard.”

Jon knew that “unknown to you” meant in essence not here-to-fore having been of note to the Angelic Beings, not just unknown by Jon personally. What the “influences” that The Lord was referring to from the Enemy was pretty vague as all Beings knew that they were to either keep one from their Salvation by whatever wiles, or to keep a Saved one in a backslidden state if they had gotten Salvation... What “actions” The Lord was referring to remained to be seen. Jon wondered anew at why The Triune God, with so many ways of communicating, including just putting in one's mind exactly what was meant by His communication in the first place, so to be directly understood, well...Jon had not a

clue. Why all the cryptic—“My seraph...would you question my wisdom in the way i impart my impartings?” Came a sharp pulse of communication from the lord interrupting jon’s thoughts.

Jon wasn’t too fazed, as he detected humor in The Lord’s interruption of his thoughts. While all knew the Son’s parables to men, instead of coming right out with how things related. And so it was as usual with God the Father. Jon knew that there must be a reason for what seemed as riddles. Perhaps it was so the one’s who heard, really had to think on The Lord’s Word, and only with The Holy Spirit to guide one were things made crystal clear.

The Lord’s thoughts formed in his mind and communicated to him on far more than an audio level, to where at the end of the message Jon had seen a kind of circle vision video of Zoe in concert, and then a flash of her dancing and moving about the stage from above. This view then faded through to where just the roof of a building could be seen, and then as like a camera zooming out from having been zoomed in, the building became smaller. Soon the block, and then the surrounding areas, encroached on the view shown to Jon’s mind, and finally the whole city was to be seen as from thirty thousand feet in the air.

The Seraph easily recognized the city and knew where to find “Zoe,” which was obviously The Lord’s intent in the visualization.

At that moment Jon was given to know that The Lord was done communicating, though of course the Presence of The Holy Spirit was to the discerning, always known and felt to be present in His creations, both of man and His Ethereal Hosts.

For men, it was The Small Voice of The Holy Spirit that was perpetually as a voice of their conscience, no matter that one didn’t have their Salvations or that the specific human was about as rotten as they come and almost surely hell bound. The further in a State of Grace that a Saved one was, though, the louder The Small Voice could become. The Lord was easier to hear and heed, might be a better way of putting it.

Of course, the less sin (Separation from God) anyone had, the easier it was to hear The Small Voice. A Divine feeling of peace

was also to be had while in a State of Grace, and after a while the discerning Christian could actually tell if he or she was in need of forgiveness.

Jon was considering his options and wondering exactly what The Lord had in mind, when a familiar one of the Heavenly Host came up to him.

“Farol,” he acknowledged the lesser Angel who had so recently helped him on his last mission among mankind. Or are you Michael in disguise again? He asked facetiously. He of course knew the answer as only the Creator could be in more than one place at the same time.

Farol ignored the jibe, as he knew Jon knew the Farol before him was indeed...Farol.

“Seraph, I have been sent to yet again assist you in your objectives,” Farol answered and informed Jon with the appropriate salutation using Jon’s station as an identifier, though standing on ceremony was not important among The Lord’s Hosts as it was among the Enemy’s minions. This was as the many Beings under God in the Heavens were all connected by The Holy Spirit, and all knew that titles were only differentiations and not necessarily denoting something like promotions through the ranks, which was typical with the enemy hosts.

Jon was, of course, again in his ethereal Heavenly form, and with two of his six wings spread, he bowed in agreement and acknowledgment.

“This will be an interesting assignment from every perspective, Farol,” Jon said. “Are you familiar with man’s music today?”

Farol’s glow brightened somewhat at the Seraph’s words, as that worthy’s countenance would often do at hearing good tidings. While Michael was surely not alone in his having grown weary of watching man fall prey to their own sinful natures and the demonic orchestrations, to where most Angels who were involved with the doings of man were bored with their status of being mere observers.

Their purpose seemed to be to only monitor and provide a discouraging preventive presence to the enemy minions desires to exceed the restrictions imposed on them, as well as on The Angels by The Lord, to prevent either from having undue influences on mankind.

“I have heard some of the caterwauling that man currently calls music, and it falls far short of what used to be the norm for man even within one man’s lifetime,” Farol answered Jon.

“Well, Farol, we go to observe the unusual rituals that are involved in the performance of what is now considered popular to man in music and dance, or to at least some of mankind.

Jon shrugged, knowing how uninformative his information was, he confided his take on the matter. “The Lord has only seen fit to inform me that we are to observe a certain female at this task and in this human lifestyle and discern enemy influences to decide on a course of action, if needed.”

As they had been speaking, the two Angelic Beings had gently wafted towards the Gates of Heaven, and then with a simple, “Attend me,” by Jon to Farol, the two fell away from Heaven toward Earth.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Strongarm, still at Aaron's mansion, had listened to Gavin and Aaron and was gleaning yet more insight into what kind of minds this generation of heirs had developed. He could readily see that Gavin had developed more traditionally in line with a like mind-set to his progenitors. The sins of the fathers seemed to have found a home in him.

Aaron, on the other hand, was really looking and sounding like he was going to be a problem child from the standpoint of how he would need to become, as opposed to how he currently was, should something happen to Gavin and Aaron have to assume the mantel of being The Patriarch.

Strongarm was not hearing anything from listening to Gavin and Aaron, which even remotely made him think Aaron could fulfill the Armstrong family's destiny as was laid out in their unwritten guidelines for the Strongarm/Armstrong Strategy.

He was in fact, all the more convinced that his earlier impressions that had him ready to take decisive actions to change the young man thing's ways were going to need to be initiated immediately.

With that in mind, Strongarm didn't waste time listening to the siblings further but flapped his ethereal, bat-like wings to rise up through Aaron's mansion to get his bearings before heading west towards the setting sun.

A few hours of travel mostly over the Atlantic brought him back to the city where he had previously stopped by to observe Zoe himself and hear the report from the demon underling (one Retch by name) that Stanch had assigned specifically to observe her.

Zoe had already had several demon minions about her that Retch found present when he took up station to observe her. They were there only to observe, because she had, (to demon-

kind's gratification) fallen away from her Christian parents and, though a Christian herself, was following a path that had built up quite a bit of unrepented for sin, which made The Small Voice of The Holy Spirit so faint that she only remotely felt or heard it.

This was, of course, what demon kind liked when one was a Christian. First, though, there came the struggle to keep someone from becoming a Christian and getting Salvation in the first place. Failing that was the even greater effort to prevent the Saved one from Evangelizing and bringing any other human to The Lord, which was usually accomplished in a "backsliding". Then finally was the epitome. The demonic 'Grand Slam'. The furthering of a backslide into the doing of the sin for which there is no forgiveness which was when one knew Jesus as their Lord and had their Salvation, to turn about and renounce The Lord and claim Satan as their god. But only once in a blue moon was the circumstances right for such a demonic effort, so far and away was to just relax assailments, and let the backslidden one have pleasures and things of the world, to keep happily occupied in their sins.

So, the other demons present were there on the orders of whomever their Captains, Lieutenants, and Overlords were, to try to keep Zoe happily on the wrong path, as it were. Success in her worldly endeavors leading to the adoration of her fans was one thing they encouraged, along with financial success. Both kept a non-Christian or even a Christian who was backsliding happily focused on things of the world rather than things of The Lord.

They had begrudgingly reported to Retch, the demon that Stanch had sent to specifically watch over Zoe, as regards to what they had overheard of her communications and further meetings or proposed meetings with Aaron. Retch, again, was one of the few minor demons that were entrusted in regards to the secret of the Armstrong's ascendant place in the ending times demonic scheme of things. However, even being advised to keep their mouths shut about the Armstrongs under threat of dire conse-

quences didn't qualify these minor demons to be made aware of the details of the Armstrong/Strongarm Strategy.

Retch had been told to tell the demons already watching Zoe nothing about his specific purpose but was to use the name of Tranth, Satan's Chief of Staff, as the authority by which Retch could subject these other minor demons to his temporary Captaincy over them.

Retch, Strongarm, and Stanch knew that sooner or later these two Zoe watching demons would inform those in authority over them that Tranth had sent someone in to do something, anything, that wasn't cleared with that Principality's overseeing demons. Specifically, whatever Captain that the two normally had, would feel his toes were being stepped on as he hadn't been notified and on up the ladder of authority to the top. In this case the top would be The North American Continent Principality Prince Demon Overlord Archdemon...Torath.

Eventually every demon in the loop would be aware of someone else getting in the mix, but meanwhile the watching subtly influencing demons had informed Retch that the "female cow had remained suitably corrupted for being a (Blech!) Christian."

Retch had then informed Strongarm that the two watchdog underlings had told him that Zoe was not even close to The Holy Spirit in any way that was discernable, and seemed happy with the worldly wealth and fame that she had acquired, to where she wasn't anywhere near being humble, or humbled enough for demons to worry about her rededicating herself to The Lord.

Satisfied that one side of the equation that concerned Stanch was suitably supervised, albeit unhappily that the focus of the supervision was a Christian back-slider, Strongarm had winged over to spy upon Aaron. That he had arrived in time to overhear a phone call between Aaron and Zoe was a bonus and an information bonanza.

Then, while Strongarm was in demonically nefarious contemplation of what he had gleaned about the young heir while the

youth was in avid discussion with the female, the older sibling had arrived and provided Strongarm with a far greater understanding of the individual states of mind of both of the brothers than he had previously had. This was basically because of his personal dedicated supervision of The Patriarch, and because of the lack of trustworthy “in the Strongarm loop” lesser demons to supervise the heirs.

If Strongarm had known of the calls and meeting between the brothers beforehand, he could not have timed his arrival had he planned it to learn more about the brothers, and specifically about the Aaron situation, in such a short time...had he tried.



Zoe was in concert again when Strongarm reacquired her location from Retch. What he was going to do to throw a monkey wrench into the budding relationship between the performer and Aaron, hadn't gelled in his mind yet. Something ostracizing her from the Armstrong heir, in combination with putting fear into Aaron about any further forays out into the commoner's world, would be a bonus.

He drifted down through a wall to find a huge noisy space, with every seat filled by an arm-waving, unintelligibly shouting human. While on the ethereal level the space was virtually inundated with demons encouraging the happy throng of those they assailed with lusts and what was demonically recognized as a sort of unfettered musical madness.

Interspersed among the throngs of demons were a few Angels, who Strongarm believed to be on hand more to observe than to perform any function whatsoever. For apparently there were few Christians present at the concert, or in any event...there were few people Saved or unsaved who required or rated an Angelic presence.

The music wasn't as horrible as some he had heard, if you went for a lot of thumping, screaming, and wild gyrations that seemed

to not have a lot of relationship to anything that Strongarm would vote for as actual tolerable human music.

To get down to business, though, he zoomed down to float virtually right in front of the performer, who was then dancing and singing center stage.

Strongarm noticed that the female wore considerable shiny, decorative ornaments and wondered if those provided an attraction to the human male. He decided not, at least not to any great degree. They appeared to be more simple attention attractors that could be worn by any human to make them stand out from the crowd but not necessarily to attract the opposite sex.

Surely, Strongarm mused...the tawdry surroundings that the dim lighting could only partly hide nor the cheap costuming or phony jewelry (all of which were glaringly obvious to demon eyes no matter the gloom) were a detriment to attraction, being comprised of fake baubles and brassy imitations of gold and silver?

Certainly such could not be other than simple attention getters to someone who had been reared in the environs and amid the plush surroundings that the current Armstrong siblings had. Quite probably solid gold items amid the finest silks and tapestries wouldn't even faze an Armstrong, so what about this heifer had impressed the younger sibling, the demon wondered?

Surely it could not be the loud yet rhythmic caterwauling that seemed to pass for the music of the moment to this crowd. Her nubile charms were evident, though, but not in any degree above and beyond those belonging to the women in the Armstrong household, whether wives or concubines.

In any event, it was time to size Zoe up and see how to take her down to eliminate her as any kind of threat to the demon's plans for the Armstrongs. He had just been figuratively patting himself on the back about his timing and now here he was wishing that someone a bit more observant and discerning than either of the two idiot minor demons had been around to witness the initial meeting of Aaron and Zoe. It would have been a fine thing indeed

had someone more observant been attending the entertainer when she and Aaron had first met, as except for the friendly phone call he had himself overheard between the two, Strongarm really had nothing to go on that bore serious concern, while he himself had witnessed Aaron's denials that there was anything serious going on with the singer when Aaron had spoken to Gavin.

Well, Strongarm sighed to himself, there is nothing for it but to question these same two demons that must have been around Zoe when she met Aaron and who are still around her now, to see if they remembered Aaron's visit in any detail that could be of use in my determinations.

Retch had been staying well back from Strongarm. The demon knew his place fairly well, but his place as opposed to someone like Strongarm...well... he only knew that Strongarm had the ear of as august a Captain as Stanch, never mind also having the confidence of one as great and powerful as Satan's "Chief of Staff," Tranth himself. He also knew to about the Armstrongs, and that they were the focus in some regard, of not only these three august lords, but with Tranth in the equation as the right hand of the Master himself...then it stood to reason that their efforts and directions had the sanction of the Throne.

"Retch, fetch me those two who have been observing the cow." Strongarm threw over his burley shoulder loudly to be sure to be heard among the cacophony of caterwauling voices and purported music blare of the concert.

Strongarm could see the two minor demons lurking by the great stage curtains, no doubt in some kind of misguided effort to not have his attention focused on them. No doubt caught between their nominal Captain's orders, and the conflict involved in that Retch had usurped the normal chain of command over them, and invoked Tranth's authority to do so. They now didn't know who was who over them but just knew that their lowly stations as hands off observers pretty much could allow things to be where anyone except a messenger imp could be a Captain over them.

Retch hustled up with the two observers in tow, and Strongarm began to question them. They were oblivious to the crashing, banging, and screaming that resounded around them on the physical plane, as they chose to tune it out as it were, to only deal with their surroundings and each other on the spiritual plane.

“So, it did not seem as if the male young one with all of the attending retinue that visited the female was enamored of her in the least?” Strongarm questioned after a while of getting virtually no where interrogating the two watchers.

“What’s ‘enamored,’” one of the two demons questioned in response.

Strongarm sighed and shook his great head in frustration. A phrase of man that had stuck with him came to mind, and he voiced it, though he doubted if even Retch would get the association.

“This is going to be like pulling teeth to get information out of you dunderheads,” he growled to the two hapless underlings.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Torath, who had at first been the power to be, contended with by anyone in the clearing before the arrival of his Master, either Angelic or demonic, was not a happy camper. When Satan had chastised him publicly, while combining the chastisement with anything thrice repeated especially ones name, well...Torath knew his name was mud from his Master's point of view, but he hoped not for long.

Torath quietly gnashed his teeth, which had already been clenched in a rage against his underling Baloth. The buck was not going to stop on his doorstep when he had an underling henchman to blame, especially one who had initiated Angelic responses with unauthorized manifestations on the physical plane, which brought the attention of the opposite side of things in the first place.

He and all of his kind present had stood or hovered in whatever level of attention their minds allowed them to focus on the repartee between Michael and Lucifer.

Torath was probably the only one of the horde who noticed the Seraph slink off between the trees as the confrontation between the Archangel and the former Archangel had grown heated. He wondered what the Seraph was up to yet again, though was not inclined to speak up just then.

Yet again...(he cast a baleful look at Baloth that boded ill things to come for his underling) left to it seemed...perpetually wondering about what the Seraph had been and was up to again now...seemed to be just about all that Torath did as far as really knowing anything about Jon's actual activities in Torath's principality. "*Wonder, wonder, doop doop de doop dot 'dupe'...who wrote the book of... 'blech'*" He recalled a human song that had lodged in his memory and came to the fore even in such circumstances... (with minor adaptations on his part).

In any event, though, Torath noticed the Seraph's subtle departure during the confrontation; he didn't want to bring attention to himself by interrupting his Master's invective. The refocusing of which just might turn same invective to be heaped upon him, as Lucifer was reminded yet again that something was left to be desired as regards Torath's supervisory skills in his own principality.

"*Uh oh!*" He thought in dismay after observing the Seraph's departure without comment, and in short order after see Michael also fade from view right in the middle of what Torath could see and hear to be an unfinished argument/debate with his Master Lucifer.

It was obvious from the looks on the faces of both the Archangel and Lucifer that neither expected Michael to fade away virtually in mid-sentence. Lucifer's mouth subsequently snapped shut after a disgusted puff of fire and steam emanated from it as an aftermath.

Then, as Torath feared, the frustrated Lord of Hell cast about to find someone to vent on, and sure as he had a black heart, Lucifer found the unhappy Prince of North America to single out.

Torath, in turn, glared balefully at Baloth, who in spite of that unworthy's fierce normal visage had somehow managed to look as sheepish as such a brute could appear. The Overlord had seen that his west coast lieutenant had been surreptitiously sneaking looks at Torath during the wordplay by their betters with a hang-dog kind of countenance, if that was a possibility either, considering his facial characteristics.

Baloth, as Lieutenant and head demon over the west coast of Torath's North American Principality, was a Power in his own right, and were he to be in the demonic right of things would not be acting quite so sorry and chagrined about his actions, which were specifically generated for a his immediate superior, Torath. He only needed to be scuffing his renowned horny-toed feet around like some little miscreant human child for any demonic

jury (if such a jury existed) to proclaim him guilty by body language alone.

“Torath, my favored Prince of the most powerful and wealthy of my Principalities upon the Earth, what have you to say for yourself and for your lackeys actions?” Satan asked of his underling.

“Master, my cadre who know all of the details of the events are present here, and I myself will know all (another evil eye stabbed at Baloth) within a short span and then can report to you in detail.

Torath had gestured towards Baloth in particular as he spoke in answer to his dread lord.

“See that you do so timely!” Satan gruffly responded.

“I can only guess now as to what in total has transpired,” Torath volunteered, while thinking back on his own manifestations and transmogrifications (See The Angel Jon) that were they to become demonic public knowledge, would have already resulted in Lucifer taking away his Overlordship to say the least, were The Lord of Hell to have heard about them. Never mind the fact that he had possibly done a human life saving, which might or might not ultimately lead to a (Aargh!) Salvation and maybe even a Judeo Christian Ministry!

He was striving to not let his befuddled confusion play across his features...when he was again addressed.

“Torath, I appointed you and others of your ilk to be Overlords to handle all of the details that I cannot be bothered with. There is a grand scheme underfoot of which you know naught, and I cannot take time out to listen to everything that occurs outside what is the norm to maintain the balance.” Lucifer had walked over while speaking to where his black helmet had landed and picked it up to place back upon his head.

“I expect you to find out what happened, decide and enact appropriate responses and make sure whoever else was at fault in all this mess besides yourself...” Satan paused here to point past Torath at those behind him, (who cringed, whether they were guilty or not,) “... to know of my displeasure all of you, though I hold you accountable for your underlings failures.

Satan proceeded to his waiting chariot and within seconds had vaulted up into the heavens with his hosts in tow.

Torath breathed an enormous sigh of relief from what he rightfully took as a reprieve of any punishment such as a demotion being handed out to him.

Though he had hated every second of being belittled right in front of everyone earlier, especially in front of his personal lackeys and assorted minions, he kind of felt the belittlement was mitigated by the last words of the Master showing an obvious continuing of his preexistent confidence in him.

Baloth had known better than to leave with the Master, though he had arrived with him. Torath's looks throughout the entire time that the two of them had been in the small clearing under Satan's thumb, so to speak, had spoken volumes to the West Coast Lieutenant. It didn't matter if leaving with the Master would have provided a temporary reprieve, as sooner or later Baloth would have to come to answer before Torath (provided Torath retained Overlordship of his Principality).

"Well, Baloth, you have a lot of explaining to do, but that is not the most important objective. We need to put a spin on this whole deal to be seen as some kind of positive victory for our side. Laying blame upon one another in this instance still amounts to our pointing the finger at our own failures in-house. We need to combine our efforts to refocus the Master's wrath and attention elsewhere."

Torath had been really going to hand out some serious repercussions to Baloth after all was said and done, provided, of course, that he still was in a position of authority to do anything to Baloth at all. But since Lucifer had apparently focused on other matters of more import during his repartee with the Archangel, and seemed to have lost most of his ire at his underlings, most noteworthy at Torath himself, well...the Overlord was inclined to also cut a little slack to those under him who had caused or helped to cause the drama. He had really been expecting to get

his butt handed to him, but it was apparent that Michael popping up out of nowhere had taken some wind out of Lucifer's sails.

Yep, our Master's theological discourse with the Archangel has no doubt diffused his ire at all of us. But what means the ambiguous remark about "a grand scheme underfoot" that I know nothing about that obviously has Satan so preoccupied, anyway?

Torath was also aware that Satan probably hadn't been anywhere as close to as angry as he had pretended to be in front of the Seraph and Archangel. Especially so, as Satan knew both Torath and Baloth to be avid haters of mankind, who theoretically needed no offerings of exalted status to provide incentive for their machinations to engineer pain, suffering, and ultimate damnation on a human. (*I do believe that ain't exactly so in Baloth's case*, was Torath's thought.)

So, in essence, since Satan had left, no doubt to return to his Throne room and do his "spider in the web" deal where he could be comfortably ensconced in his dragon form there, as was the norm for him. So Torath was now yet again the acknowledged head demon of all who were currently assembled, as their Captain and Overlord.

"Disburse this rabble," he ordered Baloth, indicating the host above them predominantly but also the few demons that had for whatever reason remained on the ground after Satan's departure.

"Get up, Sinath, and Captain these." He waved an arm in a circle to encapsulate the hosts above and on plane with them. Sinath being the minor Lieutenant whom Satan had made grovel with his face in the dirt and then had forgotten about as he had allowed all of the other demons on the ground to arise as they all were looking a bit to "prayer-like" for Satanic tastes in general and for Satan's tastes in particular.

In any event, in short order Sinath and the other ranking demons on site (except Baloth and Torath) gathered and marshaled into some kind of loose array the host that remained after Satan's sudden departure.

Sinath wished to ask his Overlord what to do with them, but after witnessing what he had just witnessed, and from what he knew of the temperament of the Archdemon, he chose discretion as the better part of valor, and after marshaling the host, just began moving them in a handy direction considering their formations. His simple plan was to get out of sight and the possible criticism of his superior and then to disburse the host to go to where was their individual norms, and to do what they were normally supposed to be doing.

Torath and Baloth watched the host move away until it was just a spec on the horizon.

“Well, Baloth, we have some planning to do, and after what just happened we might have some defensive moves to make to protect ourselves from the greedy aspirations of our peers. Now, I don’t want to know everything,” Torath growled, “but what, if any, positives came for our side from all of whatever happened?”

“Actually...” Baloth thought long and hard about what he knew of things. “Actually, I don’t think we came out smelling too good. In fact, a few, not many, might have ultimately gotten... ummm... Saved, or brought closer to that state than before.”

Here he paused for a bit, trying to decide whether to tell the whole truth, as he knew Torath had no love lost for him and suspected (with good intelligence to convince himself) that Torath had moved to discredit him using that wimp of a Prince of the Pacific, Jankh, as a pawn.

Of course, Baloth hadn’t and didn’t ever expect solidarity from Torath, as Baloth was a direct appointee placed under Torath by Satan, rather than being appointed to his station as a Lieutenant under Torath by Torath himself. The conflict and trust problem potentials were obvious and had indeed been bones of contention.

In any event, Baloth didn’t trust Torath enough to admit also that a Judeo/Christian Ministry might eventually result from how things had played out with the advent of the Seraph Jon’s involvement. So, he didn’t volunteer that particular tidbit, wait-

ing for the Overlord's input, and further, Baloth continued to wonder at Torath's presence at the man party period. What was it that had somehow led the Archdemon to being in confrontation with the same Seraph that had been such a pain to Baloth and his crew? (See "The Angel Jon")

Torath had nodded his head thoughtfully at the negative spiritual warfare report from his henchman Baloth, knowing full well that that wasn't all that there had been to things. But, on the other hand, Torath's own participation had contributed likewise to the somewhat same dismal ends. *Lucky this unit doesn't know about my own fumbling at the man gathering, for he does have ambitions and would use such knowledge against me if he could.*

Neither he nor his henchman's efforts were such that either could use the other as a scapegoat for the total mess, so it just seemed a good idea to let things unsaid remain unsaid and losses unmentioned remain unmentioned, especially if they were potential losses or losses projected to happen sometime in the future.

"Sleeping dogs needed to lie," and/or "let bygones be bygones" seemed to be a real good idea to Torath and to Baloth as well.

"You know what, Baloth?" Torath ventured.

"What is that, my Overlord?" Baloth responded.

"It seems on hindsight, that in the cosmic scheme of things... no matter how one looks back at our recent activities, something is left to be desired, which begs the question: "Why bother to look back at all?"

Baloth digested this chicanery in silence before cocking an eye at his superior and suggesting craftily, "Indeed, my lord, why not overshadow recent events with a success that will be lauded instead of trying to mend the proverbial unmendable fence just to break some kind of even?"

"I agree," Torath responded, seemingly without hesitation or reservation but again with the thought that Baloth was a bit too crafty and too good at being bad, and that he would be well shed of the Satan appointed Lieutenant one way or another. Perhaps

he could encourage Baloth to be considered by Satan for another post or even a Principality like Jankh's Pacific Principality. It shouldn't be too hard to knock that vain bejeweled monkey from his perch and get Baloth ensconced in his place.

Not for the first time Torath wished that Baloth had not come to be his lieutenant at the Master's orders. *If he wasn't appointed by Satan, I could just fire him...hmmm...maybe as the Throne knows that Baloth is the root cause of all of the recent Angel activity, he is out of favor enough to be replaced without my lord's protest. Hmmm...*

PROOF

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

After Gavin left, and somewhat because of his visit, Aaron was taking time to kick back and give some thought to exactly what was going to be expected from him as an adult Armstrong male and heir of The Patriarch's lineage.

Others in his family were also called "Armstrongs", but were only the male sons of the daughters of true Armstrongs, and so it wasn't the same at all as it was with he and Gavin. The difference for Aaron's part was that he would be expected to at all times be ready to take over the mantle of leadership of the Armstrong Empire, and to spearhead whatever it was that was the ultimate Armstrong family goal, which frankly...he had no clue about. *Gee whiz, we already own everything and can make even governments do our bidding. What else is there to strive for?*

Apparently only his uncle Gilbert and his father knew what that was, and...perhaps Gavin. But he doubted even his brother knew yet, though the way Gavin had come at him about Zoe was indicative that he was being taken into the loop of confidence and authority already.

Just like he had done as a little boy when he didn't get his way, Aaron drummed his feet in frustration, which he had just slung up on the coffee table when he plunked himself down on the couch.

"Hmmm..." He pondered while rocking back and forth and "hmmm-ing" to himself.

All the secrecy and living like hermits barricaded on the island are for what?

What in the entire world...literally, was there that they didn't already have or couldn't get at the snap of a finger? What mission or objective can there be? Why stay reclusive?

Matter of fact, to put it all in a nutshell... Aaron snapped his fingers and sprang to his feet with the self revelation: *Why do I*

have to feel like I am in a cage or like I am in a jail when I am the richest and most powerful man of my age on this planet?

“Yo Bro...Whut up?” He facetiously spoke to himself thinking about how to address his brother before grabbing up one of the phones lying on the coffee table and punching in a speed dial number.

“What is it, Aaron? Can you let me get through my own front door and take my shoes off? Man I just got home and the old lady hasn’t got done flapping her gums at me yet, never mind trying to hear you at the same time,” Gavin complained.

“Oh come on...really Gavin? Remind me to care what your current squeezes have to say about anything, as I keep forgetting why I should...Oh yeah! It’s because I shouldn’t care, just like you don’t care anything about my girls of the moment.” Aaron paused, knowing that his brother would be chewing that one over for a second.

“What girl of the moment...hey...you’re not talking about that Zoe chick?” Gavin demanded suspiciously. “Dude, you just told me she wasn’t like that with you.”

“No, no, no, I am just making a sarcastic...” Aaron thought for a second and decided, “Forget it,” he said and moved on to why he had actually called instead of wasting more time on the frivolous.

“I’ve been contemplating my navel a bit over here, and I just don’t get it. What is the big deal? I mean, why can’t we do what we want out in the world? Maybe years ago our family wasn’t strong enough or the world wasn’t civilized enough for us to take a chance out there, but surely now things are under control and civilized enough for us to be safe.”

“What are you driving at, and why all of the sudden do you seem to want to go bouncing around and leave our hard-won, safe oasis and go out into a world of chaos?” Gavin without realizing had somewhat quoted from some of the new studies that he had been taking with Uncle Gilbert that in essence were part of the type of programming and indoctrination studies for being the future Patriarch.

Gavin had stepped out onto his own patio under the moonlight, where he too could look out over the sea. He had closed the sliding glass patio door and shut off the complaints of Marianne in mid sentence, though that wasn't his reason in and of itself for going outside; it was for a bit of needed privacy.

Gavin knew that he could tell his brother some of the things that had not yet been part of Aaron's soon to be new studies under their uncle, but some things were not for anyone else's ears but an Armstrong heir and certainly not to be overheard by just the simple girlfriend of the moment.

"World of chaos, man! Gavin, you should have just heard yourself. That statement sounded just like part of some kind of script written for a sci-fi flick—"

"Aaron, Aaron...hold up a moment," Gavin interrupted. "Look, there are some things that you are going to start learning from Uncle Gilbert that are strictly for our ears. Not Mom's, our sisters, or even wives, and surely not the maids, butlers, or even more surely still...our bed warmers of the moment. I mean...not even the other family members that are on the Armstrong board can know of some things that you are going to learn now that you are of age."

"I'm listening." Aaron waited expectantly.

"Well, I can only tell you so much over the phone until we get a secure line in to your place, and even then we will only be able to talk about just so much unless we are face-to-face in a secure private spot." Gavin paused for a moment. "Besides, I don't want to step on our uncle's toes, as I understand that the way things are taught to us is as a result of a tried and proven technique."

"Where are you right now, and who is around that can overhear you?" he asked his little brother.

"Gee, I don't know...I'm in my living room, and I don't think anyone is around, but I don't have x-ray vision to see if someone is going by in the hall, lurking with radar ears, or what," Aaron replied sarcastically.

“Well, I guess you’re okay, but watch what you say in front of people. Aaron, you don’t even realize how when you don’t agree with someone you sometimes repeat what they said like you just did with me when you repeated the description, ‘World of Chaos’. Those kinds of words can perk up ears that are not even deliberately tuned in to a conversation, if you get my drift. As a matter of fact, you may recall from some movies that we’ve watched together when we were kids, that showed that there are key word attention getters...like ‘bomb’ or such spoken over the air or even over a public phone line, which might cause someone to start listening in.”

“Okay, Gavin, now you’re tripping me out...” Aaron began and then lowered his voice and just barely caught himself before looking around guiltily. “What, are we involved in, some kind of industrial espionage or something?”

“I’m telling you I cannot talk about this kind of stuff over the phone, but suffice it to say that there are reasons still today for us to remain as behind the scenes as possible, though with modern media and spy technology for sale at any electronic store, it’s hard to remain anonymous to any degree, and unbelievably more difficult when we are off of the island. We have paid untold millions through the years to keep our family name out of the public eye, but Uncle Gilbert tells me that nowadays the more you spend to try to keep something under wraps, the more attention you draw to yourselves. I believe he called the situation a ‘catch 22’.”

Gavin paused to marshal his thoughts before continuing. “I don’t know if you realize this, but even your little foray to see Zoe’s concert caused a media frenzy in Los Angeles circles for a bit, and we had to use our influence to quash it going any further. This is what I am trying to tell you: that for many reasons, some of which you will soon know...we are reclusive as part of an over-all long-range plan. It isn’t just that we don’t want to draw attention to ourselves for general privacy principles. We flat cannot tolerate at this point any serious scrutiny of our family’s position,

associations, or objectives. We couldn't in the past, and that holds true all the more so in this day and age with satellites, and other intelligence gathering governmentally orchestrated spy technology. Then there is just how greedy and resourceful the private sector is for any real news of us not just fabricated from whole cloth. Among these are such as our big business competitors, the paparazzi, and even some of the all powerful Church groups"

"Okay," Aaron said, scratching thoughtfully. "But...whatever. If I have any clue at all, it is that we surely have everything that the world has to offer already, and I just don't see why we need to hide out quite so much as long as our security has everything under control."

"Look, Aaron, just try to keep out of trouble that has the old man or Uncle Gilbert getting a bug in their ear, huh? I mean, I know you just turned eighteen and all, but the same stuff kind of applies now as before. It is just that you are going to learn why it applies now, whereas before you just had to obey. Give your curiosity a bit more time."

"All right but...enquiring minds want to know, though." Aaron half heartedly agreed but with serious reservations, as he was doggoned if he was going to live in seclusion without something solid to go on. This whole deal was sounding as solid as living in fear of ghosts. He was already planning on calling Zoe and doing something else that he had never been allowed to do before. *I flat do not need all this shoullda woulda coulda just in case and maybe the blue-meanies are coming and bury my head in the sand like an ostrich just in case....stuff!* Was Aaron's thought. Little did he know that his older brother shared a lot of his sentiments, but was biding his time.

"Soon enough...soon enough," Gavin soothed. "I wouldn't be surprised if Uncle Gilbert gets you started even sooner than he did me when I turned eighteen."

"Okay, later bye," Aaron answered and hung up.

“Brat,” Gavin told the dead phone before also hanging up, though long used to how quickly his brother ended a call when he had said his say.

PROOF

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Zoe had just finished the concert, oblivious to the new additions to her personal demon retinue, and was looking forward to a week off from touring. So, for the week she had rented a small cottage lakeside at a little-known, exclusive resort in northern Arizona. She was bound and determined to use the time to get back into being herself (whoever that was now) without outside influences, as lately she felt she had been losing herself in the rock and roll superstar persona that her profession seemed to demand that she channel herself into, even when not on stage.

Gee whiz! She thought to herself, *If famous people really wanted to smile and be nice all of the time it would be something different. But when you feel lousy or just want to be left alone and still have to act like the cat that just got the cream, well... a forced grin is getting to be all I can muster lately, and the paparazzi cameras are just so unforgiving. I know they can tell that I am not a happy camper.*

She had seen a picture taken of her recently and anyone could easily tell that her smile was more than just a bit forced.

The clothing deal got to be a bit of a bummer too. All the bells and whistles she wore on stage were not really very comfortable. *Its like I am wearing the front bumper of a 56' Buick.* As a matter of fact, some of her costumes were such that in normal surroundings she would get caught on one thing or another, as sequins or other baubles or bedazzles had a tendency to have sharp edges that snagged on whatever other edges or even coarse fabrics that might lurk in her path.

She favored simple attire and was most comfortable in regular jeans and a cut-off t-shirt or sweatshirt and tennis shoes. Of course she had got to the point to where she couldn't just traipse off to a regular clothing store without risking having to give

up the shopping objective, in favor of autograph signing, with paparazzi soon to follow.

She knew also that her shopping windows were short lived if she went to a well-known store or shop, as the owners or managers liked nothing better than their store mentioned as a star's choice, so they would call and alert the media themselves.

This meant two things. One was that she ultimately had to have the shopping brought to her or went to private or semi-private showings. Two was that because of the tailored nature of such garments being shown, she had gotten used to having even such items of apparel as a simple pair of jeans to be custom fitted. Finally, for her wardrobe for the last two years, she had found one seamstress slash rock star designer for her stage costumes, who was intimate with her sizes and tastes, who also created or tailored to fit casual wear for her on the side.

In any event...not to have to deal with how she looked out in public for a while was going to be a very nice thing indeed. Getting up and wrapping a scarf around her mop of blonde hair, while forgoing any makeup what so ever, and padding around the bungalow wearing whatever comfy pjs that she had crashed out in was going to be the standard for her days off.

Yep, sweats are going to be the wardrobe of choice, she thought with a satisfied smile.

While she was happily pondering the joys of getting to the bungalow and being out of the public eye...she had finished stripping off her stage makeup in the dressing room mirror. Then in the next moment had literally peeled off her (in her opinion) far too snug a set of form fitting bedazzled clothing, to don with relief her worn and comfy casual off-stage duds.

Merv, her manager, had with a cursory knock popped his head in to inform her that her limo was outside the alley stage door entrance, and that she had best hurry before the paparazzi figured out her exit strategy and swarmed to intercept her.

Just then, her cell phone rang with its distinctive musical chime.

“Dog it,” she muttered as she snatched up her purse and headed for the limo. The phone continued its intermittent song as she rapidly made her way through the local stage hands and her personal roadies, issuing orders to Merv who was panting in her wake.

Her head of security, Stan, had of course been outside the dressing room and had immediately notified the two other men in his detail to “pick up on us” as they headed toward the car. She really didn’t like having such a protective buffer zone always a presence, and felt too self-important sometimes when she considered that her limo was always followed wherever she went by a car carrying her security detail. It was all part of a celebrity insurance deal her manager had told her, but truth to tell there were times when she was relieved that she had security, especially when she was tired.

The limo driver was also a member of the detail and had acknowledged that all was clear from his position in the limo just outside the alley stage door.

Zoe zipped through as ahead of her the other members of her detail had done their best to clear a path by telling the workers to “Hang tough fer’ a bit, while Zoe comes through.”

Her security did this as a norm and usually with the local management’s help, as Zoe’s insurance, lawyers, and contract, along with the establishment and promoter’s insurances didn’t want to see her having to wend her way through a crowd of stage hands and construction workers building or tearing down sets, unless she was in something like a Sherman Tank.

In the instance, like now, that she didn’t give much of an advance heads-up for everyone to get clear, the management staff and her security just did the best that they could.

Zoe had just reached her limo when her phone toned again and she fumbled it out of her purse to where it tumbled to the car’s carpeted floor. She scooped it up and didn’t notice that her fumbling must have pushed the “send” button, which on her

phone also answered it. She relaxed with a sigh of contentment into the plush leather seats and then hearing a tiny voice, put the phone to her ear, as the car started off on what was to be for her, the beginning of a holiday.

“Hey, Zoe, what were you trying to do, get me off the phone by throwing it away?” Aaron asked with a chuckle.

“It would have been a thought, but not specifically for you,” she responded. “I have a week off and I’m going to try to hide out from everyone and relax.”

“Yeah? Well, who are you trying to hide from?” Aaron asked kind of facetiously but with a bit of a worried self-conscious tone in his voice before continuing more assuredly, “I have it on firm authority that if you don’t answer your phone in the first place, you won’t have to worry too much about who is on the other end.”

“Usually I look to see who is calling if they are ID-able, but I dropped the phone being in a hurry and you got turned on without me doing anything,” she said.

Zoe was in the process of stretching out and yawning when she snapped to what she had just said and chuckled.

“I got turned on without you doing anything, huh?” Aaron mimicked her as he too had caught the possible double meaning.

“You know what I meant. But anyway, guess what? I am off to do whatever I want for a week. That is why it wasn’t until after I spoke to you that I thought that maybe I should just shut the phone off and not talk to anyone if I really want some down time during my time off.”

“Okay, later bye,” Aaron said and hung up.

“AHHHH!” Zoe was on the verge of a vintage defamatory exclamation of frustration and hit her send button again, which automatically called whoever was last on the other end of her line.

You see there, Farol, Jon noted to his Angelic companion. She still heeds The Small Voice as it dictates to her to curb her impulses to use profanity. She can be reached and dealt with to turn her from her Godless path.”

“Hey Zoe, its been awhile. What’s up?,” Aaron answered sounding totally unperturbed, though by Zoe’s way of seeing things his hanging up on her in this instance should have been indicative of his being mad at her. She was thinking this specifically, as he could have taken her words a few moments ago to mean that she wouldn’t have been speaking to him or even answered her phone at all had she had time to think about it, which wasn’t the case at all.

“Are you mad at me?” she asked him.

“No, what should I be mad at you for and why do you even bother to ask?”

“Because as soon as I told you that I was thinking about not answering my phone, you hung up on me.”

“First of all, I didn’t hang up *on* you. I hung up cause I do that when the conversation is over. And I figured from what you said that you wanted to be left alone. No problem, I do the ‘I want to be left alone’ thing myself, and ‘I am one with you grasshopper’ about it,” Aaron explained, using a phrase from an old TV series.

Once again Zoe caught herself and remembered that she would have to realize that the responses and what she considered normal thought processes of the average man wouldn’t apply to someone like Aaron or probably anyone in his family. Again she remembered that this youth was extremely “comfortable in his skin” in a strangely self-assured way for one so young.

While she was pondering that very thing she caused a lull in the conversation, and Aaron put in, “Let me explain myself a bit. We...my family and I... I mean... we don’t usually have time for what I see on TV to be all the niceties of conventional society. I personally am in a short break between being again ridiculously busy with studies and kind of on the job training, as I just completed and graduated from my seventeenth year. I will begin my adult training soon. Right now I can afford to take some time off or out myself, but soon...”

Zoe took his open-ended sentence as it was meant to mean and that was that whatever Armstrong program awaited Aaron

in his eighteenth year would probably be pretty all encompassing time and attention-wise.

Aaron continued, “Anyway...that is why when our attention is focused and someone interrupts, we might just respond: ‘Is this important? And if it isn’t clearly something more important than what we are doing we just go on with what we were doing. I find ‘later bye’ to work well for me. I take no offense if you do not want the call, nor do I expect offense to be taken if I do not want your call. Don’t you do the same?”

“Quite frankly, what I want and what I can do, telephonically or otherwise, is why I called in the first place. But don’t trip on how I work my phone, as if I have my way, you will learn soon enough to know when or if I am mad at you, and by the same token I won’t take offense unless I am sure you intended something that I should take offense at in the first place.”

“Okay,” Zoe said. “So that is why every time I talk to you, you get off the phone by saying that ‘later bye’ deal. I get it, but you still sound like a brat, though.”

“Sorry about that,” Aaron said cheerfully, and Zoe could detect absolutely no sorrow anywhere in that supposed apology. She grinned again at Aaron’s way of uplifting her out of her doldrums, real or imagined. She plain forgot herself in wondering anew at the ‘stranger in a strange land’ aspect about him, compared to anyone she knew.

“Oh, yeah...I am sure you are just weeping tears over there,” she said.

He, of course, nonchalantly ignored her.

“Believe it or not,” he said, “I actually had an agenda in calling you originally. I was going to get your concert itinerary from you directly, just in case what is posted on your website has been changed or isn’t up to date. Then I was going to try to schedule to meet you somewhere sometime.”

“Well, I won’t be anywhere concert-wise for at least a week, and I believe my next show is in Chicago. By the way, how goes

the construction you were telling me that you were going to get done so we could hang out once in a while.”

“You know what,” he said, “You are right...I talked to dude... my architect...and things are supposed to be happening. Hold on a sec...”

Zoe could hear a clatter loudly like the phone Aaron had called her on had been put down on a hard surface. Then she was sure that that was the case as she heard him speaking to someone she could only assume was the architect in question.

“Hey, Michael,” she heard Aaron say. “What’s up with the elevator and the marina plans?”

Zoe kind of tuned out the rest of Aaron’s short discourse with whoever it was and put her phone on speaker while she took some tissues and astringent from her purse to wipe off makeup that had been applied for the stage.

“Okay, Zoe, my architect is on the job, but you know it’s only been a couple of days since I called him. All he’s been able to put together so far is a team of engineers and surveyors that came over yesterday to take measurements and all that mess, so he can draw up some plans.”

Not really paying that much attention, as she wasn’t even close to being any kind of a mechanically or structurally inclined individual, her response to this was, “Hmmm....” Which Aaron could only vaguely hear as she was still on speaker-phone. Meanwhile, she took another swipe at an offending spot of stage makeup.

“Hello, anybody home?” Aaron asked. He knew that ‘hmmm...’ well from his mother when he was describing the building plans for the mansion over the last couple of years of the planning stages. It meant that a female wasn’t paying any attention to his building plans whatsoever.

“Zoe, should I call you back?” he finally asked the void.

“No, no, no, I just have my hands kind of full and I wanted to put this junk away before talking,” Zoe said, picked up her phone and took it off speakerphone, closing her compact with a snap.

“Yeah, a lot of gals have their hands full doing their make-up, but I wouldn’t have pegged you for one of them.”

“Hey...well...you’re right, I wasn’t *doing* make-up but was taking stage makeup off. I don’t usually have a lot of casual makeup put on, for your information. But I can’t be having my face shinier than my costumes, now can I? But then under neon lights or in the broad light of day I look like someone slathered cement on my face.” She found herself grinning into her compact mirror while she so informed her “brat,” again surprised at how she enjoyed speaking with him.

“How did you know anyway?” she asked.

“I heard the authoritative sound of the closing of the ever present trusty woman’s compact,” he told her with a chuckle in his voice. “I may not have a dearly beloved one right now, but between one gal and another and female relatives. I know the sound of a compact snapping shut pretty well, though my second choice would be you popped your bubble gum.”

“A bit huffily ignoring things that deserved no answer...*Boy this kid is just too aware, HmMMM.....* Speaking of which, how is the old love life?” Zoe asked without too much female guile and with a healthy woman’s curiosity about how the super duper rich might find someone to have a relationship with.

“I’m hanging in there. I don’t think I am going to tell you yet how it is for my family in relation to intimate relations outside of marriage yet. I don’t want to give you the wrong idea about us.”

Aaron had responded without too much thought, then *Oops! Me and my big mouth.* The thought came to mind as he realized how any female would be like a dog with a bone having heard what he just said. He tried to change subjects...

“What? What would give me as you say, ‘...the wrong idea?’”

She had already started what he knew would be a third degree about Armstrong relationships, when he had the forlorn hope to ‘head her off at the pass’ so to speak.

“Yeah,” he rushed out like he hadn’t heard her. “...you know that elevator that I told you is in the center of my revolving floors? The plan is for that to go all the way down to sea level, and—”

“Stop, halt, cease, and desist!” Zoe almost shouted into the phone and stymied Aaron’s efforts to take his foot out of his too-informative mouth. “You can’t just say something like that to a woman and then pretend you didn’t say it.”

“Oh boy, now I’m in for it,” Zoe heard Aaron mumble under his breath, in a chagrined voice, while she was now totally focused on hearing something that interested her that was surely other than building plans.

She shifted to...and stretched to be...more comfortable in the limo while had she perkable ears, they would be officially deemed...perked. She was still some distance from the airport, where she was going to catch a flight to Sky Harbor International Airport in Phoenix, and not only had a bit of time to spare for juicy details but would find the time if need be. For this was something that a typical inquisitive gal (such as herself) could sink her teeth into information-wise, and that would be to know the “low-down.” The “nitty-gritty.” The nuts and bolts of the exalted Armstrong family’s love life.

“I don’t suppose that you will just let me describe my elevator plans to you at this juncture, will you?” Aaron asked her with a forlorn voice born of a forlorn hope.

“Not a snowball’s chance in a frying pan!” she answered vehemently and then couldn’t help but respond to how like a little boy who had inadvertently told on himself he sounded. She started giggling infectiously, and soon Aaron joined her with a couple of snorts of self-derision.

“As I was saying...” he began futilely between snorts of laughter. “The elevator...” Then he broke up in gales of full on laughter.

When Zoe could stop her own giggling, she said with a serious tone, “I am all ears. And not about elevators. You know exactly what I want to know.”

“Let’s pretend that I need to know what you want to know specifically and go from there,” Aaron responded with what he hoped Zoe took as a warning tone of voice indicating that some things were not open for discussion.

“Well, you could start with what constitutes who might be considered by you or your parents to be qualified as a marital prospect for you or your brother,” she said.

This was the first time Zoe had made reference to his brother, and it brought home to Aaron that he and Gavin were pretty much being funneled into choosing from the same type of acceptable to the Armstrong clan type of woman. This in spite of the fact that Aaron knew that he and Gavin were not at all alike, and this included their tastes as regards what most appealed to them individually in a woman. For instance, there is no way that he would find himself...he could only describe it as “saddled” with a mistress such as his brother Gavin’s Marianne.

Aaron said, “Okay, Zoe, I will give you a brief synopsis of my supposed love life, which isn’t as interesting as you seem to be thinking it is.” He paused. “But then I want to hear more about this vacation deal of yours.”

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Unknown to the Armstrong clan was that an independent reporter, one twenty-four-year-old Christine Zimmer, had decided to follow up on the (in her knowing opinion) all too rapidly quashed mention of Aaron Armstrong's crashing of the concert and subsequent private meeting with Zoe. There was so little actually known about anything personal regarding The Armstrong, his sons and heirs, or literally about the Armstrong family in general that Aaron's appearance at the ZOE concert should have had even so-called respectable and responsibly reporting newspapers devoting space, never mind tabloid repercussions and rampant speculations by the paparazzi, about a Zoe/Aaron love affair and whether any truth in it was to be had.

Christine had had other fish to fry around the time of the concert and for a while afterwards, and had only lackadaisically waited on the follow ups to the original mentions that she knew would come, pursued by so many dedicated 'on the payroll' reporters, that there would be no place for the independents like herself.

When no more mention was made, she knew that those like, or affiliated with the Armstrongs, along with the all-powerful Armstrongs themselves, had to have made some big moves and paid out big money to quash the story. Heck, she thought... between the Armstrongs and their associations, they probably owned or controlled all or most of the established media anyway. Then it would be a simple thing to pressure the independent publication editors with some big money and/or big money influence, to just refrain to follow up on anything to do with Aaron and Zoe.

But no one had gotten to Christine, and one of the things about Ms. Zimmer was that she came from some serious old Hollywood money that had been wisely invested over the years to where her family was fabulously wealthy in their own right.

Not on a plane with the Armstrongs, whose holdings were so vast that they were incalculable, but Christine's own father was easily counted one of the billionaires of the world many times over.

His name was Harold Zimmerman, the son of the former Hollywood mogul Herman Zimmerman, who had parlayed the millions he had made in the fledgling movie industry to begin several years into the Great Depression in the mid 1930s to "for a song" buy properties with huge production line capable plants already in place, as he foresaw the approach of World War II.

Even before the United States entered the war, Herman was cranking out armored personnel carriers, anti-aircraft guns, and jeeps, to name a few of the items on his production lines, for the U.S. government to send as aid to Great Britain. At the end of the war some called Christine's grandfather a war profiteer, but most called him a visionary and were happy that at least some few had the foresight to prepare for the war needs to come when America entered the fray.

In any event, the Zimmerman clan was one of those who by 1945 were billionaires, and though Christine's father, Harold, didn't have the initiative or pioneering spirit of his progenitor...a billion begat yet other billions over time, even if you weren't the best of investors.

So, Christine had been born a billionaire, Aaron a trillionaire, and neither really gave a thought about the state of having been "born with a silver spoon", or what was more appropriate in their cases: 'gold with diamonds' spoons that were a given norm for them.

Christine had been born in Hollywood in the same castle-like mansion built by her grandfather in the 20s that her father before her had been born in. She had grown up and attended private schools in the main attended by the snobbiest children of snobby parents that one could imagine. One-ups-man-ship was the order of the day, week, month, and year... times four, among her peers. Of course the status conscious girls all pretty

much knew the financial and power pecking order of their fellow students, like they knew their own bedrooms wallpapers, hence they knew the Zimmermann's to be Hollywood royalty by any of their standards.

So, the other girls vied for Christine to attend their functions and join their cliques, but she fended off most advances to pursue her own vocation, which she had long known to be a fascination with out of the ordinary human interest stories. She was fascinated from an early age by the psychologies and motivations that inspired men and women to do extraordinary and/or unusual things. If they were extraordinary and/or unusual people as well, or came from extraordinary or unusual circumstances...so much the better.

While in college she had had a few articles published outside of the university paper and had used the last name Zimmer so not to be identified as the offspring of billionaires. One of the reasons that she was so well known by her fellow students even into college was that there were enough of them at the same university as she was in then who had also attended school with her in her pre-college days when her every move was in an armored limousine. It hadn't helped her efforts to keep a low profile that another car in front and one behind the limo with security personnel made her stand out even more from the less affluent.

Her own patriarch grandpa had insisted on her security being tight, as he well remembered the Lindberg kidnapping.

However, at eighteen years of age she had put her foot down to her father and refused most of the security that had made her all but unapproachable through high school.

Yet, there were some valid points that her father, reinforced by his head of security, had made that she could not gainsay. IE: She was, in fact, still even at eighteen, a good target for kidnapping and ransom, even though it had been a while since the last article about her being one of the youngest billionaires on the planet had been published.

She had been twelve years old when her grandpa Herman had passed and she had been left one billion dollars free and clear from a living trust he had set up. Their long-standing trusted attorney at the time had also been of grandfather Zimmerman's generation and had been ill himself to where he could not handle the reading of the will. So, his youngest son who had recently passed the bar, came to do the honors and then subsequently was found to be unable to keep his mouth shut and bragged around about the amounts of the inheritance.

He had made mention specifically about her billion, and in short order she had to be taken out of school to avoid the publicity, but articles with pictures taken of her on her way to and from her limo outside the entrance to her school and home had been second- and third-page news in the regular papers and front-page news in some tabloids.

Her father and the family attorney had been planning to figure out how to get the inheritance sums, and the details of the will (although now a matter of public record) not be readily available to the news hounds. Her father had discussed it with his father, and things were in the works to just deposit the money in several secure foreign banks while Christine's grandfather was still alive. That way the deposits wouldn't be as a will that would be filed as a matter of public record.

That they hadn't quite gotten around to doing it was because Grandpa Herman, to all intents and purposes, was as active and healthy as a fifty-year-old, in spite of his far greater years, and no one foresaw that he would have a sudden heart attack while doing his daily laps in his Olympic-sized swimming pool.

In any event, after the inheritance interest had died down in short order back when she was twelve, she had come away from the ordeal with an absolute distaste for publicity, and only because her father overrode her about the bullet proof limo and the added security, was she forced to accept those "attention getters" in her life until she turned eighteen.

At eighteen she took the steps she needed to, to implement the use the name Zimmer not only as a pen name but in all her dealings. Just like actors who had stage names, she managed to stay privately a Zimmerman but be publically a Zimmer, who only a few knew to be the grown billionaire version of the twelve-year-old billionaire of her youth. By the age of eighteen her fortune had grown again by almost half from interest generated alone, never mind judicious investments of her portfolio by her astute father.

So far so good, and she went about her life without raising any flags to draw attention to herself. She didn't spend money like water like her old school peers were prone to do, judging by the mentions she sometimes read of them. She did spend money, however, but never even approached spending the interest on the interest, which her initial billion had generated. Of course good old Uncle Sam was most helpful relieving her of good chunks of her interest via "capital gains tax".

Some time after turning eighteen, she began donating a lot through her father, who did so out of his own accounts using his name, and then she would wire transfer him back what ever the amount he donated for her. He had complained more than once that he was getting all the tax credits rather than she for the donations, but she would laugh and quote him her latest net worth, which was soon well in excess of two billion dollars.

She enjoyed his gasps of dismay when she would sometimes tell him that she was trying to figure whether to just give it all away.

So, she wasn't an investigative reporter for the money. She was truly an inquiring mind that wanted to know, though she did like to see her name at the beginning or end of an article in a reputable newspaper or magazine. Since she had from birth been like a princess, she didn't crave anything but recognition that she could and did find and write the truth about whatever she presented to be published. She had even regularly turned down offers of

payment for her human interest pieces, but not so often that she generated curiosity about why she didn't seem to need money.

This story, though, was full of questions she needed answered for her own inquisitiveness, and she knew that there would be many others out there who wondered about Aaron and Zoe as she did. If for no other reason except that the young man was who he was and could easily be seen to be stepping outside his family's protocols and lofty station to barge in on someone who he equally obviously did not know, or he would have had pre-arranged seating and a backstage pass...which he had not.

Why? And the "inquiring minds want to know" oriented Christine not only wanted these things answered but had decided to use 'INQUIRING MINDS WANT TO KNOW' as the caption of her first piece on the story, which she felt should go for at least a couple articles if she could get an editor to go for it.

Then there was that the "Fair Maiden" and "Star of The Show" in question was renowned for her own reclusiveness in her private life, to where she had even gone public to explain that she had unfortunately had it brought home to her that since she became famous, virtually everyone new she met had an agenda, and she just wasn't "going to be romantically intimate with anyone for the foreseeable future."

Zoe had made this statement after the umpteenth time she had been seen with virtually any male doing anything however innocent and platonic; to subsequently find herself amorously linked with him by the paparazzi...and bombarded with questions about her relationship with whomever the poor sod might be. And then all the more of a poor sod if he was married and his wife read the articles.

One immediate example of this how just last week she was talking to a cameraman about lighting, and the next thing she knew there was a picture of her with him in some rag or other with extrapolations no end. The same had happened a couple of weeks before with a sound technician, and once with a clerk at

her favorite deli. So, she finally came out and unequivocally laid it down in an interview that she was not only being celibate physically and emotionally, but she even explained why.

“Straight-up,” Zoe had explained, “because of publicity and being some kind of human interest fodder for rag magazines these days, I do not trust anyone to not try to use my bit of fame and twist it into something infamous. So, no amorous relationships of any nature are the safest bet for now until I can absolutely trust someone, and whoever that might be isn’t even on the horizon as far as I can see.”



Bringing herself back from her reverie, Christine’s nose for news went into full gear, and she went to track down and interview whoever she could find who had witnessed Aaron’s impromptu presence at the concert. She knew it had to have been impromptu, as chief-most among the mentions made were statements from those who received five grand or more to vacate their seating so Aaron could be an island unto himself, surrounded by no one. She well knew that if someone such as he had planned to attend the concert he would have had reservations and security in place from the get go.

Christine scored with the chief of security who was working at the concert hall during the ZOE concert. He allowed her to view the digital recordings of the outside security cameras showing Aaron’s motorcade arrive, going the wrong way against all signs posted up into the hall’s horseshoe type approach to the main entrance. The outside cameras also showed that though a flood of people from his entourage exited the limousines and SUVs that comprised Aaron’s procession of vehicles, Aaron had waved back all but his “men in black” appearing obvious security detail. She could even see how some of the obviously more important limo passengers protested amid hand and arm gestures, only to see Aaron say something or other and with palms down make a

gesture with both arms just like a baseball umpire would do to inform whoever that a player was safe.

Then came the bonus in that one of the cameramen designated to film the concert for possible airing on TV had been curious enough before the show began to turn his camera on and record Aaron's security detail approaching those in the seating that they wanted for the Armstrong heir, waving checks and invariably bribing the ensconced to vacate their seats. Christine believed she saw, and then subsequently verified, that in more than one occasion an obstinate fan of ZOE had to be persuaded with more than just one check.

Christine had found over the two years since college that the fact that she was considered quite a looker with flaming natural red hair, bright green eyes, a pert upturned nose with freckles, and a dazzling smile above a fit trim figure, to be a great asset in getting people to volunteer information.

In this case, not only did the Security Chief of the concert hall burn a DVD with the applicable half hour or so of footage that she wanted but also took her in to see the financial secretary, who provided her with a few names of some of the people who had year-round reserved seating in the area where Aaron's security detail had bribed them to relinquish their seats for the ZOE concert.

Christine was able to contact several of these people, two of these she found to have been the obdurate ones, until one was offered two five thousand dollar checks, and the other held out until three five thousand dollar checks were put in his hand. Like Christine herself, these were wealthy folks in their own right, but they didn't get their wealth by turning down ten and fifteen thousand free dollars offered for a hundred dollar seat.

She wished she could verify every check that was handed out by Aaron's security detail. But she was sure that some kind of record had been far exceeded by what she felt she could already prove to be the most expensive concert seat ever purchased, to the

“Book of Records” people, should she care to pursue it. She might still contact them (she was thinking), as that would be a good story in itself. Her second article on the affair might have for a caption: “THE MOST EXPENSIVE SEAT EVER PURCHASED!”

It would also show the lengths to which Aaron would go to see his girlfriend? A girl he wanted to become intimate with? It would also show how insanely rich and powerful an Armstrong (about whom virtually no one knew anything intimate) actually was.

Drive the wrong way with impunity. Barge into a sold-out concert and wind up not only with the best seat in the house but with all the best seats in the house. Then hang out after the concert for a bit and end up with a private interview in her dressing room with a Star that any rock and roll magazine or tabloid reader knew had given up on being paired with virtually anyone intimacy-wise or even meeting anyone new other than in business.

In any event, Christine not only had written a good article describing what had happened, but had weeded through the footage provided by the concert hall’s security chief to come up with a few fairly good stills to go along with the story. One was a good full-body shot of Aaron in a widespread stance with his arms akimbo and out in the baseball umpires “you’re safe” signal, while facing down several Armani-suited figures with briefcases alongside limousines with open doors. She also had the presence of mind to get the chief to burn to cd a copy for her of the entire video record of Aaron’s visit, both from inside and outside the concert. She did this just in case it might come in handy should someone want to air her story on television.

At the end of the article Christine had promised the readers that she would not rest until she had interviewed Aaron, Zoe, or both, and found out why Aaron had crashed the party, so to speak, and what had come of their impromptu tryst in Zoe’s dressing room backstage. She didn’t speculate as traditional paparazzi would have. She had, however, called a friend and emailed him her article, which he vowed to publish in his next week’s issue.

His name was Ron Spellman, and he, like Christine, had not been noteworthy enough to receive a hand out from whoever must have paid to quash the potential Aaron Armstrong/ZOE articles when/if they had been handed out to quash things in the first place. Ron was actually affiliated with a local university and working on his Masters degree while serving as editor on the university paper. He also (through the school) had several radio station contacts and talk show contacts that he thought might be interested in airing an interview with Christine if things were put in just the right way to them. After all, Zoe was college age and her music was a hit with the young crowd. Aaron was just at freshman age, and even Christine would still be working on her Master's degree had she stayed in school. Everyone involved, in fact, was the right age for college readership to be interested in.

Christine left what she had with Ron for the time being, meanwhile planning her strategy to buttonhole Zoe as the easier and more accessible of the two to follow her story up with.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Michael found himself rematerialized from having dematerialized right in the middle of his discourse with Lucifer. Obviously The Lord had done this while providing His cryptic remark just before the clearing faded from view. The Lord was perhaps still critical of Michael's representation of Him to the Enemy. But instead of things coming back into focus to where he was back in Heaven, the blankness of temporary non-existence cleared to find him apparently among a throng of humans on a sidewalk bordering along some type of plaza. He was on a level plane with men who were passing him by with annoyed looks, which without rocket science involved; Michael took to mean that he was visible on the physical plane and irritating the humans somehow.

No doubt it was irritating to them that he was standing there unmoving on and in their path with what must be his own irritated befuddled expression, brought about by his not knowing where he was or why he was there. Then there was that The Lord's cryptic words were still echoing around in his head and still puzzling him. To wit:

"You have moped about the heavens and would that you are allowed some autonomy to do as you will with my blessings.

Cast about you as you will soon find yourself, and do what you will...With my blessings."

Michael felt a weight in his hand that was as unlike as could be from the weight of the sword that he had just been resting his hands upon the pommel of, in the glade facing Lucifer. He looked down and saw a strange sight as his right hand lifted up a briefcase for him to behold.

It sure wasn't a sword, and the coat sleeve that was shot showing a white buttoned human shirt cuff, was surely not part of his normal Angelic attire.

The hand itself was also surely not the scarred, powerful hand of the Archangel Michael, though in itself was not weak but seemed to be that of a not exactly athletically inclined middle-aged human. The hand, clothing, and the watch upon the hand's wrist were all somehow surprisingly familiar in some way, though totally alien when he tried to focus on why these things seemed familiar when he searched in his memory.

Ha, ha, very funny, Lord, he thought to his Creator, fairly sure that The Lord was proving some kind of a point at his expense.

He made to rise above the throng that were hurrying past him on their missions to whatever they must deem as important, and found that he was powerless to do so.

"This is not funny, Lord." He qualified aloud his earlier remark, receiving a strange look from a passerby. He shrugged, swiveled his head upon his all too apparently human neck, and swung his arms, briefcase and all, to get a feel for the body he found himself in.

While thus introspectively engaged, he looked about himself and saw that a long, black machine, that from his infrequent visits to the planet he had known as a mechanized carriage as The Archangel Michael, but now knew somehow was actually called a limousine. The vehicle was parked at the curb immediately behind him on a busy street that was adjacent to the plaza. He gave it no thought, though it looked familiar...or perhaps just looked like it belonged there to him for some reason.

It came to mind as he looked about himself in his new form that terms and names of things that he would not have known as The Archangel Michael were coming to the fore from the memory of the being whose body he was now inhabiting.

Well, he thought, *maybe this body didn't just materialize in front of these of mankind. There is no consternation or surprise focused on me, as one might expect from such an event occurring among them. So, the body I now seem to animate was already here, and I am the only being surprised to be here within it.*

As if to lend credence to this supposition on the part of the Archangel, a hand plucked at his sleeve and a somewhat familiar voice said, "I'll just take that for you, sir, and Mr. Grummond's office is on line one waiting for you."

Michael turned to see a uniformed chauffeur reaching for his briefcase.

He let the man take the case from his hand, while with his other hand the chauffeur opened the back door of the gleaming limousine and then stood expectantly, waiting for him to enter the car.

"Aaahhgh," Michael growled in an inarticulate grunt that was articulate enough to him. The Lord wanted him to do something as a man or perhaps just wanted to teach Michael a lesson in patience and humility because of his moping about the Heavens...so the choices being what they were, well...

Michael noticed that the driver had been taken somewhat aback by his growled mutterings and allowed that he had to watch himself in his communications with The Holy Spirit, The Lord, or even when simply talking to himself...being overheard by those of mankind within earshot.

He stooped to enter the car and while momentarily familiarizing himself with what really were surprisingly familiar surroundings, he was handed back the briefcase that the driver had just taken from him so deferentially.

"Here you are, Mr. Corporeal," the chauffeur said. "Are we heading back to the office now, sir?"

"Um, well yes...just do the usual routine," Michael growled at a loss, though at least now he knew that he was this Mr. Corporeal.

"Yes, sir... um...sir...the phone." The driver deferentially reminded him before gently closing the car's door.

"What's going on here, Lord?" Michael asked under his breath, and once again as when he was kind of doing an unauthorized assisting of the Seraph, Jon, The Holy Spirit seemed to not want to be the most informative.

So, just to be sure, before the driver could get around and enter the car, Michael tried to rise and once again failed to become a

spirit of the air (so to speak) and remained to all intents and purposes an earthbound, or in this case limo seat bound being of flesh without even that Angelic ability.

The thing was, he knew some things and remembered other things all of the sudden that he knew he didn't have any experience or familiarity with as Archangel, yet they were familiar nonetheless.

Aha! he thought to himself. *I have access to the memories and familiarities of this being whose body I now usurp. To what avail is this? In fact, to what avail is any of this?* He looked up to question the heavens.

While ruminating, he had heard the front car door open and close, then he heard another vaguely familiar sound...a beeping noise, and shortly thereafter the dark partition between he and the driver rolled down with a whirr.

The driver said apologetically, "Sir, your secretary called again on line two to say that Mr. Grummond is still waiting on line one."

Michael racked his brains, and whatever familiar memories he vaguely seemed to recall of the surroundings and his appearances and the car's interior didn't seem to extend to "Mr. Grummond," and he had no idea of who this Grummond guy was or what to say to him.

Michael mentally shrugged and decided that he needed to relax and bask somewhat in the variety of it all, and that though The Holy Spirit wasn't the most responsive right now to his mental queries, The Lord would perhaps volunteer what he needed to know as things progressed.

He had been chomping at the bit to just do something, preferably that was hard on demon kind but really anything new to relieve the boredom of waiting for the ending times, and that is what had gotten him into the somewhat satisfying confrontation with Lucifer.

For now...for ostensibly Divinely instigated boredom relief, he found that he was to all intents and purposes a human and not

able to change back to being an Angel or even to rise. Second, the life that he had been plunked into was like an ongoing opening vista of surprises. Kind of like a game that he had to learn the rules and parameters of in an ongoing way. *Verily...I am not bored.* He sent the thought aloft, with an immediate sense of having generated humor in response.

Last but not least was that somewhere in this persona there must be going to be an opportunity for him to do something positive to please both himself, and more importantly...The Lord.

Or at least, so he took the lord's cryptic last words to him... ("cast about you as you will soon find yourself, and do what you will...With my blessings.")...To mean.

Michael picked up the irritating noise making thing doodad that he knew to be called a phone. *See my Lord; I haven't always just moped about "The Pearly Gates of Heaven". I knew some things... yet truly the mind of this being I inhabit is most informative.*

"Hello," he said.

A gravelly voice that, again like other things, was vaguely familiar to him, asked, "Michael, are you out there feeding the pigeons again?" Without waiting for any response, the voice also complained, "I wish you would leave your cell phone on during your little excursions."

Michael wondered what a "cell phone" was, but it was a very brief wonder that got easily lost in all the other wonderings that were going on right then.

"I have to do what I have to do." Michael responded as non-committal as he could think of while marveling that The Lord had even arranged for him to inhabit the guise of a mortal who was named for him, and for the state of materialization that he currently found himself. IE: "Corporeal."

Of course all wasn't too surprising, as The Lord could have had this entity's existence, name, and vocation planned for His Archangel to usurp before Michael himself was created.

"This, to avoid undue confusion on your part, my angel."

Aha, Michael thought back at The Lord, *I knew that You were listening in and orchestrating.*

“You will find your way through that before you, as your way is unique to you.

You will find my favor in my humor.

These thoughts were as long as and as fleeting as dreams, where in moments, time can stop while a whole story unfolds.

“Are you there, Michael?” Came the tiny voice from the phone that had slipped a bit from being held to his ear.

The Archangel thought for a moment on the ambiguity of The Lord’s statement. For some reason (and not for the first time) it came home to Michael that The Lord enjoyed specifically the actions and antics of His Archangel to wit...Michael himself.

Once again, the Archangel that was a power in his own right, was made to feel childish and small before his Creator.

Amused a bit himself, Michael again wondered, *Lord, do You shut down some of Your ability to be all present and all knowing just so You can be amused at Your creations such as myself, and in our bumbings?*

“Michael, Michael...are you there?” Came the sound of the tiny voice over the phone to once again remind him that he had to multitask a bit.

“Yeah, I’m here and the pigeons are fine,” he answered with his thoughts scrambling to remember what the conversation with this Mr. Grummond person was about, and more importantly... to access his host’s memory as to what it perhaps should be about.

“Hmmm,” came from the phone followed by a silence of digestion for a few seconds, then a kind of grunt of derision before, “Are you on your way back here to the office? We have to go over the new Armstrong plans.”

Michael remembered that the driver had asked him if they should go to the office. As the partition was still down between himself and the (he perceived) quietly eavesdropping chauffeur, he called out, “Hey, you, yeah, you, I forget your name with the listening ears. Are we going to the office?”

“Yes, sir,” the driver said, sounding puzzled. “I asked you at the plaza, and I believe that is what you wanted me to do.”

“Fine,” Michael growled, and then under his breath but still audible to his business partner on the phone and still able to be heard by the driver, he said, “Everybody seems to know where I am going and what I am doing but me.”

More voices sounded from the car phone that had once again slipped down from directly occluding with his ear. (*Verily, I am not used to using such contrivances*, he thought to himself.) Unknown to Michael was that his cell phone was in his pocket still turned off, which was the standard for when the man he now found himself to be went for his walk and pigeon feeding.

His driver had responded to his mutterings by saying, “Sir, I am sorry if I have not been clear, and I thought I reminded you this morning when you ordered the service that my name is Sam and that I would be your driver today.”

The driver had said this deferentially still, but there was a hint of some kind of hurt or discomfort that Michael’s apparent confusion was causing to the man.

As a Celestial Being, and an Angel of Light, Michael in no way wanted to be the author of any causing’s of any man to be hurt or to fall from Grace or to lose his peace or to “Stumble.” For, as many Scriptures, including Matt 18:16 and Rom 14:13, dictated how unhappy The Lord was when someone who knew Him caused anyone else, Christian or otherwise, to stumble in their path to Him, or in their walk with Him. These Scriptures, in Michael’s opinion, were a warning to all, not just to mankind.

Seeing that there was an immediate issue needing to be addressed, Michael spoke into the phone. “I will be there shortly, and I must impose upon you further, as I must get off the phone now,” he said into the receiver before hanging up.

Michael could not know that his terse cessation of the call was not even close to how Mr. Grummond normally heard his host speak, so was not aware of the confusion his hanging up the phone in its car cradle had caused on the other end.

Thinking about the driver and the menial position such a function must entail among the humans, he perceived that the diminutive driver must feel while performing his subserviently menial task, that the ostensibly august one driven must think of him as so far beneath notice, as to not even merit his name's remembrance.

If this was the case, it could well cause the driver to stumble in his "walk," and this was not to be borne by Michael, while in all probability The Holy Spirit was reinforcing his conviction.

He must make amends.

He shifted to move to the seat that was back to back with the driver's seat with only the slid down partition in between them and said cheerfully, in as humanistic a way of speech as he could (and here again he found that he was helped by the memories of the host being he inhabited, whose memories he was fast learning to draw and rely on).

"I'm sorry, Sam, my mind is all over the place and I just keep forgetting things. Perhaps however old we are, we can have senior moments to where things just don't get logged into the memory banks, huh?" Not even knowing what a 'senior moment' was until just a moment ago, Michael couldn't help but wonder at himself in that respect. *I am from times before time was defined by man, and must wonder at my own capacity for having 'senior moments'.*

Michael could see some tenseness relax from the driver's kind of defensively hunched shoulders, which the discerning eye could take to mean that the poor man had had his share of belittling and had stiffened to prepare for just another one such from Michael. Yet he had spoken up as he could from his menial position in his own defense.

(Humans, Michael snorted in derision. They are so busy putting each other down trying to make themselves seem elevated in the process...to where they totally fail to understand the Scriptural meaning of "the first shall be last and the last shall be first." This humble little human driver should warrant a place in Heaven, and Michael hoped and prayed that Sam would indeed find his Salvation, and that they would meet again among the Heavenly Host.)

“That sometimes seems to be the case,” Sam responded in an entirely different non-defensive tone of voice and a far friendlier and more comfortable way of speaking than he had been using.

Carefully, Michael asked Sam, “I’m sorry, I have been pre-occupied...have you been driving me a lot lately?” In this way Michael hoped to get the driver to divulge wherever they had gone before the plaza and, in fact, to divulge anything at all about the person who Michael was supposed to be.

“I believe that I have picked you up quite a few times over the past few years from your offices, but perhaps you don’t remember, as you usually just open your own door getting in and then jump out at our destinations without waiting for me to get out and come around to the curb and open door for you.”

Boy, Michael was thinking. How can Beings get to be so lazy? I know they cannot fly, and these contrivances are swift compared to their feet, but to sit and wait while another opens a portal for you is contraindicated, except to exalt yourself.

Sam continued, “I believe that you have made mention that it is only when your company cars are all in use that your secretary arranges for our services.”

Michael’s thoughts continued, only momentarily interrupted by Sam’s input.

If you are in a hurry and do not have time to use the feet The Lord gave you, or use the animals that can bring you, and you just must use something that burns things smelly and smoky fuel, then you should not have the time to wait and belittle someone, whose function in part seems to be to come and let you in and out of your fast conveyance.

“Ahem, harrumph,” Michael began a bit flabbergasted about what to say, as he was thinking not too highly of the ‘privileged’ of mankind, and not for the first time. “Well...I don’t particularly believe in having others do what you have the time and strength to do for yourself, so indeed I do open and close my own portals in front of and behind me whenever I can.”

“Actually, we drivers today appreciate that, especially in foul weather. But my father and some of the old-school chauffeurs don’t believe in anything other than full service.”

The driver seemed to be warming to this subject a bit, and Michael didn’t have the heart, or really the desire to stop him, as all was “gist for the mill” at present, and being as Michael’s information mill was currently woefully lacking in information.....

“See,” Sam continued after drawing breath and negotiating a particularly bad traffic situation, “if you watch an old movie you can see how things were in the old days. Service was really service, and the servants took pride in how well they were ‘of service.’ Not like today. No sireee. The supposed servants of today have a list of ‘I don’t do’s’, while wanting to be treated as equals. How can that work? On any job the boss is the boss. Whether you pound a nail in for him or shine his shoes, you are not his equal on the job, and your job description fulfillment demands that you bow to his wishes in your functions regard during work or office hours. So, you are not equal until you are off duty, period. Myself, I just simply do not feel it right to be belittled while being of service, and I apologize if I got a bit huffy that you forgot my name.”

Michael was digesting this bit of human interaction information and saw that the driver was watching him in the rear-view mirror while he was doing his impartings, no doubt to see if his words were causing any thunderclouds to form on his passenger’s brow.

The Archangel could not tell, for one of the few times in his existence, whether Sam already had his Salvation by the glow of The Holy Spirit. Neither with his human eyes could he see the demons and Angels that he knew must be around.

He was, in essence, spiritually blind as far as seeing on the ethereal plane. He suspected, however, that Sam, who appeared to be in his mid-thirties, was not saved, and so, probably, had possibly only one or two demons around to assail him if need be. But they were probably comfortable in Sam being lost in his

“state of sin” and would not be really very active with assailments of temptations or corruptions, because he was satisfactorily lost to Heaven at this point, so why should they exert themselves?

Michael was well aware, that all demons knew as well as he, that too many assailments could cause a human to fall to his or her knees in misery, and seek The Lord for surcease. “Let good enough alone”....or...”don’t rock the boat”were both good quotes for demonkind, as many a time their Overlords would point out.

Among other things wondered, Michael wondered if while in the guise of a man, whether he was supposed to start Evangelizing. This was a very valid question, as Michael had never been called upon to work with mankind in such a way. He decided that for the nonce, he would just go with the flow and see where it took him, without any pulpit pounding...figuratively or literally.

Switching to another train of thought and endeavor entirely, Michael decided “Nothing ventured nothing gained” and so took the bull by the horns, to coin a phrase, and just flat asked the limo driver what he wanted to know.

“Sam, what exactly do you know about me and what I do in the world?”

Michael had shifted back to the back seat where it was a bit more comfortable for his human body, which in short order had begun to get a slight crick in the neck with his host’s body angled somewhat towards the rear of the vehicle, while his head had been swiveled forward towards Sam.

He picked up the briefcase and opened it to glance inside at the papers and then glanced up to see Sam kind of studying him in the rear-view mirror before speaking. Then Sam began to tell what he knew about the man Michael that hosted Michael the Archangel.

“Well first, I know that you are pretty well off considering that you either have your own building, or anyway have ‘The Corporeal Building’ named after you. Speaking of which, here we are.”

San had negotiated another turn and pulled into the curb in front of a set-back building of tinted glass and chrome. It was

basically U shaped to where the wings came out around the center to be on a plane with the adjacent buildings that were right against the busy sidewalk. From what Michael could see out of the limo windows between the city sidewalk and the recessed curved inward center of the building...there was a flat expanse that was overlaid with an intricate design of ornate pavers, centrally accentuated by a modern bronzed art sculpture in the center of a fountain. The fountain's jets were intermittently spurting to cover and soak the green oxidized bronzed centerpiece, before returning to a lesser water pressure.

"Yep, right on schedule," Sam said cheerfully. He shifted the limousine into park and turned in his seat to look back directly at his passenger, and then continued his discourse.

"The only other things that I know about you are what I've read in the papers, or were mentioned on TV in the news. Like when in the local area news you are mentioned as the architect of one of the buildings you have designed, remodeled, or restored. Then sometimes I read about your doings in the gossip columns where they question your relationships with your dates, or perhaps when you are written of in the society pages at a charity event. Bottom line is that you are a known man of some distinction in this town. At least people seem to know of you, because when I mention that I have you for a client, no one asks me who you are."

"Oh yeah", Sam cheerfully volunteered as an afterthought. "I also know that you have a partner named Dan Grummond, as when you get a call to the car and I answer it for you, it is usually what I assume is a secretary from his office that tells me that he is calling for you."

That is good to know, Michael thought to himself, still thumbing through the sketches, plans, and documents that he had found in the briefcase in bewilderment. No wonder it was kind of hefty for his weak human arm. The man carried a plethora of his work around with him. Well, at least he knew the first and last name of his new found partner. *Partner at exactly what...I wonder?*

Michael had also come mentally to an “oh well” stage of this (what he deemed) adventure. In other words, He had come to a resigned conclusion expressed in the thought, *Oh well, The Lord is going to look out for me and not have me biting off more than I can chew.*”

Sam turned back toward the dashboard and had just opened his own door before pausing to throw back over his shoulder, “Please, Mr. Corporeal, at least give me a chance to open your door in front of your building. It’s good for our business for prospective clients to see that we perform full service for our patrons. Besides, my boss would throw a conniption fit if someone called him to ask about the details of our service and then told him that one of his drivers, namely me, just sat in the car without bothering to get out and open and close the client’s doors for them.”

Sam started to get out when the thought struck him, and he turned again to confide in a whisper as though imparting something top secret to Michael, “You can only imagine what my employers would say or do to a driver who didn’t open the doors for female clients.” Then came a grin, and around the grin came the answer. “A future in pizza delivery awaits!”

Without waiting for Michael’s agreement, Sam looked for traffic, got out and shut his door, and started hustling his way to come around the big car.

Michael’s ears had been listening closely to Sam’s disclosures, but his eyes had been busily trying to make sense of the contents of his briefcase before and after they had pulled up to his building.

When Sam opened his door, he snapped shut the briefcase, *his* briefcase as it were, and stepped out of the car. Right away he saw the caption: “Corporeal Buildings” on a plaque on the side of the fountain’s basin retaining wall and then looked up to see in large letters “The Corporeal Structures” in a tastefully flowing script of white and gold trimmed lettering above the entrances to the buildings foyer.

Everything was again just so familiar, while exasperatingly remaining just out of readily accessible memory. (Kind of like

anything else that slips the memory to be referred to as being “right on the tip of the tongue.”)

Michael looked up to see that *his* building was somewhat dwarfed by the surrounding edifices, but none struck him as even being close to how aesthetically clean the design of his building was. Michael savored the possessive “his” for a moment, perhaps unreasonably proud of what he purportedly designed, owned, and had named after him. (He had never considered possessions before, having only his attire and armor that he would even consider “his own.”) It seemed possible that some human attributes of his host were coming to the fore. *Watch out for ‘pride’ happening instead of just savoring accomplishments as something well done.*

Michael well knew that The Lord was not going to leave him in his host’s body, and wondered whether some of his own thoughts would remain to be considered by his host, as he in turn was considering his host’s memories.

“Sir,” Sam said, and Michael stopped skyline gazing and reached out to perform that which he had beheld for millennia in various forms to his own approval, which was the minor human intimacy of touch when greeting or departing. which in this instance he knew to be the human ceremony of simply shaking the driver’s hand, and did emphatically not include other possible variations such as for instance... a hug or a kiss. He, however had reached out to Sam, only to discover yet another variation... in that the departing touch was offered in any form, as he found just a card placed in his grasp.

“Well, uh, thanks.” He hastily looked at the card, which had Sam’s name and a number printed along with *The Executive’s Choice*, and under that in smaller print was *Limousine Service*.

“The gratuity is included.” Sam advised he who was ignorant of what a “gratuity” even was, while holding a small electronic gizmo of some kind out towards him. He efforted to search his hosts memory and vaguely knew that he needed to sign this thing somewhere upon it. This was reinforced by the obvious writing implement protruding from its own clip holder on the device.

Fortunately, Sam was helpful and indicated with a forefinger the place for Michael to ‘make his mark’ upon after proffering the pen, which Michael took in hand, sighed, and looked to the heavens while he hastily scrawled something totally illegible on the devices lit up and lettered surface.

“Have no doubt, Sam.” He paused to smile and wave the card before finding a pocket to place it in to assure the driver that the card would not be nonchalantly treated and thrown away. “I will call you for any future need of conveyance.”

With that Michael began leisurely strolling towards the entrance of the building but once again glancing skyward beseechingly and thought, “I would that You would engage more fully these knowledge’s of the being that I inhabit, so I am not as inept to these mortals as I am to myself.”

Just before he got within reach of the revolving entry door, reading his name above it, he stopped. Suddenly as if The Lord was answering his prayer and shedding light across the human board, a curtain was being lifted on the memories of the host that The Lord had manifested him in. To where, beside and alongside other memories that were like vistas opening in his mind, Michael knew that just as it was obvious that anyone would look up the meaning of their name if their name had meaning... his host had at one time or another looked up *corporeal* to find that it meant: “relating to the physical body; bodily; tangible”.

This meant that in essence, the mortal name by which he was to go by could be construed and extrapolated to be: ‘Michael Tangible Physical Body’.

“*Very...very...funny!*” he addressed his Lord.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Aaron had just gotten off of the phone with Zoe. She had described the bungalow, the lake, and the resort in general. She had explained about the security at the exclusive resort that guaranteed privacy.

Aaron was impressed and could imagine himself lying about indolently, with the beautiful Zoe as a companion.

Of course, Aaron knew himself to be no Davey Crockett to be living in bungalows and roughing it too much, but when he had voiced how he might not fit into such a rustic environment, Zoe had told him it was rustic appearing but not at all primitive.

She had laughed and said, “Hey, we even have indoor plumbing and bathrooms instead of out-houses or woodsheds.”

Fortunately, as her upcoming stay at the resort was forefront in Zoe’s mind being she was on the way to the airport to go there, it had not been too hard for Aaron to get her to babble on enthusiastically about the resort and kind of (he hoped) forget about Armstrong girlfriends and wives and such.

It had, in fact, worked for the time being, because Zoe had talked on for about twenty minutes until she had told him she was at the airport and had to get off and go through check in, along with all the latest Homeland Security rigmarole.

They had said their goodbyes, and lo...just before hanging up Zoe had dropped the bomb and informed him that once comfortably ensconced in her bungalow with feet propped up on pillows, she was going to call him to live up to his part of the bargain in that she told him about the bungalow, and he was in turn to tell her about the Armstrong women, and how Armstrong romances were in general.

After getting off the phone with Zoe, Aaron was just getting ready to head off to the elevator and go up to do some exercise

when the phone rang again, but this time with his brother's distinctive ring.

"Now what?" he mumbled to himself, thinking that lately since his brother had come under his uncle's tutelage, every time his brother stopped by or called was some kind of a new chew on Aaron's fast becoming mightily sore...hind end.

"Hi, Gavin," he answered. "What's up?"

"Aaron, Dad is furious and read Uncle Gilbert and I the riot act. You know we have publicity people all over who are specifically there to quash any mention of our family's doings that they can, right?" Gavin asked Aaron without even a polite hello.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah...and really...I just don't know why we have to be such a cloak and dagger family anyway," Aaron responded, knowing that this had to yet again have to do with his (according to his family) concert barging fiasco."

"I know where you are going with this Gavin, and man...you already hung me out to dry about it, so why don't you give me a break?"

"Because," Gavin almost shouted, "because your exploits and our name are now being smeared first across a couple of university mediums like their little in-house paper and radio station, then was picked up by a couple of rag-tag tabloids, then by a couple of regular papers in Los Angeles, and now there have been mentions on television stations."

"Oh come on, Gavin," Aaron said. "My going to a concert on my eighteenth birthday can't be that big a deal."

"Well, maybe if you hadn't broken the world record for the most expensive seats ever bought in the history of mankind. Or maybe if people weren't framing your checks and other's selling them on EBay. Then you have to drive up in the place on camera going the wrong way and displaying to the entire world that we Armstrongs think ourselves so exalted that we don't have to obey the laws of the land."

Aaron could see that his brother was running out of steam. He could also hear his uncle Gilbert in the background talk-

ing to Gavin in his usual unperturbed even voice, trying to calm his brother.

For the first time it really came home to Aaron the Armstrong pecking order. Why, for instance, since his brother had come to be eighteen himself, while Aaron was still only sixteen, had it suddenly been that every time there was an issue, it was Gavin who had taken Aaron to task, rather than their uncle Gilbert.

That's how it is now, he thought to himself. It is Gavin who is now responsible to the Old Man for my actions, and not Uncle Gilbert like it used to be.

Aaron caught himself in mid reverie and realized that he had not heard Gavin except as a muffled voice for a bit, like a hand was over the mouthpiece over there wherever his brother was calling from.

Then, in a normal tone of voice, Gavin's words came back into audio focus.

"Aaron, we have to confirm something with The Patriarch, but I suggest you start packing your bags for an extended trip away from home."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Aaron demanded.

"Well, you are always blathering about how you do not understand why our clan has for millennia stayed in the shadows and shied from recognition, right?"

"Yeah, that's right."

"See, Aaron, over the last two years I have learned the answer to that question besides the obvious potential kidnapping, from my studies with Uncle Gilbert, and as Patriarch to be."

You see...I am being tested now in how I handle the leading of our immediate family, before the reins of power over all can be transferred. Then in your case and in the case of a long line of our ancestral younger brothers...the elder Heir Apparent is to decide when the younger possible Heir can learn and also be party to that knowledge.

Not Dad, and not Uncle Gilbert. Me. And I was thinking about cutting some corners for you, but it surely isn't going to

happen for now, and thanks a lot for throwing a difficulty curve ball into the equation that I need to solve. And you know that Dad and Uncle are all over when to hand over the reins to me, just as I am now all over when to let you into the loop.

“Uncle Gilbert and I agree with our publication people who are to censor such things that there is no stopping the human interest stories that have been stirred up. And someone keeps stirring the pot even as we move to stymie things. The bottom line seems to be to go out there and answer their questions and get them to be done with it all that way, instead of letting them just go on and on about we mysterious reclusive Armstrongs.

“I mean to tell you...at this point without anyone to tell them differently, they are inventing whatever they please and selling their fabricated versions of things. Frankly, we have conferred among the three of us, and though I have to decide, the test allows me to hear our elders advice. And it seems to us all that you might have a news conference where you just tell them it was your birthday, and you went nuts for a minute or two. Or... whatever.”

“Are you kidding me?” Aaron asked incredulously but with a sudden grin. “Are you saying you want me to go out ‘off island’, and give an interview and let someone film me deliberately?”

“Yeah, well, if you were in Los Angeles, you would see pictures of you all over the place waving your arms like some kind of scarecrow anyway,” Gavin informed him wryly, but Aaron could detect a bit of hidden amusement on his brother’s part, as Gavin knew him well even though they were so different.

Gavin knew that even if his little brother pretended indifference or dismay to their Dad and Uncle...the prospect of getting out from under the oppressively protective and reclusive atmosphere under which they had spent their entire lives appealed no end to his little brother.

If anyone knew that Aaron just ached for the chance to try to stroll among the masses like he was one of them...it was Gavin.

Meanwhile, visions of imaginable and unimaginable freedoms danced through Aaron's mind, and he asked, "So, when do you think you would want me to go to Los Angeles?"

"Uncle Gilbert is getting hold of Dad right now, as I just called him with my decision, but we have already sent a helicopter your way and a jet is standing by. I think The Patriarch knows that you either have to get them to shut the heck up, or keep them focused on you and not on our entire family as they are starting to do. I would advise you to just pack what you need for a day or two and then buy whatever you need when you get where you are going."

Gavin was again having some kind of whispered or muffled conversation in the background, when Aaron clearly heard his brother say, "Yes, Sir, give me just a sec."

A click or two and Aaron heard the strong, authoritative voice of his father come clearly over the line.

"Aaron, boy are you there?"

"Yes, father." Aaron answered a bit sheepishly, as The Patriarch only spoke to him directly of late...very rarely.

"Boy, you are a pain," his father said sternly then continued.

"You have no clue as to what is at stake here and now and nearing fruition for our entire family, and how badly we could have used you were you deemed mature enough. But...I, Gavin, and your Uncle Gilbert are persuaded by your recent irresponsible actions, that you are not ready to find out what is at stake and so...cannot be of any use to us for now. Meanwhile, you have stirred a hornet's nest that prior to the electronic age was not possible, even by some of our most bumbling of ancestors in their heyday."

Aaron truly felt chastised. No one likes to hear that they are considered useless, when if deemed useful there was a real need for them.

"I'm sorry father," he gulped out.

There was a pause, and then The Patriarch continued.

"The Armstrongs have been behind the Thrones of many a ruler or dynasty or power. In this way we have avoided the dag-

ger, which plunged into the chests of those rulers that we stood behind, and watched with impunity as they had their hearts cut out. Why was this so, it was as we were known to have no ambitions of our own, and so posed no threat to a usurper. Thus it has been for millennia. But, now you see...it is our time. We are now strong enough to rule...em...harrumph...um...forget I said that.”

Aaron caught the drift that his father had said things that he had not wanted to impart. *But hold on a second...dear old subtle Dad The Armstrong wasn't about to blunder out something so obviously...that he wanted not known. Like things having to do with what his brother had been learning and that they had all decided that Aaron wasn't equal to formally knowing just yet for some reason.*

He kind of felt bad about letting his progenitors down in that respect, but he knew himself to be stronger and more able than his peers obviously thought he was, and if his suspicions were correct, his father thought somewhat the same. Hence the informative, yet not too revealing...blunder.

In any event, Aaron was all ears now, wondering what other ‘accidental’ slips his father might make during this, the absolutely longest communication from The Patriarch that Aaron had ever heard his father make to himself and/or Gavin. Though he knew that he had not been party to many a closed-door session between his sibling and his uncle and father these past two years.

Boy, he sounds so old and senile, Aaron thought to himself, while hoping for another slip of the tongue and at the same time feeling sorry for his sire. But wait, he chided himself almost falling for the illusion of senility that was being projected, by his sire. The old man was no where near the age that he looked, and it was only a short time before that he knew the Patriarch to have been functioning with his usual capabilities.

He knew that whatever the total awesome responsibility of being The Armstrong Patriarch was, it was so burdensome that most Patriarchs that Aaron knew about in his family's history had died at relatively early ages from stress or whatever. And

he had seen with his own eyes that his sire was seriously going down this same premature aging path. One could almost clock the passing of an Armstrong Patriarch by the coming of age and maturity of the heir apparent. Or at least so it seemed from Armstrong history.

A funny or not so funny repetition in the chain of their patriarchy. There had been a lengthy pause in the Patriarch's discourse, and Aaron could hear and feel his brother and his uncle breathing and listening in, not daring to speak while The Patriarch was waxing forth, even during intermissions while he was obviously marshalling his thoughts

"Look, boy." His father's voice came again at last. "I heard about your shenanigans and thought we put a cork in the media responses. Then over the last two days this thing has blown up in our faces like spreading wildfire.

I prayed last night to our gods and woke up this morning with an idea that I believe came from them, and that is that you go to whoever is pushing this and give them an exclusive interview.

The plan is to satisfy whoever is inspiring this entire hubbub of speculations about all of us in general, to instead just have them focus on just you in particular, where they stop pasting our names all over, by simply quelling their curiosity by feeding them you and whatever blather you want to tell them to keep them focused only on you. We much prefer that attention be as brief as can be managed.

"I am telling you, son, either that happens, or you are going to have to become our dancing bear and perhaps not come home for a long, long while."

(Little did The Patriarch know how little of a threat to Aaron, that his statement constituted.) Aaron could almost visualize how Gavin must be shaking his head over how he, Gavin, knew Aaron was taking in their father's words with an enthusiastic grin, while their father supposed his words would be taken as a threat and dire warning.

Another pause while The Patriarch seemed to be obviously marshalling his thoughts so to put his imparting succinctly, which he was a bit known for and had many a time in their youth advised Aaron and Gavin to think before speaking, even if it meant a void of momentary silence. Meanwhile, Aaron could hear his brother and uncle murmuring in the background, obviously on a speaker phone at their end of the three way.

Then Aaron heard coming from outside his house, the muffled clatter of a helicopter approaching, even through the ostensibly soundproofed new walls and windows of his mansion. (*My architect is going to hear from me.* He made a mental note to himself.)

Again came the voice of his progenitor in a continuing of this far and away longest single communications spiel that he had ever witnessed by his father to anyone.

“What I mean is that during these ending times, ahem har-rumph...I mean as we near the fruition of our plans, which are very serious plans, by the way. Well, if the masses of the world just *have* to dwell on the name of Armstrong, then you are to give them a frivolous focus as exclusive as possible upon yourself only. Be an attention getter. What is Aaron going to do next...that supremely rich playboy of the world? AND NOT ‘what are the Armstrongs up to in general?’”

“Do you follow me, boy?”The Patriarch demanded. Then before Aaron could answer, addressed Gavin and his uncle Gilbert.

“Okay, Gilbert, and you, Gavin. Take this boy off of the leash and put him to work doing something *for* the family for once instead of letting him put all of our behinds in the wringer. But I warn you to caution all of our friends and associates throughout the world, it is not just an army of Armstrong Security that I want around my boy but their security forces as well if and as he goes through the lands within which they claim as under their individual influences.”

There was a click, and Aaron believed that he heard two other sighs of relief that coincided with his own.

“Hey, Gavin, the helicopter is here, but so far all I have is my wallet, keys, and phone.”

“You heard the Old Man,” Gavin responded. “That is going to have to be enough. We’ll send you whatever else you absolutely have to have from your house that you cannot just buy a new one of in Los Angeles. Matter of fact, that will give you something to do while in the air...order up any and everything you can think of, including a new helicopter to pick you up from the plane, and a new limo to pick you up from the helicopter. Draw all the attention that you can to yourself.”

“Get going, and Uncle Gilbert and I will meet you at the plane here on the island before you take off.”

PROOF

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Things had been rapidly spiraling out of hand in Strongarm's opinion, and that meant in the last few hundred years.

He fondly recalled the days when a community like Salem could only turn on their own village's possessed and obsessed, and though trying to exterminate them locally, the effort would not become widespread as communications between humans were slow or non-existent.

Now, he thought sourly, you possess someone at one end of this planet, and everyone knows an exorcism is in progress all the way to the other end of this mud ball.

Shortly after he had questioned the two 'dumb as a post' demons who had been assigned to Zoe by whatever Captain regulated them and found out nothing particular and indeed, nothing even in general, Armstrong had just begun to lay out his orders to Retch for the Zoe mammal's continued observation, when along came yet more trouble.

The "trouble" was in the form of two new Angels descending virtually right on top of him where he still was floating in front of the female performer doing its performance.

He perceived two things in the next two seconds: One was that they actually were taking up station above the human named Zoe. Two was that one of them was not an Angel at all but a six-winged Seraph. And, having just heard the tale about a Seraph being on Earth just recently and stirring the pot (ie, having The Lord's leave apparently to be unbound and smite demonkind as he chose), well...

"Hail, Celestial things," he called to The Lord's two. "I do not suppose that you are lost and that I can give you directions to a place of better music or indeed...anywhere away from here and most especially away from myself?"

“No, fallen one,” a sonorous voice answered. “We come to ward the ‘Child of God’ below from evil intent.”

“She is backslidden,” Strongarm answered. “She is fair game to be influenced with even less protection than if she had been confessing and repenting. She cannot have more protective warding when separated by sin than if she was actually in a decent state of Grace.”

“None the less, by the Grace of our Lord, we are sent to ward her from your kind,” Jon answered then added, “I tell you this now, demon in good will, though you merit no explanations, which though you may not even understand the concept of, is in line with my wishes to not have any confrontations in this regard, with your kind. So, please tell you kindred to not approach this female, as we will smite them as we see fit.”

Strongarm sputtered and his jaw opened and closed, trying to find words until finally all he could do was mutter, “That isn’t how things are supposed to work.”

“Our last words on this matter to you are these: Had those of your kind most recently not ignored ‘how things are supposed to work’, we would not be here having words with you.”

Strongarm snarled an unintelligible response, and beckoning to Retch to follow him, he flew through walls and buildings until safely out of earshot of any Celestials that he could see.

“Well, you heard it,” he told Retch. “Go to the Master’s palace and find Stanch and tell him about those two. If you don’t find him there ask for an audience with Tranth in my name and inform him about the Seraph, so he can help you to quickly find Stanch. I need those two Einstein’s to get together and tell you what in turn, to come and tell me.”

As Retch made to leave, Strongarm grasped his arm with a taloned claw and detained him. “I don’t know if you noticed, but as soon as the Seraph showed up, one of those two little useless critters of our kind ran off, no doubt to tell his Captain about us, the Seraph, the human cow, and whatever else the little dummy

can be persuaded to remember that might have stuck between the sieves of its memory ability.”

Here Strongarm put to use his intellect to choose his words carefully, as Retch was not to know the details of the Strongarm/Armstrong Strategy, but as things were getting so muddled, he finally shrugged.

He said, “I don’t know what to say to Tranth and Stanch about what to do about the Seraph. Let them figure it out. But I do advise that they should try to run interference from Overlord Torath’s henchmen showing up here in droves in response to that little messenger imp that just took off from here, and putting at risk our efforts with the Armstrongs.” Now go, while I stay and keep an eye on the noise making female and those two new banes of my existence.”

Retch went on his way, and Strongarm went back to the concert hall to find that the caterwauling had ceased and that the human female that he thought he would have easy access to sway from pursuing any relationship with Aaron was in a hurried process of changing out of her shiny garments.

In short order, he and the two Celestial Beings were following along as Zoe hurried to her limousine to begin the long ride to the airport.

She was on the phone the entire time while in her car, and Strongarm would have given something (perhaps the torture of Torath’s still attending lone imp) to have overheard her conversation. But when he made a move toward the vehicle, he had been ward off by the two Heaven sent ones, who in his opinion, were still cheating on the rules governing the actions allowed Angels and fallen angels, as laid down by The Lord Himself.

He could see that the two Angelic Beings had no qualms themselves about listening in on the telephone conversation, and he ground his teeth in frustration. (He would have been grinding his teeth all the more had he been immediately aware of what happened about five thousand miles away, just after the female

hung up the phone, when The Patriarch had deigned to speak at length to Aaron.)



Stanch had left Satan's palace to go find Strongarm, who he thought might be on the island, and apprise him about the publicity that had blossomed almost overnight about the Armstrongs. He had shown up just in time to be on hand to address The Patriarch's questioning dreams about what to do about the threat to the Strongarm/Armstrong Strategy, which all the burgeoning publicity represented.

Stanch's suggestive influences over The Patriarch while in a deep sleep had borne fruit to where Aaron had now received orders to either go quell the questions about the Armstrong family in general, or to draw attention to himself to such a degree that no one even thought about the rest of the family.

Stanch knew, though, that Strongarm had been going to try to scare Aaron somehow from even wanting to go out into the world, and/or throw a demonic monkey wrench into any future relations the youth might be considering having with the singing female called Zoe.

Stanch was champing at the bit, so to speak, to run up on Strongarm and tell him that plans had changed in that regard in light of their new machination put forward via dream to the Patriarch, IE: Aaron deliberately focusing attention on himself, while also putting forward the dream state thought of *how better to attract attention away from the rest of the family than for Aaron to have a relationship with a rock star?*

He had proof of his efforts bearing fruit in that shortly after the Patriarch awakened, he had overheard the wishful thinking of the Armstrongs, and The Patriarch in particular, about the possibility that the younger son, at a mere eighteen years of age, could sally forth and quell the rapidly blossoming focus on the Armstrong family.

Far more likely of success than merely having a romantic entanglement with Zoe, was that the youth could continue in the same vein as he had already proven himself particularly apt, and be the attention magnet that he had proven himself so capable of being.

Stanch hesitated for a few more moments and then winged away towards Los Angeles, where he knew that Zoe was last, and felt that Strongarm either still was or that they would hopefully meet head on, with each going to where the other had just come from.



Retch arrived at the palace, and upon bursting into the Antechamber to the Throne room where he expected to be announced to Stanch, and if needed...Tranth. He was told by the smug voluble Slimeth that Satan had just emerged from seclusion in his private chambers (from whence roars and other furious sounds had been emanating) and had finally come to sit again on his Throne to hold court.

Slimeth informed Retch in his most puffed-up, toad-like pomposity that Satan was in conference with Tranth over supremely important issues and upon no pretext was to be disturbed.

As Retch knew where he personally was in the scheme of things, and not knowing the import of the Strongarm/Armstrong Strategy, or potential door opening ability of using Strongarm's name to so august lords as Tranth and the dread Master himself, he sat meekly and waited.



Satan once again lolled on his golden Throne on the black dais, in his red gold dragon form.

Tranth had brought him up to speed about the Armstrongs, among other lesser matters, with the proviso that things were moving so fast that no sooner would he hear something about the Strategy or the Armstrongs and get it dealt with, here would

come yet another messenger with something that would change their immediate plans towards the culmination of the Strategy.

Satan, still wrathful and preoccupied about the encounter with the Seraph and Michael, was kind of listening with half an ear until the mention of Los Angeles. At that point he focused in and started asking a few questions and getting some answers he didn't want to hear.

"Well," he hissed, "no wonder Prince Torath has sent me queries that someone portraying you as the author of machinations he is unaware of has been stepping on his toes there."

"No offense, my lord," Tranth responded. "We need Torath, Baloth, or one of their lackeys getting in the mix and learning about the Armstrongs like we need more Christians."

Satan kind of snorted and growled at the same time while in contemplation.

"Yesssss, I will send word to Torath to stay away from those of yours that he knows are operating in Los Angeles."

"One last thing, Master, in regards to proving to you how things are changing so rapidly with man's new communication technology..." Tranth strode to the massive portals that only he or Satan could command to open.

When they opened, there almost instantly came to stand Slimeth the Major Domo of the Antechamber. The only thing different between he and the Road Runner of cartoon fame in how he zoomed to a stop in front of the portals when they opened was a lack of the sound of a "Beep-Beep" in accompaniment.

Glancing quickly about and not seeing either of the faces that he sought, Tranth whispered to Slimeth, "Is there anyone here with messages from Stanch or Armstrong?"

Slimeth beckoned the awestruck, diminutive Retch and gestured for him to approach the Throne room.

"Master," Torath informed Satan, "I present the reason why we must begin to communicate using mankind's technology as behold, here is yet another messenger from either Armstrong or

Stanch, who's message might already be redundant by the time that this messenger arrived. And furthermore, we rely on such a one's memory rather than speaking and being able to dialogue and question the author of the communication directly."

Satan snorted with impatience and began the indicative clicking of his talons. Then he spoke and warned, "While you blather, its message grows older and more apt to be out of date. Let us hear it, respond, and then let us hear your plan to educate our kindred in mankind's communications techniques, as I fear most of my subjects to be incapable of readily learning what would be needed to use man's technology against them."

After listening to the trembling Retch (who was all too aware of the concept of "shooting the bearer of bad tidings," though perhaps not knowing that exact term), the two leaders of demon kind dismissed him to await their pleasure in the Antechamber.

A brief conference ensued, as it was determined that there was nothing to actually be done except to keep watch on Zoe to see if Aaron contacted her or vice-versa and to just keep watch on the Seraph and his attending Angel at the same time. Why The Lord was stirring the waters with the presence of two of His own was a mystery, as she was really of no importance yet, that the two demon leaders could ascertain.

Tranth reopened the Throne room portals, gestured to Retch to approach, and whispered the Master's decision to the diminutive demon. Not trusting Torath as far as he could spit, he also warned Retch to say nothing to anyone that he was carrying a message from the Throne or to whom he was carrying a message. "Except if you happen to run into Stanch or Strongarm," he carefully amended. "Do tell either all that you know if you see one of them in your travels."

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

After entering the revolving door, and as his host's memories continued to flood into his awareness, Michael knew right where to stride to across the lobby to catch he and his partner (Dan Grummond) private elevator.

He could now even put a face to the disembodied voice that he had been speaking to on the car phone.

(Thank you, Lord.) He lifted in a silent prayer to Heaven.

Now, thinking about phones. He put a hand in to his jacket's inside pocket, and there lurked a turned off cell-phone. He pulled it out, turned it on, and replaced it where he had found it.

(He found that he was inordinately pleased with himself for being able to know how to accomplish turning that phone on.)

Thinking about the functions and ways of being of this Michael Corporeal brought a further flood of memories of that worthy's about such things as architecture, and more specifically, about current projects. The drawings and documents in his briefcase were beginning to make sense in the light of some of the revelations that he knew The Lord was allowing him.

The Archangel was just thinking that he had the hang of things by thinking a questioning thought and receiving an applicable download in return, when out would pop information from his host that had nothing to do with what he was mentally inquiring or thinking about.

Images of Corporeal's parents and sister and even some pictures of them on what he knew were the walls of his office bombarded him one minute, and...uh oh...what's this.

A procession of female images paraded through his mind without rhyme or reason. There were high-school-age-looking girls and far more mature-looking ladies all jumbled in amongst each other.

It seemed that Mr. Corporeal had been having an active social life, which the Archangel was okay with, but after the succession of images of varying ages had ceased, he noted with a bit of dismay that not a one of them had a flashing light or buzzer to denote the current interest of his host.

As he now knew the body he found himself indwelling to be thirty-eight years old, the more youthful of the images that had flashed before him could not pertain to his host's current amorous interest.

The Archangel suspected that a curveball was going to come at him from some quarter in this regard, though, and he best gird himself.

He made to hitch his sword around to be prepared (gird himself) where the hilt was just so in case of need...which was his wont when facing peril or indeed, any difficult situation, and lo... of course his sword was not now buckled upon him.

A vision of all of his armor and normal attire neatly folded and/or placed by his shield came to him, which was where he had left it leaning against one of the massive ornately carved columns that served as one of the gateposts at the entry to Heaven.

"Thank you, Lord. I would, however, that they were here with me now, he mumbled under his breath, just as the elevator doors began to open at the fifteenth floor, which he knew to be the floor of his office, while the penthouse floor, which was the sixteenth floor, he now knew to be where he dwelled.

He quickly qualified his thank you to The Lord with, "I would that I was in that armor and nearing battle with the enemy rather than face the amorous attentions of any of my host's females."

Michael felt rather than heard his Lord's mirth take the form of a rumble that shook the Heavens.

Sure enough, just as the Archangel stepped from the elevator, a bright-eyed and saucy little thing came rushing up to him with a handful of papers. Checking his new memory file of females and finding her among them as one Katie, he was relieved to be

given that this was his personal assistant, a friend, and very dear to his host.

As he strode toward where he knew his office to be, she took up station a bit to his side and to the rear and began babbling about this or that that she must be deeming was of import, but what perked his ears and piqued his interest for some reason was the repeated use of a particular client...Aaron Armstrong.

When he reached his office door, he turned to her and said, "Refresh my memory about the Aaron Armstrong situation and project status."

He went around the large, old glass and black-iron, claw-footed, ornately decorated, oval, formal conference table that he used for a desk, which though dwarfing the rest of his office space, yet groaned under the weight of all that was arrayed haphazardly upon it.

The high-back office chair that was custom contoured to fit his physique and provide comfort over the times of his long hours ensconced there upon, beckoned him.

He stripped off his suit coat and hung it on a nearby coat rack, upon which already hung a raincoat. He sat in his chair, swung his feet up on to a conveniently and he knew to be deliberately left bare spot (for this purpose) on the corner of his desk, loosened his tie, and put his hands behind his head.

Katie had demurely perched herself on the edge of one of the two comfortable guest chairs that faced the front of Michael Corporeal's desk.

She cleared her throat, noted that he was situated and had her attention, and began, and as Michael seemed to want an encapsulation of the entire project, she began with the beginning.

"As you know, we completed the initial project for Mr. Armstrong satisfactorily on schedule. We were subsequently contacted about a helicopter pad, drilling down through the rock and extending the central elevator shaft down to sea level, where we are to design and build a protected marina for boats and...

well....some kind of ridiculously expensive, virtually mother nature proof yacht club building of some kind.”

As Katie had been speaking, Michael had swung his feet down and pushed off on his chairs castors to roll over to the coat rack where he had left his briefcase. Returning to his desk, he opened the case to remove the hand-drawn sketches, which he had noted before in befuddlement in the car but now found to have bearing on Katie’s disclosures.

Katie continued and described how they had just received the engineers and surveyor’s reports from the team that they had sent out to Armstrong Island to check the viability of Aaron Armstrong’s wishes being taken from an idea to a reality. Michael saw that the pictures that had been in his briefcase were of a peninsula upon which sat a massive sprawled out mansion, which overlapped the rocky promontory upon which it sat. There were several views of the mansion obviously taken from a helicopter. The sketches, when superimposed over the actual pictures, depicted the same area from a side view but slightly downward angle as if also from an aerial view, rock breakwater jetties protecting a series of docks, a small anchorage, a modern-looking, glass, two-story structure with a helicopter pad on its roof indicated by a circled red cross, and then an approach to an opening in the solid rock, which Michael knew to be to access the newly bored and installed house to sea-level interior home elevator.

At the far right of the sketch was a track on the side of the cliff with a another, but glass-enclosed elevator, shown about a third of the way up the tracks from the docks, as if in mid-traverse of it’s mission, whether upward or downward.

Just visible at the top of the cliffs where the glass exterior elevator would stop inside a small outbuilding, were a helicopter pad and a small parking area.

While Michael was (what he now firmly was led to refer to as) “down loading” memory about what his host had been designing to build, Katie had been droning on about what the engineers

had found to be the existing situation for the most difficult of the engineering obstacles to overcome.

And, the three primary engineering feats to get done to prepare for Michael Corporeal's designs to be implemented, were first and easiest, to install the surface mount exterior elevator to fetch workers up and down.

This would remain a general public elevator that would undoubtedly see more use than the private interior of the house elevator, as surely Aaron did not want everyone, including maintenance personnel, traipsing through his home.

Second was to bore the elevator core shaft and to adapt the existing interior elevator to install the interior core shaft elevator. Then, to dredge up all the dynamited debris from the building of the first phase of prep-work for the building of the house itself off of the promontory's rock from the seabed, and use it to build breakwater jetties, upon which a three foot thick at its base, and ten foot tall concrete wall was to stand. This served another purpose in removing what might be a hazard to deep-keeled sailboats.

Third, was to engineer the docks and structures to be invincible. Impervious to anything nature could throw at them, and as the wind and waves would have to first get over a ten foot wall upon a breakwater jetty of solid rock, with steel and concrete caissons going down to bedrock, the buildings and docks would never bear the full brunt of nature's fury, though designed and built to do so.

Katie had wound up her imparting, while the Archangel was basically reveling in his new found architectural and structural expertise. Of course he knew he was but picking the brains of his host, but to have an understanding of the complexities involved in some of the wonders that he had seen that had been built by mankind that he had marveled at over the centuries, was really something to discern and savor.

The Archangel found himself for the first time in a very long time actually taking some pride in The Lord's creations—man-kind, and their complexities and abilities.

Too bad they cannot seem to bring their own creative and complex minds to focus on spiritual things and discern the spiritual battle that in the main they were just participating in as unwitting pawns. He thought.

Bringing himself back to the immediate situation, he dredged up his memory and found that the fair Katie had last made mention that they were expecting a financial breakdown for the generating of a bid from their cost estimating department that same day to do the first phases of the new Armstrong project.

Everyone at Corporeal Buildings, however, knew that what things cost really didn't mean anything to the Armstrongs and that there was no bidding involved but to merely put a ballpark number on the contracts for a signature by whichever Armstrong the contract was with. They also knew to let no grass grow as far as their communications with the Armstrongs as far as bids, contracts, or indeed getting the actual projects under way.

The contracts also had to be open ended in the materials costs, even though granted they knew to bid for and install the very best materials that money could buy to use in the structural aspects... The Corporeal Interior and Exterior Designers along with the Landscaping Departments, were continually amazed at Aaron's opulent tastes and willingness to spend exorbitant amounts of money on what should have been the simplest of installs.

They all, of course, had no idea of the competition and ongoing friendly vying for unique and different exotic new decors, which went on between the Armstrong households. They were surprised at young Aaron's knowledge of materials and his display of an awareness of the latest in decorative and innovative materials used in the décor of a home, but did not know how he came by it.

Suffice it to say that bidding the work as indicated on the contract in the finish work phases, always had a qualifying "plus

materials and installation labor for anything “in addition to the contract.”

As Katie seemed to be sitting and observing him expectantly, no doubt awaiting some jewel of a response from who she justifiably thought of as her boss who made such decisions, Michael quieted himself inside and also waited for an insertion into his mind of what Mr. Corporeal would have had to say if he were himself.

“Just a second, Katie. Let me think for a minute. Just hold your pose.” He said, finding the new invention of twiddling his thumbs to be rewarding.

“Okay, whatever the engineers come up with, in addition to the planning and estimating guys to do the demolition for the elevator core shaft, the installation of both elevators, and utilities panels and sub-panels to run the entire finished project, plus the upper helicopter pad, and breakwater jetties and barrier walls, add another 6.7 million for the docks and marina buildings.”

He added, “Of course, qualify everything to add changes, materials specifically dictated by the Owner, and all the other almost specific to the Armstrong’s amendments and qualifications that we have to use in our dealings with them.”

Knowing that he really did not need to add this in as his little assistant had more than proven herself capable in the two years since she had come to the firm and only because Michael was somehow led to know of the importance of the account, he added, “Have everyone drop everything else that they are doing to get this proposal and contract ready for approval.”

“Yes, sir!” Katie responded and closed her notebook on papers and pens to tuck all under her left arm, which allowed her to throw him a snappy salute, which she had learned as a member of the Navel Reserve. “I have devoted my life to this account and made it first and foremost on my every waking moments agenda, and since every time the Armstrong name comes up you reiterate that they are priority one around here, I find myself devoting my

dreams and sleep time to the Armstrong account, just in case my every waking moment is not enough.”

The Archangel laughed and asked, “Am I really that bad?” (While ledgers, numbers, account figures, and balances began whirling through his thoughts.)

“Worse!” Katie affirmed, still holding her salute.

“Okay, at ease, soldier. I’ll try to be less of a pain about the Armstrong accounts, but everyone knows that they really are the icing on the cake around here, right?”

“Oh yeah...” Katie said, nodding her head with what she considered a “Duh, no kidding” look, while crossing her eyes and sticking her tongue out to the side of her mouth to really look like an imbecile. “When you handed out that big bonus to everyone when the final phase payment for the house cleared, it became official that any time anyone around here had anything to do with something for the Armstrongs, it was given top priority.”

“By the way...that reminds me.” She opened her notebook and began flipping through it. “This is really going to come as a surprise to you. Aaron Armstrong called and said that he was going to be in Los Angeles and be available to meet with you to go over the new project plans. He said that he didn’t know his exact arrival time yet so had no idea of when he could meet with you but that he would probably be in Los Angeles for awhile and that there should be plenty of time.”

Here Katie paused and cleared her throat and gave Michael one goofy look before continuing, “He also said that as his coming was a spur of the moment thing mostly to address other matters, he would not impose on you right away per your standing invitation for him to stay in your penthouse should he come to Los Angeles on business or pleasure.”

Katie had paused again, seeing that Michael was frozen in place, apparently from her impartings, where a minute before he had been slightly rocking his office chair in combination with a slight swivel that had worked together to arrive at and per-

form a lazy oval of travel that he and his chair were unknowingly performing.

“Don’t shoot the bearer of bad tidings,” she ultimately and reluctantly imparted. “But, at the end of that call, Aaron said, ‘We will have plenty of time to hang out at your place in the evenings between all the design meetings that will be occupying our days.’”

By this time the Archangel was pretty sure that the Armstrong account was why he was for all intents and purposes indwelling Michael Corporeal. Every time the name Armstrong came up it was like The Holy Spirit quickened within him and so quickened his interest in the Armstrongs as well.

“Is there anything else Mr. Armstrong said that might come as a surprise to me?” Michael asked with what Katie thought she discerned as an expectant wince.

The Archangel was fondly thinking about how just a short while before he had been so looking forward to the privacy of his penthouse on the top floor of this very building. *Oh boy, just a few feet away (if only I were in my Angelic form I could fly up through the ceiling to blessed privacy).*

(Just a bit of private unobserved quality time with the thoughts and memories of Michael Corporeal, but no...it was apparently not to be.)

“Are you kidding me? The main surprise for you I would have thought to be that he is coming at all!” she responded, sounding confused. “That boy never leaves that island, and you always complained that he couldn’t ever even meet you part way. Then we have all this media attention because he was allowed to come over here for his eighteenth birthday and caused such a media stir to where we thought he might get himself locked up and hidden away on that island indefinitely.”

Katie had been flipping through her notes while she was speaking. “Ah, here it is!” she exclaimed. “Aaron called back a few minutes later about the sound-proofing at his house not keeping out the sound of a helicopter landing on his lawn, where we pretty much *have* to put the new helicopter pad.”

They were interrupted by Dan Grummond bursting in to the office without even a thought to giving a polite knock first.

“Hey, Mike. Hi, Katie.” The perspiring rotund worthy hailed while wiping his brow with an already damp handkerchief and yet interminably pushing his glasses up on his nose.

“I heard you were in, and I heard that Aaron Armstrong left a message that he was coming to town for some duration. And that he was complaining that the mansion was not living up to the soundproofing specs.”

Dan swabbed his neck and forehead again before continuing, “Geez, Mike...what can we do to fix the soundproofing quick? I mean, what if he is coming to town to look for another architect because he has complaints about our work...”

“Hold it hold it.” Michael raised a placating hand. “In the first place, our qualifications are for the house to be soundproofed for normal outdoor sounds, including lawn mowers, but I even specifically mention that the noise of a screaming two cycle leaf blower might be able to be heard. Normal outdoor sounds are not a two-or three-ton helicopter landing or taking off seventy-five feet from your nominally ‘sound proofed’ wall or window.”

Dan seemed to be somewhat relieved but still asked, “So what exactly are you planning to tell him that we can do about the proposed helicopter pad?”

“Well...we could build a deflecting sound wall like they do along freeways to divert highway sounds from residential areas. But that would be mighty ugly when he looks out of his first-floor windows. Otherwise, we really can’t do much, when his second floor is windowed all the way around for the view as it rotates.”

“He either gets a helicopter pad handily available to his home and the proposed cliff-side elevator that goes down to the proposed marina and has to deal with the vibrations and noise, or he doesn’t get a handy helicopter pad on this side of the hills, and has to commute to and from.”

Michael paused for a second, almost not sure whether he was speaking, or like a puppet, with his mouth was moving with all these things that an hour or so he knew absolutely nothing about, because Michael Corporeal was directing the flow of words.

“Dan, don’t trip. I am going to tell young Mr. Armstrong the exact same thing about the helicopter pad on the roof of the main marina building. We can keep out most of the sound, but the vibration in conjunction with the sound is going to percolate through.”

Katie had been slowly trying to sidle her way over to and through the open door, even though she could see that Michael was well aware of her machinations to make herself scarce and had winked at her when she had slipped another foot closer to the escape hatch.

He held up his hand to forestall any further concerns his partner might have and said, “Okay, guys, this Aaron Armstrong thing is in my lap in more ways than you know, and I think you have informed me of all that I need to know that you can give me. I would say that it is my turn to do my thing now, and get ready for a meeting with Aaron.”

“Katie, take these sketches to Engineering & Planning and have them go over the reports from the team we sent to the island. I do not care about overtime. By tomorrow morning I want some tentative blueprints made up with some dimensions of the harbor, docks and the main clubhouse marina building. I want several views...an aerial, and a side view showing a cut away view of the proposed inside cliff elevator. We don’t need electrical, plumbing, or mechanical drawings yet, as Aaron only needs to approve the overall layout and appearance of the project, and not the mechanical and utility details.”

“The cover sheet is to be kind of like my sketch of an elevated off to the side view from outside the harbor showing the break-water jetty and wall with the Armstrong family crest painted on it. At the end of the walls and on either side of the entrance put

two small lighthouse looking towers with red and green lights. Past the wall we see most of the docks and slips and the central marina club building. Just like in my sketches. Now don't forget to have Exterior Design & Landscaping embellish the cover sheet with some green potted things, a really jazzy looking glass enclosure exterior elevator, and some nice looking electric dock vehicles."

"Oh yeah," Michael added at least pretty sure this idea was his own as he just loved boats and water, though his armor rusted when he snuck down from Heaven to go sailing back in olden days. "Have them put some boats in the slips here and there. Power boats would be easiest as they don't have masts and sails that might obstruct other things we want seen in this rendering, but get a nice sized sail boat in one of the bigger slips, or tied off at the end of a dock."

While Michael was instructing the furiously scribbling Katie, Dan had sheepishly waved a hand and ducked out the door.

Dan knew that though a licensed architect himself, he was not on an artistic par with Michael, and over the years had found his forte to generate the actual contracts, and control the company's finances and payroll. Without a doubt, Katie would soon give Michael's instructions to all the departments in preparation for Aaron's perusal and hopeful signature of approval on the rough plans and sketches. Then she would be in to inform him of Michael's tentative budget figures for him to tack on the engineering and office hour labor estimates, to in turn submit to Aaron along with the first tentative sketches and plans.

Then all could buckle down to dialing in all the things that had to be done to generate a full set of construction plans and prints.

Dan sat down with a sigh of relief behind his own over size desk that also groaned under its own load of paperwork. He leaned back in his chair and laced his fingers behind his head and closed his eyes. There were no doubts that all at Corporeal Buildings were in for a long night of preparation for Aaron's surprise visit to the Big Apple.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Christine had pushed what she could find of the story about Aaron's concert crashing to anyone who would listen and who had influence over the news, whether printed, on the radio, or on TV.

She was quite pleased at the results, as in some instances she knew herself to have been stonewalled, and she had no doubt that it had been instigated by Armstrong family interests.

Not satisfied with the results of her efforts to 'shake the tree', so to speak, about Aaron Armstrong, she had decided to go after the entire clan. She had written, "Who are these Armstrongs and why are they so secretive?" She had made hints at their vast holdings worldwide, making much of the fact that no one really could pin them down through the morass of shell and holding companies that were buffers between them and what they owned or controlled.

Christine had been, in the truest sense, soliciting for a response, by said shaking of the reclusive Armstrong family tree.

When her private phone rang with a number supposed to be guaranteed to be not listed on any list, she answered with her typical response assuming that the caller would have to be someone in her immediate circle to even have the number.

"Hi, you got the live version," she answered.

"Hello, this is Aaron Armstrong," a strong, assured young voice responded.

"Yeah right," she responded with a laugh. "And you have reached the offices of the Pope. I was actually expecting your call, but via one of your buffering flunkies and not from your august-ness' direct, as I am only the Pope, and you are an exalted Armstrong who normally doesn't deign to consort with such lowly ones as I."

Aaron was laughing in return.

“I know that the Church has gotten progressive recently, but didn’t yet expect to find a female Pope. In any case, this really is Aaron Armstrong, and I would like to speak with you.”

After a digressive pause during which Christine’s jaw dropped and she almost dropped the phone with it. “I’m sorry... Who is this again?” she stammered. While now knowing exactly who was on the other end but needing a moment to regain her composure.

“This is Aaron Armstrong, Ms. Zimmer. I apologize if I startled you.” He chuckled warmly.

Christine had recovered her composure enough to again question the identity of her caller, both in her mind and by asking for qualification.

“Mr. Armstrong, may I ask how you got my personal phone number, as it is an unlisted and supposedly guaranteed to be unavailable?” She asked directly, even though inwardly she was still quite taken aback, as this was absolutely the last person on the planet she would have thought of to be calling her.

“Come now, Ms. Zimmer as an investigative reporter you should know such things aren’t impossible with enough time and money. Needless to say, with my family’s resources, it really probably wasn’t difficult at all.”

Aaron mused how he had consulted his uncle Gilbert and found that their contacts in Los Angeles had just ran down the apparent instigating source of the belated media attention and found it to be one Christine Zimmer. Aaron had asked for her contact phone number and wasn’t really too surprised that it was made available to him in under ten minutes, just after the Gulfstream G-650 had taken to the air.

When he had asked his uncle how this was done in so short a time frame, he was only told that someone owed the family a favor and the particulars or individuals involved were not in the need to know category for him at this time.

As in the past, he knew better than to try to extract any more information.

Christine, by this time had recovered enough now to take offense at his comment and with more than just a little bit of hostility in her voice asked, "What is the purpose of this call, Mr. Armstrong?" Secretly, though, she was very pleased with herself. Her "shaking of the tree" had produced a far better result than she had expected. She would have gladly sent him her supposed private and personal number herself had she known he was going to call her.

So she was going to milk this call for all it was worth.

Aaron noted her apparent hostility and not knowing that she actually felt like the cat that just got the cream, he tried to be friendly and break the ice a bit.

"Please, call me Aaron," he said. "I find all this formality kind of a drag." Although truthfully, in his world where everyone except his father, uncle, and brother were either servants, hired professionals, or business associates of the family, all referred to him as Mr. or as in his youth, Master Armstrong. "May I call you Christine or Christy, if you prefer?"

"Ms. Zimmer or Christine will do fine," she said, still feigning anger and putting an edge to her voice. "And I ask you once again, what is the reason for this call?"

"Why, to grant you an exclusive interview to satisfy all your curious readers, which I was told that you had promised them in any case," he said. "And to kinda set the record straight so people don't get the wrong ideas about all of us, like that my errant behavior recently should reflect on or be put upon the shoulders of my entire family."

"And why would you be so willing to do that, as your family has never before been very big on being in the public eye, let alone granting interviews. And secondly, why grant me an exclusive, of all the reporters in the world that would sell their souls to the Devil himself for an opportunity to do a story on you?" she asked, her mind racing with the possibilities and ramifications of what such an interview could mean for her journalistic career and credibility.

But better than that yet, she knew herself to be the primary one that was doing the robot thing of movie fame: “Need input... I need input.” Christine knew herself to be the main instigating inquiring “mind that wanted to know,” others among her peers not withstanding.

(Little did she know that the “Devil himself” in the person of Stanch had hitched a ride to Los Angeles with Aaron and had decided to not only see Strongarm about putting some kind of monkey wrench in the burgeoning friendship Aaron was developing with the rock and roll wench but had vowed to himself to personally put in his two cents to mess up this Christine Zimmer’s life for her messing with the Strategy that he had so zealously guarded for so long.)

“I can see that you are skeptical about my motives, and...may I add, more than a little distrusting, and I guess that is probably justified considering the method in which I chose to make our first contact,” Aaron said. Then, before Christine could comment, added, “Tell ya’ what. Let me make it up to you by inviting you for lunch tomorrow.”

“Stumble bumble, oh smooth one.”

Christine could barely hear him mutter this critiquing of himself to himself (which she knew she wasn’t supposed to hear at all) before he spoke more audibly.

“I mean, I am inviting you now, but don’t yet know to where I am inviting you to. This way you see, we can get to know each other a little bit before I answer some of the questions that I know that for some reason you seem to be so avid to know about me.”

“Wouldn’t that be a good start to break the ice?” he asked.

Christine was just starting to get a bit concerned. How did Aaron know that she had been the one to push the human interest angle and instigate inquiries about the Armstrongs to where he had singled her out from the others who had written articles?

She wasn’t stupid and knew that the rich and powerful had ways of dealing with who they perceived as direct threats. And if the Armstrongs thought that she was directly responsible for

focusing unwanted media attention on them, well...unfortunate things can and did happen to the little people, even easier than to the supposed movers and shakers.

In this vein, Christine had long been of the opinion that among other ostensible leaders of nations, the Kennedy brothers had died specifically because they had threatened the existence of the true human rulers of the planet with WW111 by their response to the “Cuban Missile Crisis.”

The true rulers of the planet knew no national boundaries, and to say that they cared not a whit to be threatened by the dealings and ultimatums of some four-year elected official of any given nation was an understatement.

While these thoughts percolated through her head, Christine pretended resistance to the luncheon invitation from Aaron by saying hesitantly, “I, uhh...really can’t...”

Aaron took advantage of her ostensible stammer and quickly cut her off with a verbal blitz.

“Can? That’s really great. I am flying in tonight, and after I get settled, I need to buy some cars and either borrow or buy a helicopter, cause the traffic there is murder. Then tomorrow I will send one of them to pick you up at 12:30, if that is good for you. Oh yeah, I already have your address, so that won’t be a problem, but tomorrow if you want to be picked up elsewhere, just ring me up or leave a message for me at Corporeal Buildings offices in Santa Monica. Sorry about not giving you my cell, but like you I try to keep it in the family, so to speak. Good luck using your resources to find my number like I found yours, though.”

While she pursed her lips sourly, she heard another chuckle, and before Christine could get a word in edgewise, Aaron continued, “I really hate to cut this short, but my pilot just informed me that we will be touching down at JFK Airport in about five minutes. Lookin’ forward to meeting you, ‘the real version’ like you answered, but this time the ‘in person’ real version. Gotta go. Bye now.”

And the connection was broken. Christine was left staring at the receiver, dumbfounded. However that lasted about a nano-second as she started to exclaim to herself aloud. "That arrogant little...of the all the nerve...calling my private line...knowing my address and who knows what else? What makes him think I'll even show up? Hmmm."

Christine stopped fuming, and after a second remembered an old idiom of her grandfathers of "never look a gift horse in the mouth," at least not when anyone's looking. She looked at the receiver again and punched in a speed dial number to her friend Ron at UCLA. Boy was he going to be surprised.

She was drumming her fingers on the coffee table where she had absently perched behind on the edge of her couch in the living room. She did this as a nervous habit while in deep thought when sitting at a keyboard just before starting to compose an article on her computer. It had gotten to be to where almost any surface being drummed upon with all five non-phone holding fingers was a meditation method for her.

Presently, she was trying to figure how to get Aaron to allow a filmed interview without thinking about writing, but knowing that she would momentarily be pounding away on her computer keyboard to write to her best recollection, the conversation she had just had, and the thoughts generated within her thereby.

She picked up her phone again and dialed 411.

A few moments later she was at her desk pen in hand and pad at the ready. "Santa Monica," she said into the receiver. "Corporeal Buildings, please."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

The Armstrong Patriarch, born Marcus Armstrong in nineteen forty-six, almost to the day nine months after Hitler's death, examined himself in his Master bedroom mirror for the umpteenth time.

Marcus knew that he was aging rapidly and knew that he was heir to that Armstrong malady peculiar to The Patriarch, if one was to call it a malady.

The Armstrong Patriarch looked into his mirror as if into a crystal ball and looking for answers. All he saw was the tired face and sad eyes of his own reflection.

Their network/Coalition of basically a "Who's Who" of the rich and powerful had taken over half of a century since the days of Hitler to again bring the nations of the earth to the precipice of a state of world chaos that was a prerequisite for the Anti-Christ to resolve in order to be hailed as a savior of mankind and proclaimed as the world leader.

Over the millennia, and especially over the most recent centuries, in several noteworthy instances the Armstrongs and their closest allies had come so close to establishing what they considered the proper fertile world circumstances that would allow the emergence of the Anti-Christ, who their lord providing would come from among their ranks.

These circumstances, of course, were partly that the world had to be in some sort of chaos that the Anti-Christ could just conveniently come along with the ostensible solutions to resolve and be proclaimed a savior of sorts, for having the answers to the world's dilemmas. The reins of world power would be placed in his hands by a grateful, willing world, as his solutions provided surcease from world hunger, poverty, disease, and war.

Marcus Armstrong, now known only as The Patriarch, had longed while still relatively young to become the Antichrist him-

self. But as his best years had slipped by, he knew that it wasn't to be. He also knew that it was overwhelmingly probable that one of his sons would not only see the rise of the Antichrist, but to one of them would fall the actual title and the power and responsibility.

The Patriarch felt that it was time to really reflect on what had transpired during his lifetime. It had been so easy to hide the Coalition and their lust and greed for riches and power, as virtually every nation was scrabbling for the very same thing. The Coalition's resources far outstripped in fact the wealth of all but a few of the top nations in the world.

He reflected on how the greed and oftentimes lust for power was to be most easily discerned in the very peoples who shouted the loudest that it was the other guy who was the bad guy.

As The Patriarch got to certain points in his reflections on world history before his birth and during his lifetime, he could not but reflect and dwell on what had convinced him in his younger years that there was no righteous race or creed, and that the Coalition was as good as any and certainly no worse in their motivations and in their following of their god, (who whispered direction to them in their dreams) than the Christian, the Muslim, the Jew, the Hitler era Nazis, the Asian Buddha followers, the Catholics, or any of many others, all of whom he considered of as subscribing to or following along with some cult or other.

This was true whether some type of nationalism was being adhered to or some type of religion was being followed or both.

They were all greedy and committed atrocities in the name of their countries, their religious beliefs, or their own personal values.

Hitler, his dominance over Europe, the SS, and the torture and murder of millions of innocent civilians, was to be ultimately the catalyst from which would manifest the situation for the last Anti-Christ to save the world from.

Three things going awry ruined the satisfactory building of the Nazi empire and hence the emergence of the Anti-Christ shortly thereafter.

ONE:

The Japanese attacking Pearl Harbor, where and to quote Japanese Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto they “awakened a sleeping giant” (The U.S.) had not been taken into consideration in what was then the Strongarm/Armstrong Strategy to the demons in the know. To the Armstrongs and their cronies, the plan was more simply known as The Armstrong Strategy, or simpler yet still, just called The Strategy or The Plan.

In any event, once the United States war machine got into gear because of the Japanese attack and the nation’s leaders saw production capabilities in full swing the likes of which the world had never known, well, the American Government knew that it could take on the world and win. Patriotism was also at such a high point that it seemed the entire generation was enlisting so manpower to fight the battles was not going to be any kind of problem.

Frankly, the American leaders at that time wanted to flex its muscles and show the world the armed might of the American war machine. Initially, more than it cared about a German-controlled Europe or the rumors of Nazi extermination camps or the tortures and crimes against humanity perpetrated against any of the Asian countries and cultures that Japan had been attacking long before Pearl Harbor.

So, though the Germans had been working overtime to keep the United States out of the war and even went so far as to ignore the fact that the U.S. had to all intents and purposes already been at war with Germany, but just had not formally declared war.

Germany had put forward that the US had been attacking U-Boats and confiscating German merchant vessels even without declaring war, which became the grounds as indicated on Germany’s Declaration of War for the state of War to be declared.

TWO:

The second factor that caused the Strategy to ultimately be placed on hold for at least another generation or two was that

no one could foresee just how badly the world of man and the ethereal world of demon-kind either hated or disliked the Jews, which on one hand had their persecutions getting out of control and drawing too much attention. While on the other hand there were people across the world who had reason to have had dealings with “The Chosen” and had come away knowing that to the Jews *they* were considered inferior races and fair game to have their pockets emptied by the sharpest of business practices.

This was not just the Nazis in the arena of mankind. Jews were known by most races and creeds to avariciously gravitate towards a buck like moths to a flame, and once having a buck were notoriously stingy and so far less than generous in the norm, as to have expletives and sayings generated about their propensity to be (as a rule) just about the greediest tightwad money grubbers the world of man had produced. They remained the “money changer” type of people that Jesus had kicked out of His “Father’s house,” while the Israel of today is not known by anyone as being a charitable nation *to* anyone.

That they had long since proclaimed themselves the Chosen of God to everyone and would rarely associate with the “Goyim” unless it was to their profit, also endeared them to no one.

They had, in fact, long before the Nazis, proclaimed themselves as the Master race and had repeatedly shown that to the Jew, a non-Jew was considered of an inferior race.

In essence, they were kind of like a smug (assured in Scripture of being The Chosen race) a big gang that looked out predominantly only for each other and whose mission seemed only to be to avariciously control the wealth of the world.

They did/do not (in the main) believe in Jesus Christ as the Savior and that they needed to be “saved by Grace” and obtain their Salvations through Him. They smugly continued to believe that they were Heaven bound simply because they had been born Jewish and apparently felt that being of the “chosen” people that they had a free pass to Heaven no matter what.

They also did not believe in The New Testament, the “Fruits,” or the “Gifts.”

Among the only groups of Beings on the planet who approached man for man the greed of the Jews but who had even less of the milk of human kindness and generosity as a race were the Japanese.

That demon-kind hated the Jews as the Biblically “Chosen Ones” and from whose ranks had come the Savior Jesus Christ went without saying. That they pushed the Nazis into war crimes against the Jews that no right thinking (not obsessed or possessed) human being could condone in their right minds also ultimately ruined the coming together of what had to be for the implementation of the Strategy.

THREE:

That the madman Hitler was just too mad and vindictive and that (unaware of the Strategy) demons gleefully inspired The Fuhrer and his Nazis to take the persecution of the Jews rapidly to levels that were intolerable to any right thinking man. Well, this is what predominantly helped to propel the U.S. into the European War, which was not part of the Strategy and ultimately caused failure of the complete implementation of the Strongarm/Armstrong Strategy planned for the 1950s.

Satan and his immediate underlings were well aware that the United States of America was founded on religious freedoms and that its written guidelines, and indeed its currency itself, were shot through with references to The Lord.

They knew that in the main, in the nineteen forties and before, the citizens of the U.S. were God-fearing church goers and that thereby the country’s armed forces would have hosts of Angels of Light to ward off any enemy spirits.

So, the Strongarm/Armstrong Strategy just flat did not want the United States in the war, period.

Hence, the Strategy required that the Nazi control and dominance of the world after winning the actual war would result in

miseries across Asia, Africa, and Europe, which were never totally realized on a world scale because they never actually won the war.

Ergo, the Strongarm/Armstrong Strategy for the Anti-Christ to come to power was never realized in the late nineteen forties and early nineteen fifties as the Armstrongs and their allies had planned.

The Patriarch shook himself physically and mentally to bring himself back into the present from dwelling on the past (which of late he had become more and more prone to do).

The current Strategy as applied by the Armstrong Coalition had managed to bring to the knees financially, virtually all of the nations of the west who had formally been “giants of industry.”

The abuses of the term “favored trade nation status” by the doing away with by the “outsourcing” of all the manufacturing and production that had formerly supplied jobs and tax revenues to the Western Nations was a stroke of genius by the Coalition.

The millions in bribes to Presidents and other world leaders was a drop in the bucket compared to how much money was being made by the Coalition’s “captains of industry” when China nor India, for instance, cared about the environment or even had an EPA, nor cared about the up to 40% workman’s compensation paid in by businesses with American based labor, nor came within a mile of being required to pay a worker a decent living wage or even a minimum wage...at all. If these countries even had words in their languages for such things as medical, vacation, or retirement plan benefits, it would be a wonder. And whether their leaders could even spell EPA was in question. The world saw the smog masks worn in Beijing during the 2008 Olympics.

Quality control was a joke, and the raw materials sent from the West was made into junk and sold back to the West at 500% to a 1000% profit through such scandalous conglomerates as the ones owned by one mega-billionaire named Sam.

It was, in fact, amazing to the Coalition how much they were able to get away with these days. True, they controlled most of

the media and put spins in that diffused focused attention on their most outrageous acts, but these days everyone seemed to expect corruption anyway, so why try so hard to hide it.

Like how they controlled the big construction companies that had received and then just kept the billions paid out to them to clean up and rebuild after Hurricane Katrina. There had been no real effort to hide the fact that they were siphoning off the money as fast as FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Administration) handed it to them.

There had been a brief mention of FEMA stopping the flow of funds because of investigations into what had already disappeared without any work being done. But it had gotten quashed. Mostly because it was those in government who through buffers, owned, or controlled those same construction companies who had gotten the contracts in the first place.

Bottom line: The FEMA money was stolen right in front of everyone, and the Army Corps of Engineers ended up doing most of the work using yet more of the nation's resources.

Marcus had been sure that they could not completely quash the vastness of that rape of the United States coffers. But as the big boys of business and the big boys of government all had their hands in each other's pockets, well...the blinders were on and the propaganda mills were in full swing so successfully that the doors were officially opened for even more of the same business of the pillaging of America, leading to a national debt that skyrockets it's way to bankruptcy.

And that business for the Armstrongs and their ilk *was* the bringing to its knees by bankruptcy the United States of America, which when coming to fruition would be the catalyst causing the downfall of the many nations relying on the U.S. for their own economies to stay healthy.

No more of the US being able to afford to be the spearheading police force of the world. No more of US financial aid or military power being a stabilizing influence among the third world

nations. No more money to support its navies and armies all over the world, and, in fact, no money or jobs to give to the young men and women coming home from their military stations abroad.

No more lifting of the debt ceiling and having a AAA credit rating.

The Coalition knew that it could now just take and squander American resources with impunity while controlling the country's media to such an extent that the average U.S. citizen only heard or saw propaganda on their news channels. Shallow and immediately local news was all that was aired, rather than hear world news of real importance. The blinders were on and kept on.

Most Americans had not heard the rumors that the rest of the world had that Americans in influential positions had taken out billion-dollar insurance policies on buildings, that within a month or so afterwards, just ostensibly and coincidentally had terrorists crash jets into.

Most Americans did not realize that this sad event inspired the formation of what constituted an Americanized modern version of the WWII Nazi SS "Security Section," which encompassed all other known U.S. police agencies (and some unknown) and that under the auspices of National Security would no longer have to function within the Bill of Rights or the Constitution of the United States.

Most Americans were not informed that though promised that Iraqi oil would pay for the invasion, stabilization, and rebuilding of Iraq (after finding not one weapon of mass destruction whatsoever), that oil and oil money had ultimately been diverted to private interests.

Americans only vaguely heard reports or the occasional interview that slipped by the propaganda censors that the American military, after pacifying a region, were serving as free security details for private interests on the American taxpayer's dime.

These "private interests" being of the same ilk as the "construction/oil companies" that had bled FEMA (and therefore the

U.S.) in New Orleans. That at least one of the movers and shakers of these companies that bled America in New Orleans and was now bleeding America in the Middle East had also purportedly had something to do with the insurance policies on the buildings just a short while before the passenger jets knocked them down...was censored and not to not be aired even as speculation...at least not in the U.S.

The Patriarch knew, though, that the Coalition's plans to bankrupt and render the U.S. to be a second-rate power could not happen just because of media censorship of the overwhelming depths of corruption in all levels of government and business.

No indeed! They had, in fact, sponsored movies where the average officer blatantly breaks the law in the name of the law, to where all purportedly agree that it was justified somehow in the end and forgiven. Not just as an exception, but as a rule of thumb. To where almost every crime and punishment show was the same.

As, for instance, one can from memory of having watched numerous shows and movies, visualize officer Joe Blow being asked after breaking numerous laws in the name of the law to hand over his gun and badge to be on suspension pending inquiries.

Then, not to be unduly deterred by such a minor inconvenience as operating outside of the law, our suspended one then goes out to his trunk or under his seat and gets a howitzer and proceeds to "kill them all and let god sort em' out", while blowing up half of the city.

Our 'hero' ultimately gets a brownie button and 'atta-boy' and all is forgiven. (We have seen this in a hundred cops and robbers films.)

The end result of this type of visual example/indoctrination of how the breaking of the law in the name of the law is to be not only accepted, but to be expected. This has resulted in how the black and white of right and wrong has become just a big grey blur to where like with the Nazi and Japanese and African nation genocides...things that are atrocities come to be accepted and mostly ignored, as....the norm.

The Armstrong group had also sponsored movies that depicted political corruption at every level and even allowed a lifting of the media blackout regarding how voting machines could so easily be tampered with. Fatalism was becoming an accepted mindset, based on the recognition by the average Joe that things were so permanently twisted and corrupt, as to be irreversible.

They had, in fact, changed their position one hundred and eighty degrees from hiding the fact of widespread corruption, and gotten the public used to and inured to moral decay as being the norm rather than the exception. Americans, for instance, were now accepting that the liberties and freedoms in The Bill of Rights and The Constitution of the United States of America were just long gone ideals that were no longer abided by.

The results were not only that common people accepted lies and cheating as the norm to expect from others both in and out of Government, but were losing whatever righteous standards they themselves had.

The international communities as a whole, were rapidly becoming ever more discouraged, apathetic, and, to say the least, had far less patriotism than their forbearers.

America's indifference and acceptance of their government's corruptions was at a peak, and playing right in to the hands of Satan, Tranth, and Strongarm on one side of the coin, and their unwitting human pawns on the flip side of the coin.

Armstrong expected that within the year the U.S. would go into another Great Depression, as China would advance no more credit no matter if the debt ceiling was raised or not. And this time no war would be handy to put the factories back on line and the people back to work.

As the United States slid into bankruptcy, so too would the rest of the bulk of the other civilized countries of the world.

Famine and poverty would spark wars of attrition and acquisition among the third world countries no longer receiving aid from the U.S. Other land-hungry, starving, and bankrupt coun-

tries would go to war because U.S. forces would not be there to deter them.

Saber rattling countries like Iran and North Korea would develop and make plans to use chemical and/or nuclear weapons, and whether they managed it or not, without U.S. monitoring, bankrupt sections of the broken up USSR would get opportunities and take them...to sell their stockpiles of nuclear armaments.

The fall of the United States would herald the arrival in short order of worldwide chaos.

The Patriarch wondered if he would live to see his efforts bear fruition and wondered if Gavin or Aaron or one of their peers in the Coalition would be he who hosted the spirit of the Anti-Christ.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Zoe stretched luxuriously. She had just gotten in and kicked off her sandals. She eyed her suitcases and several grocery bags that the cabby had thoughtfully placed near her dresser, and in the small kitchen area of bungalow, which in essence was laid out like a one-room studio. She knew that he knew who she was, drab baggy clothing, and a fisherman type hat with oversized sunglasses notwithstanding. The dead giveaway, she thought wryly to herself, was that he had addressed her as “ZOE” just before he had collected his payment for a round-way trip. He had apologetically explained the costs again just as he had at the airport before they left Phoenix that there was no way he was going to catch a fare back to civilization even if his long out of range car radio had been working.



Sometime about just when they were leaving Flagstaff, after a short shopping spree there, Zoe had gotten a call from Aaron.

He had been bubbling over with enthusiasm and explained that he was on his way back to Los Angeles where in all probability he would get to stay for a while and do some of what he called “regular people stuff.”

“I want to hook up with you and go out and play,” he had told her. Then he went on to say that he might stay on the plane in the back bedroom for the night, but had given her the address of his architect as his temporary place of residence while in Los Angeles.

“Michael is pretty cool,” he had explained. “He is the guy I was telling you about that did my house and is going to do the helicopter pad, the Marina elevators, and the new marina for me. He has been inviting me for quite some time to come and go over plans with him during our projects, and since he has his

penthouse right above his offices in his building, it would really be convenient.”

“Just a sec,” Aaron said, and Zoe heard the sound of a door closing. Then, “Okay, that’s better, now no one can hear me cause I just went into the bedroom.”

“Rough life havin’ a bedroom on the plane?” Zoe commented then more or less introspectively asked, “Do you actually ever really use it?”

Without giving him much of a chance to reply she added in a fake haughty English butler type accent, “Of course we do Mawhstuh!” While visions of the cartoon character, Richie Rich, superimposed itself over what she recalled as Aaron’s features.

“What... are you going to keep giving me the business, cause I have a buck?” Aaron demanded, trying to pretend a petulant hurt tone.

Getting no immediate answer except a slight giggle, Aaron with his usual impatience got back down to what he had called for.

“I came back here in the bedroom, so those suit wearing banes of my existence and what other security dudes that could fit aboard can’t hear me....

(When at Michael’s, who had his own building security there would be a certain degree of privacy for Aaron, as only Dan and Katie...his partner and administrative assistant respectively could even use the elevator that went up to the penthouse. For it required retinal scans and thermal imaging on all within it before it could go up to Michael’s private quarters. *So, I can be all alone without anyone reporting things to my family.*)

“And believe me,” he added wryly after pausing in thought, “Besides burglarizing my conversations, and listening in to report whatever they can to get a brownie button from my uncle, my security watches me very closely.”

“Yeah, I’ll bet they do, and...that you are. You have already seen that I have my own security issues.” She sympathized and empathized at the same time. “And though nothing compared to

yours, I'm sure, I can appreciate wanting to get away from it all, which is what I am doing as we speak, and what you are doing as well...as you fly the friendly skies."

"Yeah, but I wish you were still in L.A. so we could hook up and go have some fun." Then Zoe heard him snapping his fingers.

"Hey, I didn't tell you everything yet. When I was in L.A. for my birthday we got stuck in traffic so bad that I had my people line up a helicopter for me. Then, after we met it and got aboard, I remembered Michael mentioning that he had a helicopter pad on his rooftop. Then he explained to me how I could assure my father's security chief of how quick, safe, and easy it would be for me to come out to his offices and go over plans and stay overnight in the penthouse while still having a secure roof over my head. All...in how he put it as; 'one stop shopping.'"

"He had mentioned that there were guest suites and rooms below his executive offices that he as need be, he could put up some of the troops that travel with me." (Michael was referring to the ever-present cadre of buffering executives that traveled with Aaron and his security detail, no matter where he went.)

Aaron either ran out of thoughts or ran out of breath, though Zoe did not think him capable of either...and gave her a chance to speak.

"So, you have never been to this Michael guy's offices," she stated and then asked, "Why hadn't you ever gone to your architect's before to work on the plans for your house, because if your house is as you say, it must have taken a lot of time and planning requiring your approvals and then quite a while to build, also requiring changes and approvals along the way?"

"Well, you have to bear in mind that I was only sixteen when we started planning, and our family has some over-protective issues that I could vow are pretty much hereditary. I mean that we go way back, and though I have been limited a bit about access to the family archives, as opposed to Gavin, my older brother who is *the* heir, our family line has always seemed to have two brothers period. From among which *must* come the next generation for the continuance of the family lineage."

“Wow!” She had a millisecond to react to his pause, mentally picturing him scratching his head perplexedly, while trying to marshal and put into words thoughts about things that weren’t gelled and filed in his own realizations yet.

“Yeah, it’s all really quite a trip when I think about it. They told me, and still tell me, to be patient and that all will be known when the time is right. But suffice it to say that back when I was sixteen, there was no way that they were going to let me ‘go out gallivanting around meeting with people,’ as my uncle put it when the meetings can and by right *should* come to me.”

“And what has changed now so that you can come and even stay awhile away from the safety of the island?” Zoe asked him.

“Yeah, good question, and I don’t know if I am supposed to answer it, or really if I even know the answer to that question, but I’ll do the best that I can.” A pregnant pause, during which Zoe pictured rusty gears churning, and: “Ummm...(again), Zoe, there are some things that I am just not permitted to speak about to an outsider,” Aaron said.

Right away in response to Aaron’s tip-toeing around the subject that had surfaced, Zoe had a minor flash-back to the warnings from Aaron previously about how there were limits to what he could tell her about the intimate interactions of Armstrong family love life.

Aaron continued, “According to what I am told there have been numbers of printed investigative news articles about my crashing your concert, and other media mediums have picked them up and started some kind of crusade against my family. I suppose that you have heard about that going on or read about it right?”

He was hanging on her response, just hoping against hope that she had in no way willingly contributed to the problem, as that would be the end of their budding new friendship.

“Boy!” she exclaimed, “Your family must be really sensitive, besides being secretive like everyone knows.

For my own part, I don't even read all the junk that gets written about me, because it is mostly all drivel with no basis in fact, specifically generated to sell the rags that printed it. The paparazzi know better than to even speak to me. They literally fabricate things, hoping that we who they deem newsworthy will take offense and respond. They feed on that and when you respond it is just like throwing blood in the water with a shark. You get them all frenzied up, and they write even more outlandish things hoping that you will keep denying, threatening lawsuits...whatever."

Zoe had rushed that all out in a breath and found herself airing one of her pet peeves yet again, but she could not help it. Her very lifestyle off stage was limited by these nosy paparazzi, which when not able to get a story, just went ahead and invented one.

She knew that Aaron would jump in if she paused too long, so she forestalled him. "Just a second, Aaron, I ain't done just yet. Lemme' catch my breath. Here we go..."

"You need to tell your family to ignore it all. Making contradictory statements will just bring you further into the limelight. Take it from one who knows."

Aaron waited a few seconds politely to see if Zoe might or might not be done. Meanwhile she had pushed a button...striking a responsive chord within him, that what she said had specific merit as applied to this Christine chick.

But the confidential in-depth report that his uncle had handed to him had shown that Christine and her family were very, very, very well off in their own rights and that to all intents and purposes, Christine had motivations far removed from what Aaron construed to be the norm for a money-grubbing, news-hound, paparazzi-like person.

The thing in Christine's case was that on one hand she was herself a news item in her own right, and then on the other she was just like the other paparazzi.

It seemed to depend on which hat circumstances dictated that she wear at whatever given moment.

For a while, on either end of the call each had noticed that the phone signal must be weakening, as it was getting harder and harder to understand each other.

Aaron said, "I don't know where you are but you've been fading in and out for a bit, and I know it's at your end cause I have 4 signal strength bars. So, if I lose you altogether, call me when your signal is better... or use a land line. Either way just in case, I want to tell you before losing you, that the mission that I am on is to try to get the media to either stop inquiring period, or to just focus on me and not on my family's doings."

"Anyway, we found that one person has been spearheading and instigating the media attention, and between you me and the post, my family is not above just telling this person, Hey, whatever you are getting paid to push this, stop and we will pay you triple your fee.

"But this particular instigator has been found to not be found to be...ummm...hirable," Aaron kind of mumbled this last.

Zoe was no mental dump truck and knew the verbal fumble to be over using the more appropriate 'briable' instead of the muttered 'hirable.'

"So, what are you going to do?" she asked.

"I am going to meet her tomorrow for lunch somewhere, and now that you have thrown a monkey wrench into my plans...I really don't know what to say to her. I mean...according to you, anything I say or do with her will just be 'putting coal on the fire'."

"Are you by any chance scratching your head, or pulling at your chin in confusion?" she asked sweetly.

"Now, how did you know that?" He responded just before their signal got lost, as Zoe was lucky to even be getting a signal so far away from her carrier's nearest cell tower up in the Arizona high country.



Zoe had initially began listening to Aaron with only about half an ear, as she was really all about getting down time at the resort

with no one to eyeball her existence. But, she had come to realize after talking to him for a bit, that though she wanted to get away from things, she knew she would be bored to death in short order in the bungalow all alone and just left to her own devices. 'Getting away from it all' was one thing, but putting yourself in a type of solitary confinement, no matter how gilded the cage... was another.

Perhaps I am going overboard with my 'getting away from it all' plan here. After all...I ain't no hermit.

She was thinking that it would be fun to hang out with Aaron a bit, as just from their phone calls and the one impromptu meeting they were fast becoming friends and better still...friends that were entertaining to each other. *Well, at least I know myself to be entertained by Aaron.* Also, perhaps she could give Aaron a hand with things from her own media experiences but also from the standpoint of her familiarity with feminine wiles,

Zoe sourly eyed her bags and more specifically the grocery bags up on the small kitchen counter before walking over to the landline phone in the bungalow. She picked it up and dialed the resort's office and got the number she needed.

She was going to call the office for a number, but right there beside the phone she found the number she was looking for. She dialed and after only two rings heard from a nice-sounding, though booming man's voice, "Hello, Helicopter Tours, and how may we be of service to you today?"

"Hi, this is Zoe, I mean...Amanda Cabot..." Zoe thought about it and knew that the cat would be out of the bag anyway when she told them where she needed to be picked up from.

"I would appreciate your discretion...if you ever want anyone from Riverdale Resort using your service again. They are who gave me your number, and I can arrange for them to never refer you to another of their patrons again, if anyone...specifically paparazzi, 'accidentally' shows up and bothers me while availing myself of your service."

“I assure you, Ms. Cabot, we are the souls of discretion around here.” Came the calm assurance, though Zoe noted that he had almost whispered her name.

Then in what she assumed to be his regular booming cheery voice but with discretion as to her name, he continued.

“Your credit is good with us, and we know where to come get you, so we don’t need too much information now that you can’t just fill out when we get there. When do you need to be picked up and what is your destination, my dear?”

“I need to be picked up now, because I have a family emergency in L.A. that just came up while in route here. My bags are packed still,” she informed him.

“Boy that is a trip. Some 359 miles or 577 kilometers, if you prefer...if we take you direct from here. We may have to refuel and then of course it would be at the round-trip rate. However, considering how slow things are this time of year, and if you wanted to pay a bit extra for a couple of hours down time, and for an overnight at a hotel that has room service so a man can hang on a feedbag...and then we can wait on you a bit, and take you around town if you need, being as you have to pay the return fare anyway.”

“Well, I appreciate that,” she said, meanwhile thinking that whoever the pilot was he probably had to sleep over anyway because of NTSA rules, and “Boomer” was just trying to save a few bucks and get her to pay for the pilot’s room and eats that would have been allocated for in the fee anyway.

“I’ll figure all that out on the way,” she said. “When can you get here?”

“We have a bird fueled and ready for take-off right now, as a matter of fact, and you are speaking to the very pilot for this trip. Gotta pack a quick bag and a lunch and I advise you to do the same,” came the blaring reply that caused her to wince and to pull the phone away from her ear about six inches.

She had been mentally thinking it but was now sure that she was going to refer to this guy as Boomer no matter what his

actual name was and whether he liked it or not. Maybe he would get the hint and turn down his volume control. (She grinned to herself, as she had a quick vision picturing the knobs on the side of Herman Munster's neck being volume controls.)

"Okay, I'll get the office to send around a buggy, and I'll meet you at the heli-pad here. Am I going to need to dress really warm or anything?" she asked then remembered and jerked the phone out from her ear a foot.

"Nothin' special, we got heaters and all kinds of bells and whistles on these new birds, and we get up and move right along too. That is why it would probably slow you down for us to bring you in to Phoenix to catch a flight. We will get you there sooner."

"Cool," she said, "I'll be waiting. See you in a bit."

"Gimme twenty minutes to a half hour, okay?" Without waiting for a response, he added a quick, "Bye now." And with a click, Boomer was gone.

She immediately redialed the resorts office to make sure the helicopter pad was clear of any other aircraft and to order one of the resort's valets in a golf car buggy thing to come fetch her. She told the office of her grocery purchases and that if she wasn't back in a few days for them to clear the food out and that they could rent the place out to someone else.

Then she dialed Aaron's number back from the landline.



This had all been very interesting to Jon and Farol, while Strongarm knashed his teeth in alarm. He didn't want the two angels to become aware that his entire focus was not upon the female before them, but upon her relationship with the Armstrongs via her relationship with Aaron.

Suddenly, a minor flapping and diminutive shadow heralded the arrival of Retch, who Strongarm was surprised to discover himself viewing fondly.

Retch eyed the two Angels in dismay at how chummy by proximity...it seemed that one of his Captains had had to become

with them. He beckoned to his lord, and Strongarm winged aloft, knowing that compared to his present duty, any assignment would be agreeable.

Upon hushed whispering in yet more hairy ears with flies buzzing around the orifices, Strongarm couldn't decide whether to be more elated or more puzzled. Yet orders from Tranth to meet the Master was good enough for him.

Compared to the last hours and the company that he had had to keep, anything could only be an improvement.

PROOF

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

During the short plane ride for Zoe to get from L.A. to Phoenix, Strongarm had had a bit of a confrontation with the two Angels that for some reason were warding her.

That they had shooed him away, so to speak, from being able to assail the human was kind of within the boundaries of Angel/Demon guidelines. The variances as per this particular case was that Zoe was indeed a Christian, though back-slidden to the point to where she rarely spoke to The Lord or asked forgiveness.

So, she was eligible for Angelic protection from demonic assailment to some extent, but not much, as her unconfessed and unrepented for sins were like a foggy blanket denoting her “separation from God” state.

Yet, she could be seen to still be a Christian by the glow of The Holy Spirit indwelling within her, which as one who has her Salvation was far stronger of a visible Presence noticeable on a spiritual level to ethereal Beings than if she only had “The Small Voice” of The Holy Spirit’s Presence, that struggles to be heard in those who do not have their Salvations.

With these thoughts percolating, Strongarm had initially taken up station some forty feet away from Zoe and her hovering two Angels. But like the smart fallen angel that he was, he had been going over in his mind the rules regulating what was and was not permissible in Angel vs. fallen angel relations, as per the sinful/sinless state of any of mankind that was/were a bone of contention.

He had called out to the twain after approaching within about twenty feet of where she sat on the aircraft and receiving a warning look from Farol.

“Hail, underlings,” he greeted them. “I have been thinking and have come to the conclusion that you overstep your mandates as

regards this cow, as I have attempted no assailments upon her but merely to observe her as you do.”

“Be that as it may,” Farol responded after a pause within which he could see that Jon was not deigning to answer the demon. “We do not wish you in our space, whether we ward this woman or not, so be gone!”

Strongarm shook his great shaggy head sorrowfully. “Alas,” he mournfully intoned while placing the back of his left hand against his forehead while his right hand covered where a heart would be if he had one.

“Alas...I cannot comply with your wishes!” (Looking for all the world like someone over dramatizing in a Shakespearean tragedy.)

Jon turned from his ostensible indifference to demand, “What is it that you want with this human, demon?” This, though Jon and Farol both knew that the seraph’s question of this enemy that appeared all too much as still one of The Lord’s own Angels of Light (except for the glowing red eyes) was per The Lord’s order, and inspired only for them to find out the enemy’s interest in her.

“Would you believe that I like her caterwauling music?” Strongarm answered and then answered himself back without waiting for their response. “No, I do not think any of either of our kinds could believe that!”

“Then we are done bandying words with you.” The Seraph intoned and turned to yet again not have his eyes offended by one who still maintained such a fine featured angelic appearance, only belied by its demeanor and baleful red eyes.

“How about you, Angel?” Strongarm asked pointedly of Farol. “Anything that your orifice needs to spout?”

Farol took his cue from Jon and turned to ignore the demon.

“Okay.” Strongarm also took his cue. “That’s it, then, and whether or not it is okay with you, I will be taking up station on this cow at this distance where I can hear her babblings on her communications gizmos and see her actions the easier.”

“I do not provoke nor attack either of you or the human, so you have no grounds to deny my proximity. Frankly, though, just

as you do not wish to be in my space, I loathe the thought of coming any closer to you and He who resides with and within you. So, this is close enough, but not too close, and where you may expect me to be for a time for no business of your own.”



True to his word, Strongarm had stayed within earshot of Zoe, as had the Angels. So, all three of them had overheard the conversation between Aaron and Zoe while she was riding in the taxi, as Zoe had turned her cell on ‘speaker’ for the balance of that conversation.

Though not knowing exactly why The Lord had sent them to observe and ward Zoe, both of His Angelic Beings were well aware that the now quiet yet obviously attentive demon before them considered something about the entertainer and the communications that they had just had to be for some reason of great importance.

The demon’s great shaggy head had craned forward on its neck attentively, while the red eyes had kind of unfocused as if turned introspective.

In short order after Zoe had finished on the phone, they had all gotten to the bungalow, they observed Zoe doing a mental about face, as could be attested to by her phone calls organizing her transportation back to where she had just come from.

Then she made one final brief call, culminating with her curt statement into the phone, “Hey, Aaron, sorry I couldn’t reach you just now and hope you get this message. I am on my way back there right now via helicopter. Hang tough, and I will call you when I get in. I would like to get there in time for your meeting with the news gal, but it may be tough. Call me when you can. Bye.”

The two Angels watched Zoe put her groceries away, and when they turned with eyes following her as she made her way to the door and her bags, they both noticed that the demon was gone, and not just from the confines of the bungalow but from the surrounding area as well.

“Well,” Jon stated firmly, “I guess that leaves no doubts in our minds that this woman’s associations with the Aaron male is at least one reason for the demonic interest in her. If she were the primary focus of their interest, I do not think this demon would have been alone in his observation, but at least had one or two lackeys or messenger imps on hand.”

“What should we do, then, my Seraph?” Farol questioned.

“I believe that you should follow the demon back to the City of Angels from whence we just arrived, if that is indeed his destination. I believe you may overtake this demon and see who or what it meets with at its destination,” Jon answered. “I will remain with the woman as directed by The Lord, and as we both have the same destination ultimately, as that to which I believe that you are going, in that this Aaron and Zoe are going to meet with one another in short order, I will see you there.”

Farol went through the wall and winged away at speed, just as a small human vehicle arrived for the woman, which Jon approved of as it was not belching fumes.



Stanch, too, had heard all the blathering between his charge (Aaron) and from Zoe, whom he already considered to be a thorn in his side. And though Aaron had not turned on his speaker phone either in the main cabin to be overheard by the others of his retinue who traveled on the Gulfstream, or when in the privacy of the back cabin/bedroom, didn’t matter.

For without any interference by any protective Angels or the indwelling Holy Spirit, Stanch had just put his ear right next to Aaron’s and overheard both sides of every phone conversation that Aaron had since Stanch had decided to follow the young Armstrong heir.

The plane had landed just a short while before, and Aaron had told those of his retinue who had flown in the Gulfstream that he was going to sleep aboard until he could arrange his own lodgings on the morrow with his architect. He had informed them of

the address of the Corporeal Building and to try to find suitable lodgings for themselves and the rest of the detail soon to be arriving on a regular passenger flight.

Then the young man had gone to sleep with a satisfied smile upon his lips.



Personally, Stanch was not a happy camper. Overhearing all the conversations between Aaron and Zoe had been a handy thing for him to listen in on, but being in limbo waiting on humans who had to sleep a third of their lives away at best, comma got pretty old sometimes.

He wondered where Strongarm might have gotten off to and wondered how best he could track him down and then remembered about the two imps that presumably Torath, Baloth, or one of their lackeys had assigned to watch the human female singer.

“I wonder if those two idiots are still around,” he mumbled to himself, scratching in one ear meditatively with a gnarled forefinger.

Once more eyeing the sleeping youth in disgust while still mumbling uncomplimentary things about all and sundry to himself, Stanch winged away on his mission to discover just what was going on in this oversize hamlet, wishing with all his might that he and his kind had the communications ability that The Holy Spirit had, to just reach out and touch anyone anywhere at any time and instead had to rely on verbal messages and brainless messengers, and the time that they took to get from one place to the other. That the mental/memorizing capabilities of the messengers were another stumbling block did nothing to allay the problem.



Retch had been stopped on his approach to Los Angeles by an unwelcome welcoming committee led by one Naspeth, the demon ‘Mayor’ of San Fernando Valley area, just outside of Los Angeles proper.

The question and answer session that ensued was almost as Retch had pictured the unhappy occasion as put forward as a possibility by Tranth.

It appeared that though Naspeth's lackeys had been slow to report that two foreign demons were for some reason interested in the singer Zoe, they had winged away immediately to report when a Seraph had descended with an attending Angel and seemed to be challenging the two foreign demons.

Retch had just been blissfully cruising along wending his way toward his destination, which he figured to be somewhere in the same location as where he had last seen the singer, when a small group of four demons rose in his path to bar his approach to the area. The apparent leader of the group had raised a hand and addressed him.

"We know that you are not from our area or under our authority, and we require that you report to us whose authority are you under and from whence you come and what the mission that you are upon is," the pompous-sounding leader demanded of Retch.

Retch replied, "I am on a mission of great importance for my Master, who by the way is your Master also." He was trying to warn them not to get too interested in what he was up to for their own good. He took another tack and tried to warn them further.

"They who sent me here are the highest two above all in our realm. It would be wise for you to question me no further so as not to incur their wrath."

Naspeth's growled inarticulate response proved to Retch that his words were serving no purpose, and not for the first time during his functioning as a messenger, he wished that he had more authority to go about his business without question or being challenged then he currently did.

Suddenly a flurry came from above, and all five looked up to see a brutish-looking apparition descending upon them. For Retch it was a welcome appearance, once he recognized the troll-shaped being for who it was.

For the other four demons, he knew that they would assume rightly that the appearance heralded no good portent for them and more likely a chastisement might be in order or be the order of the day.

Stanch had been winging his way along with thundercloud already upon his brow, when he had noticed a minor confrontation below him. He had swooped lower to investigate and noted with consternation that one of the group was one of his few lone trusted individuals in the Armstrong/Strongarm Strategy. Upon closer inspection it became apparent that a group of four demons he did not recognize were confronting his lackey, which wasn't to be tolerated under any circumstances from the standpoint of anything involving the Armstrong Strongarm Strategy coming to light by being questioned by anyone outside the immediate cadre of those in the know.

Stanch descended among them basically in between his lackey and the four opposing demons and demanded of them, "Why are you interfering with the duties of my messenger?" He advanced threateningly upon them and noted with a satisfactory grunt that they retreated as he advanced.

Naspeth really needed no other warnings about what was 'politic', or perhaps more appropriately apt as "discretion (being) the better part of valor", as the messenger demon had put them to him already. Then, the huge brutish apparition had satisfactorily put the fear of the upper echelons in the demonic hierarchy into his mind. Naspeth had done what he was to do, and now he would turn the matter over to Baloth, and then if it needed to go to Torath, oh well.

Meanwhile he could tell when he was witnessing a 'one-upmanship' applied to him, and simply sped off with his small retinue burning the ethereal rubber behind him.

"Well, Retch, what have you got to say for yourself? You know the secrecy of what we few are doing though you don't know what it is exactly that we are doing, and yet you let yourself get pulled over by yo-yos like those that I just sent packing."

Retch replied, chagrined, “I am sorry, lord, my mind was occupied with how to find Strongarm but was ordered by Tranth to give my message to you if I should chance upon you instead.”

“Well, out with it, then,” Stanch growled ominously. “Things are moving just too quick of late.”

“Yes, lord. Strongarm and I were observing the singing woman when down through the ceiling came a Seraph and another angel. Strongarm and I went away from them, where he informed me that he would stay with the woman to observe what the Angels were up to and that I should go right away off to the palace to report. Having done so, lord, Tranth ordered me to speedily return hence to simply say that we were to keep an eye on the two Angels to find out what they are up to, but to...”—here the diminutive messenger demon leaned in close while Stanch obligingly bent a huge hairy fly blown ear towards his henchman—”make haste within two turns to Armstrong Island to meet the Master himself!”

“That’s it, then?” Stanch mused, rubbing his iron jaw with a gnarled hand, feeling mightily like he was left high and dry and out on a limb by a serious lack of information and leadership from the top.

Of course he did not know that Satan was still somewhat licking his wounds from his last Seraph/Archangel encounter. Nor that the Master’s knowledge of having come away from the experience with even less of a clue as to what was going on than he had when he had first ventured forth on his fact finding quest, left him little incentive to investigate another Seraph meddling so soon after the last fiasco.

Stanch looked towards where the quartet had just disappeared from sight, wishing for not the first time that they weren’t on such a hush-hush project to where they could not snag help as needed. For as poor as demon communications networks were in general, demons when organized within a specific area, from a city on up to a principality, did have a system of fairly rapid com-

munications should one have access to it. Word of mouth spread rapidly when one told six, and those six each told another six and so on. Strongarm could have been found in short order were he sought in such a way.

As far as the Strategy was concerned, though, the island stronghold and the immediate spheres of influence of the pertinent Armstrongs themselves only needed a hop, skip, and a jump to get between two of the usual information points. There had only been a few occasions where communications with the palace had been needed, and even those had not had to be done in any kind of hurry.

Stanch floated for a minute and pondered, but knowing Strongarm for being as smart as he was, Stanch had no doubt that his henchman would either be at the concert hall or on his way to it to reacquire Retch, knowing that the observant messenger demon would in all probability be sent back to the place that he had been sent from.

He looked at his comparably diminutive underling speculatively. When everything really began to break towards the Strategy's fruition, then secrecy would not be of such paramount importance, but for now...

"Go to where last you saw Strongarm," he said. "When you see him tell him what you were told at the palace. Then tell him from me that I must go back and put another nail in the Armstrong Patriarch's coffin tonight. He will know what I mean."

The brutish-looking demon lifted his head to the sky, as if to ask why me? Then shaking his head as if coming to a decision dictated by events surely not all of his own volition, he said, "Tell Strongarm to just keep an eye on the younger brother until the two turns are up, and find out what he can about Aaron, this cow of a singer, and the nosy two Angels, Seraphs, or whatever critters from whichever side comes along, and I will start the ball rolling at my end on the island. Tell him the Master comes for what I do not know, and that is where I will need to remain until our lord's arrival.

If Strongarm can break loose leaving you to observe, you are to remain at that music place where you now go to be a contact point for Strongarm and I, no matter where else we may be.

“Yes, lord,” Retch answered and hurried off on his mission.

Stanch watched his cohort dwindle in the distance, sighed, and wondered if he could get paid by the mile like he had overheard humans sometimes could when on trips like unto his current seeming never ending merry-go-round. *All aboard for the Palace, Armstrong Island, or the place of human caterwauling, and then do it all over again!*

With this thought, he again began the journey back to the island.

PROOF

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

“Now, what is that at such an ungodly hour of the morning?” Christine grumbled to herself. She opened the door and saw a tall youth gazing at her appraisingly.

In return she could tell right away before he even spoke that he must be a foreigner from the European cut of his clothing.

She was still in her pajamas, which constituted sweats...both top and bottom, and a pair of fuzzy grey socks. For as far as she was concerned she had yet at least another hour of mussed casual morning comfort padding around her house thusly attired before she even began thinking about getting ready to go out, never mind receiving anyone over.

With wrinkled brow drawn above green eyes that were warning someone's toes were getting stepped on, she asked acidly, “May I help you?”

Well, I hope so,” Aaron replied cheerfully, not abashed in the slightest. “I seem to be doing this surprise it's me thing, one way or the other to people in Los Angeles and catching them off guard.”

He looked down at his feet for a few short moments as if abashed, while playing the roll a bit and shuffling his feet like a nervous schoolboy. His primary young man's focus, however, was on the cute little belly button that winked at him from below the cut-off sweatshirt, which had ridden up a bit as its wearer had one arm up holding the door and the other up on the doorjamb. (He was, after all, a male youth of just eighteen years of age, and the fair somewhat older than he maiden before him, albeit disheveled across the board, was not without her charms...no not one bit.)

He looked up suddenly to see if his little boy blue act had had an effect, and did indeed see and feel a minor softening in her demeanor.

“Sorry, it’s...not my intention to scare people half to death when I call on the phone or in person, but somehow that just seems to happen sometimes. I think because I’m a compulsive kind of guy and used to doing things a bit spontaneously, but please allow me this imposition.”

Christine was trying to figure out where he was from by his accent but gave up as that vague question was superseded by the intrusive thought:

Man, does this kid shut his yap and catch a breath, Christine was thinking while slowly closing the door on him and on whatever he was trying to sell. *I mean, cute kid or not, he has best get his sales pitch down to have a quicker delivery, as he has been in my doorway for almost a minute and hasn’t even said why.*

As if in answer to her thoughts but more probably as the door was inches away from being shut, possibly to occlude with his nose...

“My name is Aaron...Aaron Armstrong. We spoke on the phone, and I just woke up a while ago on my plane and haven’t checked in anywhere yet. Frankly, I snuck out on my security detail and am kind of playing hooky on them, if you get my meaning. And as I had your address in my pocket...”

She had stopped closing the door in his face, trying to hide displaying the sense of elation that she felt, but yet felt that she had to stand up for her concept of Hollywood visiting protocols.

With her mind shifting from sleep mode into high gear, she gazed at him dumfounded for a good long moment before replying dryly, “Nice to meet you, Aaron, but in case you are wondering why you feel that you are catching people off guard in L.A., by your impromptu visits or whatever else you have been up to, it is because here we make appointments, get invited, are expected, and never, never do we just show up on someone’s doorstep, and...certainly not at this hour.”

“I am truly sorry,” he said, sounding somewhat sincere, but she thought she detected a hint of a smile at the corners of his mouth

that belied his avowed sorrow, while his clear blue eyes looked everywhere but convincingly into her own green ones.

“I’m actually proposing to stay with my architect friend, Michael.” He confided, “Who is designing some more additions on to my property, but for now I thought I could get a head start on the day, hook up with you, and get together for an early breakfast, or a bagel and a coffee or something?” He informed and invited her all in one sentence.

Christine was thinking that Aaron was pretty quick on the draw, to where the initial bewildered apologetic youth act was getting stretched pretty thin by his subsequent cosmopolitan ways. She also knew that being an Armstrong heir, he must have been at a hundred functions where he had hobnobbed with more than his share of famous and powerful people, and so being abashed probably wasn’t even in his nature, and certainly not with such as she who he must only considered as a news person.

Being that as it may...Christine’s being miffed had been allayed by the youth stating who he was, and her being indignant at the imposition had more or less turned to speculation. She stood there blinking her eyes, basically trying to assimilate his presence there on her very doorstep, at what was for her such an ungodly hour, being it was only 7:30 a.m.

Hey, wait a minute...I wonder...

His reference to an architect named Michael just had to be a coincidence, but then she winced at the sudden coming home of a memory from last year of a discussion that she and her new acquaintance had told her on their first date, which had to do with his forthcoming trip to Armstrong Island. He had even gone on at length about how there was an unlimited budget for the project that he was building for one of the Armstrong Patriarch’s offspring.

She really liked her architect friend and knew that if her architect friend Michael was the same as Aaron’s Michael, she had better tread lightly, as there could be relationship repercus-

sions, besides those repercussions that she had been considering all along while doing her recent research of the family. And those would be to simply be wary when dealing with the kind of power that someone like an Armstrong must have available to them.

She and Michael Corporeal had met just short of a year ago, and despite their attraction to one another could only meet rarely for a coffee or a show, as both had schedules that seemed to conflict with the other's. She was however...very interested, and hoped he was the same as regards her.

Michael was always "on-site" at one or the other of his projects around the world, while she was continually on the move chasing down her stories, which could take her anywhere, though like Michael, her job kept her mostly in the US.

As these thoughts chased each other through her mind further bringing her to be fully awake, she had taken a moment to step back, bow, and wave him in, while also wordlessly pointing at a clock on a nearby table. She swiftly looked back to Aaron to see if he had gotten the point that she was pointedly trying to make, for she did not trust herself to speak at just that moment.

Aaron, not totally impervious to hints, also noted that she was attractively flushed for some reason, in her disheveled sort of way, but did not think it was anger or embarrassment and really did not care as long as he got his way, which was that he was allowed in, so all must actually be well, no matter she seemed determined to drive home that she was not exactly ecstatic to see him at this hour.

He chuckled and said, "Thank you," as he stepped in to her foyer, while eyeballing the clock she was indicating with a manicured forefinger.

"Well, I'm still on Greek time, and I woke up quite a while ago in the plane, after coming here for quite a while just to meet with you guys. And by plural, I mean you, another lady, and my architect."

Without further invitation, Aaron continued through the foyer and hung a right into the parlor, before plunking himself

down to sprawl out in an oversized armchair contentedly, sighing a drawn out exaggerated “Ahhhh, with one leg draped over the left arm of the chair to swing.

“Thump thump thump,” went the back of his heel against the side of the chair, while draw, draw, drawn as far as they could go toward each other went Christine’s eyebrows almost touching one another, in her exasperation. She didn’t get a chance to vent just then...however. As Aaron popped out with what after hearing it, she decided to call in her next article on he and his family...his imparting of “The Armstrongian Viewpoint”.

“Frankly, I have been twiddling my thumbs since I woke up, and was just as considerate and patient as could be until I decided that you guys have to be willing to be discomfited a bit too, and work with me a little in return. You know...rise and shine and meet me halfway.”

He grinned at her briefly and remarked, “By the way...meeting me halfway would have had you being up and at em’ long ago to meet me halfway across the Atlantic.” (Another toothy grin.) “In fact, I deserve a hug and an immediate cup of mocha for my efforts.”

Of all the nerve you spoiled little rich brat! Christine fumed quietly but also not without some delight, knowing that all of this was “grist for the mill” in the article she was planning and dialing in with every word that Aaron spouted.

Where oh where is my purse with my recorder? She beseeched mentally of the cosmos, rummaging around while remaining within earshot of Aaron.

“Honestly...I would have to enjoy being stuck on a slow boat from China that forced me to wait for the California people’s lazy ways to be satisfied enough to sluggishly get around to meeting with me. Perhaps we could imbibe sustenance when these... the California rich... finally rise to be about our mutual business stylishly at nine-ish or ten-ish, or go to a ‘stylishly late’ brunch.”

Christine’s cork was going to blow. She calmed herself with an effort while totally ignoring Aaron’s fairly disparaging remarks, and said, “Now that you are comfortable...”

She let her sentence trail off. She had ceased looking for her purse to re-enter the parlor to perch on the end of her upright piano bench. Her intention was to by body language pretend that she was not comfortable or happy with his presence at such an hour. No refreshment offered alone should be speaking volumes to someone with normal etiquette concerns, but she was counting on Aaron not caring a whit about what was normal considering his presence alone was abnormal in the social scheme of things.

I don't want you here and you need to go, go, go...she was pretending half-heartedly wordlessly by body language that any half-way refined socialite would take the meaning of. And then there was the minor insult/huge hint of not offering refreshments even after he had made mention of her providing him with a cup of mocha. Meanwhile she was thinking; *Read my true thoughts and stay...stay...Stay...STAY!*

Aaron sat apparently oblivious to her feminine reporter/affluent Hollywood socialite dilemma and still sat complacently swinging and thumping his leg against the side of her chair; prepared to wait forever it seemed for her to finish her unfinished sentence.

Finally, with a snort of annoyance, she fumed at him, "You surely do know how to get off on the wrong foot around a person, and by the way stop kicking my chair! Now listen, we had an appointment for today that I believe was more than courteous in that I made it with you on such short notice. My own sister would not even come here at this hour...I mean..." She flailed for words, as it never occurred to her that someone could be so non-protocol wise, so without social skills...

"You are like a...someone who doesn't know how to act in proper society...like you are really clueless."

Aaron had removed his leg from its indolent place on the arm of her chair and had sat up straight and become stiffer in his posture with almost each breath during her brief tirade. A wooden expression had come over his features, as he felt he

had perhaps good-naturedly affronted but felt himself somewhat meanly affronted in return, and in truth did not have the social skills to know what to do about either, when not in an Armstrong environment.

One thing that he did know and stood up to sally forth impulsively upon the thought. As it seemed that his boyish charms were not going to work on this woman, going forward with plan B was probably going to be the order of the day.

“I beg your pardon for tilting at your windmill this morning.” He threw over his shoulder, making a beeline for the front door, already thinking about giving up on understanding her, never mind working with her to insure her curtailing her pursuit of writing about he and his family. He was already focusing on how to implement best drawing all media attention from his family towards himself.

He stopped on impulse yet again, just short of the foyer, angled sharply right toward her, and said, “I’ll give you something to write about!” Just before he picked the totally taken off guard fair maiden up by the elbows, to fleetingly plant a brushing kiss upon her mouth, which he assumed (rightly) had opened a millisecond before to warn him that he better not be going to do what he just did.

It was just a glancing brush of the lips as she had reflexively jerked away, but was nonetheless an accomplishment to him on several levels, as she might write about it number one, and number two, again...he was an eighteen-year-old young man and that by itself was all that was needed for incentive.

He released her to drop back down with what to him was hopefully a smart occlusion upon her scantily upholstered piano bench and now happily zoomed out of her front door abrim with the prospect of focusing his attention on getting attention focused on himself, per his father’s wishes. Pausing just outside, while eyeing what (he vaguely recalled as he had not been paying attention to the cabbies meanderings all that much) might be

where her property must end at the street some way off, he heard her call out to him from behind.

“Aaron!”

Uh oh! I should have run, he was thinking. He turned and had his shoulders up towards his ears and put his thumb in his mouth like a little boy caught doing a naughty. (With the resilience of youth, Aaron had shifted mental gears to where he was happily and almost euphorically contemplating spreading his wings and doing some of the things, and some of them crazy things that he had often dreamed and daydreamed of doing.)

“Aaron, I cannot have you just wandering off down the street in this neighborhood. Perhaps you notice that there are no sidewalks.” She gestured towards what could be seen of the manicured lawns and broad properties of those who lived in the adjacent mansions to Christine’s own.

Aaron nodded his head, thumb still in his mouth, and Christine just had to grin.

“See, you are up and about and all the way here on my doorstep while my staff are not even around yet. This is my time of the day without being bothered by anyone unless I told them to start early for some reason. Come back in here and sit and don’t be kicking my furniture, or picking me up or dropping me on my furniture either.”

“Oh yeah...” She advised him with a warning tone in her voice, “Don’t be kissing at me either, or I’m going to slap you silly!”

She disappeared from view as she had turned from the doorway to go into the mansion’s depths somewhere, but Aaron heard her parting words that trailed off the further away she went, “Come in, shut the door, and I’ll go grab keys and the car and pull around front. Be just a second.”

Twenty minutes of seconds went by while Aaron wandered the cavernous parlor, looking at mementos of a bygone era while being gazed down upon by the stern countenance of someone else’s patriarch, whom Aaron noted must have lived to be of an

age far past that which Armstrong Patriarch's seemed to be able to survive, no matter all their wealth to afford the very best in health care.

Finally, Aaron heard a car's horns out front, or maybe klaxons rather than horns, was the right description. He had been half expecting Christine to reappear from within the mansion, as he had been hearing murmurs and kitchen sounds, which he now took for the staff beginning their duties at such an unbelievably late hour for an Armstrong servant of 8:00 am.

Shaking his head at this minor example of culture shock between Grecian and American servants, he closed the carved solid oak and black iron bound front door behind him, and saw an old yet gleaming vintage convertible awaiting him with its top down.

It was a 1940 Lincoln Zephyr Continental, which Christine's grandfather had bought new off of the showroom floor in 1940. Only 350 of this elongated convertible model had been made in 1940, in response to a demand for the extra bonnet length by the manufacturer to match one that had been custom designed in 1939 by and for Edsel Ford, because of his liking for the European influence, which also incorporated the spare tire mounted to the back of the car's boot.. It was black with a white convertible top matched by the wide white band on what today has commonly become called "gangster whitewalls".

"Come on, Aaron," Christine called. "Take a picture later or I will mail you one."

Aaron was thinking that this wasn't working out so bad after all and that he should just kiss beautiful women he did not know more often.

Well, that, and he was also thinking that he best tell his taxi cabs, limousines, or however he got somewhere...to just wait until he found out how he would be received, before dismissing them.

He went down the steps jauntily and stepped into the beautifully finished automobile and was agreeably surprised to see what appeared to be all-gold leaf trimmed gauges upon the dashboard.

The red leather interior was plush and comfortable...it was an altogether nicely put together machine.

Christine shifted the three on the tree steering column shifter, and the car surged forward smoothly and quietly with only a slight vibration from the V-12 engine.

Aaron was not unaware that more than the car was nicely put together, as he shifted around feeling and looking for seatbelts, and seeing that his self-appointed chauffeur didn't have one on said, "No seatbelts, huh?"

They had come to the end of the drive and turned on to the broad tree-lined avenue that her house was set back from, before she responded.

"My grandfather wouldn't hear of anyone drilling holes in the coachwork in any of the cars in his auto collection."

Christine had deepened her voice and sat up straight in the seat while pounding the steering wheel and mimicking what Aaron assumed was her grandfather, who might even have been the old boy who had sternly been looking down upon him from the portrait in her parlor.

She continued her aping of her auto loving progenitor with, "I'll be danged if I am going to change my cars around to suit these whippersnappers' new whims and laws every time they come out with one. I'll take and pay the ticket ifn' I have to!"

"He sounds kind of like my father," Aaron said with a chuckle. "But what a 'whippersnapper' is I am sure neither he nor I know, and I think it would be a safe bet that 'ifn' would not be in his vocabulary whether or not he knew what it meant."

"Well, grandpa was set in his ways...in a lot of ways..." Christine confided. "He left me the house and most of his car collection. And if I thought it was humanly possible for you to be one, I would say that if you are a good boy, I might be persuaded to show you the rest of them sometime."

Christine had been wending her way down a long, winding road that she had gotten on after several turns to where Aaron was totally lost. There was now a yellow line in the center of the

road and traffic had picked up appreciably. After a few more moments of riding along appreciating the wind in their hair on an already nicely warming up morning, Aaron broke the silence.

“You wouldn’t happen to know where you are taking me?” he asked her. “Because I have no idea of where we are.”

Christine drummed her fingers on the wheel before answering, as more blocks flew by under the tires drumming upon the road.

“Correct me if I am wrong,” she said, “but I assume that I am taking you to Santa Monica to see your architect.” They had stopped at a light, and she turned her head to see his response to her next words. “That is if he is indeed Michael Corporeal. He is, isn’t he?”

“Well, yeah...” He looked at her appraisingly. “Now how in the world did you know that? Is nothing secret from you news people here in the US?”

Christine scratched at her smooth chin a moment before responding. “All will be revealed in short order, Aaron. In this case it is just simply a case of just how small of a world the world can actually be...and has actually become.”

She reached into her bag, which was on the seat besides her between them, and in short order produced her cell phone. She flipped it open and lifted it up and Aaron heard the phone say tinnily to her, “State your command.”

She said, “Call Michael.”

“Wait a minute, Christine,” Aaron said and reached over and pushed her cell phone away from her ear. “I have to tell you something that I know that I am not supposed to, but as you Americans say, to take the bull by the horns...”

Christine had closed her phone with a snap. Aaron was seemingly a never ending source of annoyance, and enough was enough.

“Aaron, have you ever heard of the concept of ‘personal space’? You invaded my home and now continually invade my personal space. Let’s try this that might be told to a ten-year-old...” She paused significantly, dropped her cell phone on the seat, and

turned to shake a finger under his nose before continuing, "...or to the Aarons of the world...you may look but don't touch."

Aaron was just getting ready to take affront when Christine glanced over and he could see a slight grin just before she confirmed his suspicions that yet again her bark was worse than her bite.

"Bad," she said, "Bad, bad, Aaron. Bad boy!" While out came the admonishing finger shaking like for all the world she was talking to her Golden Labrador.

"Okay, okay, I got it. But anyway...I have been trying to tell you that I came to see you for one reason only and that was to see if I could persuade you to quit pushing and poking at us with your articles about my family and I. Failing that...to ask you to just focus on myself only. I promise that you will get plenty of juicy things to write about, as I do believe that I am going to go on a spending spree of ridiculous proportions, and I would like you to go with me to so report, totally gratis."

"That sounds like a pretty good plan, Aaron, but you might want to get someone else instead that would be properly awe-struck, as you have seen my home and know that I'm not a stranger to wealth."

"Besides," she continued, "I guess that you haven't heard about your brother making his own international headlines that came out on Reuters. You all might be famous as the ultra all-powerful and rich Armstrongs, but your brother is now infamous, first that for no stated reason he withdrew Armstrong support halfway through a billion-dollar project to build a hydro-electric producing dam that was to supply power to hundreds of thousands of people, but that was also to supply water to irrigate vast dry and infertile tracts that would have been able to grow food to feed untold thousands of starving people."

"Ahhh..." Aaron groaned aloud upon receiving this news, relieved to an extent that the family now had his brother to criticize, as usually it was his own butt that seemed to always have a bull's-eye painted on it when the chastisements were passed out.

Gavin had been getting more withdrawn lately, like already at only twenty years of age he was going through some midlife crisis or change. The thing is though, that Gavin had been with his uncle not twenty-four hours before when Aaron had been sent on a mission to try to quash publicity. Yet, according to Christine, Gavin had managed in so short a time to make himself newsworthy...and if Christine was correct, notoriously so. Of course that decision about the dam might have been made sometime in the immediate past and just now had come to light to be criticized.

Christine had picked up her temporarily discarded cell-phone and brandished it at him. "Can I make my call now?" she asked wryly.

Aaron reached into his own pocket and whipped out his cell in return and brandished it like a sword. With a mischievous grin he said, "On guard, mademoiselle!"

At almost the same time both phones said in their individual tones, "State your command."

Aaron said, "Call Gavin."

Christine again ordered her phone to, "Call Michael."

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Gavin was tossing and turning in his sleep. He was hearing voices instead of his usual dreams, and during intermittent periods of semi-wakeful awareness he discerned that they weren't just simple dreams.

He wakened fully with a start and knew right away that something was different. Where normally he almost immediately forgot what he had been dreaming about, this time he could remember vividly some of what he had been dreaming.

As with most of the people that he knew, he had heard that for some reason males did not have good fairytale-like dreams, but in the main some horrible thing or other was happening, that try as they might, they could not change. In Gavin's dreams that were nightmares, he would figure out a counter move to what bad was happening to him, only for things to change to offset the move he just made and possibly put him in an even worse position than that he had just figured his way out of. Ending of facing yet another of some kind of doom happening to him than he had been in before.

The dream that he had just awakened from however had been different in that it had been his father that he had been continually trying to save from some amorphous huge black thing that was trying to get him.

Gavin recalled repeatedly using the dream's terrain and his own youthful strength to save The Patriarch, only to repeatedly find his moves countered by this faceless seeming endlessly powerful being or thing.

His father's strength having almost totally failed, he had been carrying him away from the amorphous black thing, and then in a hurricane like gust of wind he had closed his eyes for just a second only to feel his father snatched out of his arms.

That is when he had awakened in a cold sweat.

He padded into his huge, walk-in shower and turned on every one of the six shower heads full blast to drown away the dream if that were possible.

Then the in-shower waterproof phone rang with his uncle's distinctive ring.



Gilbert Armstrong had just heard from his older brother's live-in personal physician that his older brother, The Patriarch, had had what they assumed had been a massive coronary some time in the night and had died in his sleep.

Except for the old man's typical nocturnal habits of perhaps either going to his library or to the kitchen in the wee hours before returning to his bed, it would not have been noticed by his staff that something was amiss.

Someone was always standing by in the kitchen through the night, while a servant stood ready just outside the massive bedroom doors to be on hand should a call be heard for robe or slippers to be fetched.

By three am, the entire household had been made aware that their Patriarch had done no nocturnal prowling as was his norm.

As no servant was allowed upon penalty of dismissal to just entire the great man's chambers, at four am the in-house physician called The Patriarch's Chief of Staff, who became alarmed as he was also aware of the nocturnal proclivities, and had immediately called The Patriarch's bedroom line.

No answer, and only then did the Chief of Staff authorized the in-house physician to enter the bed chamber.

Then, of course, mayhem had ensued.

Gilbert had gotten the news at 4:30 am, and paramedics had arrived by 5:00, at about the same time Gilbert had arrived from across the island.

By 5:30 am their time, virtually every house on the island had its lights ablaze. While The Patriarch's Chief of Staff had the rest

of the staff assembling and making calls across the world to again set either light's ablaze at all hours, or stop board meetings or breakfast or dinners in mid-progress.

This all while Gilbert was trying to decide whether to go in person to the heir, Gavin, or to call.

He had already called his servants and ordered some appropriate all black attire to replace the pajamas and robe and slippers he had arrived in.

Gilbert shrugged. The task had to be done, and now it was up to Gavin how to inform Aaron.

He pulled out his ever-present cell and called Gavin's bedroom phone.



Gavin stared for a moment at his shower phone in disbelief as he had blearily looked at a clock on the way into the bathroom and it had been like what, five or six am. But it was his uncle's distinctive ring, and therefore was somehow of importance...especially at this hour.

"Hey, uncle, can you give me a minute. I'm in the shower!" He virtually yelled into the receiver over the roar of the high-pressure nozzles.

"You need to hear this now, son." Came the barely heard response.

Gilbert almost dropped the phone in surprise, as his Uncle Gilbert in his memory since he was five years old or so had never called him "son."

He shut down the shower and said, "Okay, I can hear you now. What's up?"

Gilbert thought just a second about how to say it then said, "There is no way to put it but how it is, and that is to say that you are now The Patriarch, as your father has died in his sleep."

At that point Gavin did drop the phone and leaned both hands and his forehead against the marble shower tile. *Too soon. Too soon...* He thought and then wondered at himself as he had

the self realization that he felt no sorrow, only concern that he was not ready yet to assume the reins of power.

He had just gone through his father's death in his dreams and had not quite washed that away. In fact, he had just been coming around to thinking about the day's planned itinerary instead of dwelling on nightmares and such, and then here comes his dream as a reality. He knew that he had not dropped the phone from emotional distress, as his father had been a pretty distant figure, and had never been one any would consider to be a loving or doting parent.

No, instead of possible tears or whatever, he had simply been taken aback by the realization that the god that his father and uncle had spoken of as having communicated to them and their ancestors in their dreams, must have done so to him last night's nightmare premonition...for the first time. He didn't think that it had happened to soften the blow...as he had heard often of the god of their dreams, but never as one who seemed to care about anyone's delicate sensitivities. *So it must have been to forewarn me that it not only was going to happen, but that there was nothing that I could have done about it.*

Hearing the tinny voice of his uncle calling his name concernedly from where the phone dangled by its cord to the shower floor, he bent and picked it up.

"Hi, Unc', I am back. You just caught me by surprise and my soapy hands dropped the phone," he said calmly then continued before his uncle could respond.

"Lemme get rinsed off, dried, and dressed. I assume that you have not told Aaron yet, and I want to do that as best that I can. While I am getting dressed all mourning looking and cancelling my appointments, can you get me a number of Aaron's hotel, just in case he shut his doggone cell off again so we can't find him?"

"Well, sure, call me when you are ready and I'll get it from security," Gilbert said, a bit flabbergasted at how easily and with almost a cheerfulness that his nephew had taken the news about his father's death.



Neither the younger nor the older of the two participants in the call knew for sure though each suspected...that what they took as Gavin's cold preparedness for his father's demise, had come from who they considered as their family god at work upon him during the greater part of his recent dreams. Some good part of which had been occurring over the past few months, and not just the one last night...to just about take away any vestige of what might be deemed the normal caring human nature.

Any sort of love, compassion, or pity had gone by the boards, while avarice, greed, and a lust for absolute power and the ability to use it outright instead of behind the scenes had been brought to the forefront of the young new Armstrong Patriarch's thoughts and feelings.

As Gavin strode naked into his bedroom, things crystallized in his mind while his heart became harder and harder the more his thoughts did so. His back straightened into a stiff, unyielding posture, while his eyes took on a strange glow. The youthfulness that just a few moments before had been apparent in his features took on the appearance of a far more mature man.

"Phone on!" he snapped toward one of the many bedroom in wall speaker phones.

"What is your command?" the many speakers responded as Gavin began dressing.

"Call Uncle Gilbert...mobile."

On the first ring his uncle answered. "You ready for Aaron's number now, already?"

Gilbert found that he wasn't impressed by his uncle's hesitant and concerned way of portraying himself, and he didn't even wonder why these human weaknesses now suddenly bothered him.

"No, uncle, it is business time and it is Armstrong time to come out of the woodwork. I want you to wake up every one of our associates. You know, the ones that you taught me are in our

immediate circle. I want them all in conference call mode with us on our secure lines at nine am our time.”

“But, Gavin...” Gilbert began to expostulate and was cut off.

“Look, uncle, I know the old man meant a lot more to you than he ever meant to me, but do what I say now as the new Patriarch. Get my father’s chief of staff to help you make the calls, and while you are at it have him report to me as soon as you guys are done.”

“You want me to call Aaron too, Gavin?”

Gavin padded over to his desk and said, “No, I will still make that call. But another thing is that I want even you to call me Patriarch in public immediately. You will see that what I have planned calls for an immediate forgetting of my youth, as I am going to need respect to command the will of the men that will assist us in our goals.”

“Okay, give me Aaron’s number.” Came this new commanding voice that Gilbert barely recognized as that of his nephew, though he had seen the same transmogrification rapidly occur in his own brother just some time before, and immediately after... Gavin’s grandfather’s death.

As soon as he gave the plane and hotel’s numbers, one or the other of which should get through to the nephew who was to take his own place in the new Armstrong generation, the phone went dead in Gilbert’s hand, as if he was beneath a polite thank you or goodbye.



One of the most powerful Beings ever made by the Hand of God poured even more power, confidence, and lust for world dominance into the new Patriarch of the Armstrong clan.

Only one fallen angel could do the job of attempting to create the Anti-Christ, and Lucifer chortled at the fertile ground into which he planted his seeds.

His underlings, most notably Strongarm & Stanch, had done a very fine job indeed.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

Christine had called Michael's office in the Corporeal Building and had reached the ever efficient Katie, whom she knew to be Michael's personal assistant, though they had never met. Katie had informed her that Michael was in a meeting but that they were indeed, expecting Aaron at some point or another and that he was "welcome at any time."

When she had introduced herself just now, she knew that Michael must not have mentioned her name to his assistant, which was all well and good as she did not want to be the subject of any office chatter, but it would have helped her now if Katie at least knew that Michael knew her. Though she saw right away that were she sawdust and of no import at all, Aaron's name was sufficient to throw open the doors of welcome.

"Well, I have him here with me, and apparently Aaron expects to be put up there in the penthouse until he can meet with Michael," Christine informed Katie then glanced over to see Aaron yawning and stretching. "I think he is jet-lagged a bit and maybe needs a nap before meeting with Michael about architecture or anything too complicated," she added.

Aaron, easily overhearing her end of the conversation, she saw was nodding his head sleepily in agreement, with his eyes already closed.

He had, after all, spent the bulk of the flight awake in the excitement of a freedom suddenly given to do exactly what he wished and draw attention to himself by being a lavish playboy. (Well that is how he thought of his mission anyway) He was however, being fair and square with his family's wishes, and giving it his best shot in trying to convince the young lady to basically lay off of publicizing things about his family.

Then, of course, he had spent quite a while talking to Zoe, slept an hour or so napping, then popped up immediately the wheels touched down at LAX. Showered, jumped in a cab and off to Christine's house he went.

Christine had received instructions and directions from Katie along with the access code to use the underground parking, and in short order was shaking the shoulder of the gently snoring youth and escorting him to an elevator that was being held open by the proficient Katie herself, who had come in person, not only because of the importance of this client, but because only she and Michael had the access codes to the security that was in the penthouse.

In short order Aaron was snoring in one of the lavishly appointed guest bedrooms, and Christine had professed to Katie that she might as well say hello to Michael when he was free since she was already there. Besides, she confided, she wasn't too keen on immediately taking the big classic car back through the brunch to lunch traffic that had just started choking up the roadways by the time they had arrived. At least this was her justifications to Katie, though the truth (of course) was that she was "on the job," and had only part of one heck of a story. (*Now that I am in... it'll take a bulldozer to pull me away now!*)

I'm officially the "inside man" for as long as this story is newsworthy! Christine convinced herself, and resolved to have her maid get her driver to bring her some cosmetics and clothing.

Katie was full of questions about the young man she had heard so much about but had never met, though she had been an integral part of the efforts to get Aaron's house from design to a finished structure. Then not knowing anything about who Christine was or what her relationship was with Aaron at all, or with Michael currently, she had sat with Christine for a while and engaged in a bit of girl-talk.

She felt that she had to do that in any event, as there was no way she was just going to let a complete stranger loose in her

bosses penthouse unsupervised unless she was supremely confident that all was safe. *Aaron Armstrong or not*. She was thinking at first, and had in fact met the ‘couple’ with the elevator at the parking level to visually identify the youth from pictures that she had seen. Her resolve to ask for ID had vanished when seeing how sleepily youthfully innocent he had looked while stifling a yawn with a polite apology, and then giving her a somewhat lopsided grin as yet another yawn came to the fore.

She had also noted the luxury classic automobile that they had arrived in and that too, had allayed any qualms she might have had whether the twain were who they said they were.

After finding herself comfortable with taking her leave, Katie did so, and went back down to the offices.



Michael stepped into the marbled foyer of *his* penthouse, and the Archangel admired the lavish yet tasteful décor that he knew who he was coming to think of as his ‘alter-ego’ (Michael) to have designed.

(Angels had and did walk the earth as men, and even “came in unto the daughters of men”. In Michael’s case though, he had not done this any time recently and only observed men’s folly from afar. In this instance where the Lord had actually put him into the architect, while he became aware of his host’s memories and feelings, was something entirely new to him.

It was true that fallen angels would obsess and in some instances actually possess a human, but among the Faithful Celestial Beings, that indwelling was the bailiwick of The Holy Ghost, and to Michael’s knowledge...exclusively.)

He could hear some muffled noises coming from where he knew the servant’s quarters and the household kitchen were located.

Katie had apprised him of the presence of his guests, and so, as he wandered around the first floor of the huge penthouse, he

was not surprised to hear a gentle snore percolate down from upstairs somewhere.

The Archangel had been very curious to meet with the youth who was the author, in essence, of furious activity downstairs in the offices. He was convinced that the entire situation within which he found himself was due to his host's business and casual relationship with the young Aaron Armstrong.

He had certain of his host's memories to draw upon. Some of which were not too complimentary, but the Archangel Michael and the human Michael had two enormously different sets of standards to go by.

So, he wanted to meet the young man and draw his own conclusions and of course see what The Holy Spirit could be seen within the boy, and see what The Holy Spirit within himself, might divulge. To that avail, he went up the winding, plush, carpeted staircase to where the Master and guest bedrooms were located.

(There was confusion across the board in that respect, as The Holy Spirit had been a bit shy of late in being was in being the most informative. Then, just as he had found himself not able to see the demons or the Angels that he knew must be about, or able to fly, or go through things on the material plane...Well, try as he might...he could not discern whether his host even knew the Lord and had his Salvation.)

In one guest room...the one with snores coming forth, he found a disheveled lump in the bed, above which was the youthful countenance of a youth that he knew must be Aaron.

In the next room lay sleeping a very pretty young lady upon the plush couch, where she must have thought she could stay awake while watching the room's muted flat screen, which was currently displaying some human scraping at his face with something.

When Katie had told him her name, a memory of bright green eyes and flaming red hair had fleetingly passed through his mind, so he knew that his host knew her in some way. Certainly

the red hair splayed across the plush couch's armrest confirmed his memory.

Michael covered her a comforter that was folded across the foot of the bed, and quietly retreated back downstairs, knowing himself to be in no hurry to speak to anyone about anything personal. as The Holy Spirit seemed to be so reluctant to give him discernment about either of the sleepers personal relationships with either his host, or with each other. And so far, he could congratulate himself on not having given away that he 'was not himself', in more ways than one.

I'll let the two awaken and observe their interactions, before I even open my mouth to perhaps put my foot in it.

The Archangel felt that he had been very successful down in the offices during the many meetings that Katie had scheduled for him, as for some reason or other access to his host's knowledge in such work type matters had come easily to the fore.

The problem was that The Holy Spirit did not seem to want to share his host's thoughts on the personalities or personal relationship between his host and any given one of those who worked with and for him. Or even of the vendor's for materials, or many contractors that he had scheduled calls for meetings with.

They were all just names, with some faces to go with them.

That included the young lady above, whom he knew *that* his host knew, but the relationship was murky to the Archangel.



The insistent ringing of his cell phone demanded to be answered. Aaron fuzzily woke and wasn't too surprised to find himself in strange surroundings as he had prepared himself to do since he had been given his marching orders, so to speak. He right away thought of Christine, and then it was brought home to him where he was.

When Aaron saw that it was Gavin's cell, he immediately answered. "Hey, Gavin, what's up?" Meanwhile he wondered at why such an early call, considering Armstrong Island time.

A voice barely recognizable as that of his brother answered him.

“The old man is dead, Aaron. He passed away sometime in the night from what they think was some kind of heart failure and I need you to come home ASAP for mom, as I am going to be too busy to be on hand for her.”

Everything his brother said was spoken in an unusually emotionlessly cold voice. Aaron supposed that even though he knew his brother to have had no strong familial feelings for The Patriarch, this unusual coldness must be from Gavin already having had some time to come to terms emotionally with their loss.

How wrong he was, he had no clue, though he himself was not anywhere close to tears, he did feel the loss and one could hear at least a bit of grief and emotion in his voice, as he agreed to come back home as soon as he could arrange it.

After hanging up with the strange-sounding Gavin who had seemed singularly uninformative about telling Aaron even such things as whether their father had funeral arrangements going. Or indeed, personal details about anything at all about any arrangements whatsoever, he decided to call Uncle Gilbert to find out what was going on.

Basically all he had gotten from his brother was that his father had died in the night and he needed Aaron home to comfort their mother as Gavin had other fish to fry.

Pretty cold indeed.

Aaron called his head of security, whom he had called while in route to Corporeal Buildings. It had already been arranged through Katie that his security would occupy some of the guest bedrooms downstairs under the offices, while Aaron, of course, would be staying up above the offices in the architect's penthouse.

He was not surprised to find the team up and at it, as Armstrong Security throughout the world knew about The Patriarch's passing through their own efficient communications network.

And, as a small cadre of his security detail were still aboard the plane, while two men at all times guarded the outside perimeter,

the plane was ready, fueled, and the pilots and staff were on the way from their hotel accommodations close by.

Aaron knew that his security would have brought at least what he would need to shower and change into fresh clothing, but he ordered them to just meet him at the cavalcade that he knew would be parked just outside, as he would shower and change on the plane into something black as he got closer to home.

He dressed quickly, and just before going down the curving staircase he heard the sounds of TVs. One from behind him and one from below. In stereo, he heard the world informed of the passing of the Armstrong Patriarch.

Boy, he thought to himself wryly...what...was I the last to know?

He quickly went down the stairs and headed for the sound of the TV in what he assumed was the den. There he found Michael standing with arms folded on his chest, seemingly brooding before the wall mounted flat screen.

The announcer was droning on about the unimaginable and incalculable wealth of the Armstrongs, “and what the passing of The Patriarch might mean for the family’s holdings, and indeed, for the untold thousands of employee’s jobs that could be affected.”

“Good morning, Mike. I see you and the whole world knows what I just found out a couple of minutes ago,” Aaron said.

The Archangel looked at the fair, tall youth, and for once it seemed The Holy Spirit was going to be so kind as to give him discernment about the boy from the perspective of his host’s familiarity with Aaron over the two years of their acquaintance, while the house was being designed and built.

He knew the child to not have his Salvation but that there was hope.

He said, “I am sorry for your loss, Aaron, and if there is anything that I can do, just let me know. Of course we will table our design meetings, and—”

That was as far as he got, as Aaron interrupted him.

“Thanks, Mike. I don’t have any time at all to do pleasantries right now, as my brother has too many things to do assuming control of our...ummm...shall we say, empire. Anyway I have to lead-foot it home and take care of my mother and family on the island, while he deals with the business side of things.

“Anyway, the deal is that in short order we will all be in mourning, which for my family means a month of no new business while we stay on the island and basically mope around, and I know that I will go nuts, so I would appreciate it if you and your staff would just come out and be my guests while we work on the marina and elevator projects, not to mention the helicopter pad.

“As this is already a work in process, it doesn’t go against the ‘no new business during mourning’ rule.”

While speaking, Aaron had been edging away toward the archway that led into the living room and the front door.

“Gotta go, Mike. All my guys are waiting. Give me a call,” Aaron said as he strode rapidly across the living room.

During the youth’s monologue where Michael couldn’t get a word in edgewise, The Holy Spirit had informed the Archangel that going to Armstrong Island was exactly what he was supposed to do.

He followed Aaron until he stood in the archway between the den and living room.

“We need to pack up some planning and drawing tables and equipment. Get everyone together with luggage and whatnot, but in three days we will all be there,” he informed the youth who was just closing the living room door behind him.

“Okay, bye, Mike.” Barely squeaked through the crack before the soundproof door closed authoritatively behind Aaron.

“Now, what was that all about?” Christine asked from her vantage point at the top of the stairs.

Michael explained to the slightly disheveled yet still beautiful human female about Aaron’s father.

“Oh my goodness! I didn’t even get a chance say how sorry I am or to say goodbye,” Christine replied in genuine concern for her new young acquaintance yet wryly thought to herself that part of her concern was that she had missed an opportunity to accompany the young heir to Armstrong Island, where she could find out things firsthand.

Michael had just received another communication from The Holy Spirit and, accessing his host’s memory, just like he had been doing all day in all things technical, he reached into his pocket and in short order held out his host’s cell phone to Christine, who virtually ran down the stairs to take it from his hand.

No sooner had she put the phone to her ear than she heard, “What’s up, Mike? I’m on the other line with my uncle.”

“Sorry, Aaron. It’s me Christine. I just wanted to say how sorry I am about your father.”

“Thank you. I’m sorry I didn’t have time to say goodbye. I was going to call you pretty soon and apologize myself,” Aaron responded. “I have to go right now, but hey...I have an idea...why don’t you come out with Mike when he comes in a couple of days with his crew? I have plenty of room.”

Christine was elated yet chagrined that the situation that was working to her professional advantage was initiated by the death of someone whose son she now knew.

“That would be great. I’ll see you soon.”

“Bye then for now,” Aaron said, then switched back over to his uncle, who was not so patiently waiting for him to come back on-line.

CHAPTER THIRTY

Zoe was in the helicopter when the pilot, one very loud person appropriately named ‘Boomer,’ turned to her and said that dispatch had just called and told him that the Armstrong Patriarch had died.

There had been a delay in Boomer’s arrival, as it had turned out that he could not fly per FAA regulations so soon after his last flight and so required some “down time” before flying again.

When he had called Zoe who was already tapping her foot impatiently at the exclusive resort’s helicopter waiting area and told him of the dilemma, it was already too late to try to schedule another service out of Phoenix.

So it was just breaking dawn when Boomer touched down on the helipad at the resort, and Zoe was awakened from where she was fitfully trying to sleep on a waiting room’s couch, which she could attest to had been designed for durability rather than comfort.

The news that Aaron’s father had died caused Zoe dismay on several levels.

They took to the air, even though she knew that Aaron would be either in route for the airport or in the air already, which meant that what she was doing was probably a futile effort.

Then there was that she had only stayed on the uncomfortable waiting room couch as every bungalow, including hers, had been rented, so turning the helicopter around was yet another exercise in futility.

Well, anyway, she thought, and then dialed Aaron’s cell phone.



Aaron had just gotten off of the phone with his uninformative uncle Gilbert, who had only told him what he already knew...

that his brother was acting mighty cold and indifferent about their father's death. On the other hand, that Gavin was immediately planning on assembling the Coalition was news, as even Uncle Gilbert had assumed that Gavin's youth would preclude his immediate assumption of leadership of the Coalition, which frankly Gilbert thought would fall to him until Gavin was more thoroughly familiarized with the family businesses, not to mention the assuming of becoming the one true world power.

Aaron had been wondering without much interest about who might be the one from among the Coalition members that might assume the reins of power, when his uncle had volunteered that Gavin had aged visibly within hours, and from his actions and orders within even such a short time since he had been informed of their father's passing, had started issuing orders that only the head of the Coalition had the authority to issue.

As they had figured out Aaron's approximate ETA in Greece, where there would of course be an Armstrong helicopter waiting to take him direct to his mother's home, they had really nothing further to discuss, so they said their goodbyes.

Aaron was just sitting back in the Humvee limo and pondering his brother's "ageing" when the welcome incoming call from Zoe arrived to take him out of his unpleasant and basically useless wonderings.

"Hey Zoe, I guess you heard, huh?"

"Yeah, Aaron, I am so sorry. I was just coming on my way to spend some time with you and help you with anything, like in dealing with that Christine gal. My pilot had too many hours in too short a time and got grounded for a while, and that just postponed everything and now I feel so bad because I should have long since been there and have been able to be there for you now."

Aaron heard a frustrated snuffle from his new friend, and his heart went out to her, as he well knew how frustrating it was to try you're very hardest and yet to still not reach your goal.

"Well, where are you now?" he demanded, coming to a decision.

He heard some muffled conversation, as the clatter of the helicopter that she was in guaranteed that nothing could be heard over the phone unless she was speaking directly into the mouthpiece, while attempting to cup out the clatter on the earpiece side.

In a moment, Zoe said, "The pilot says we are about over Bakersfield and less than an hour out from any airport in the L.A. area, including the 'Valley.'"

"Cool!" Aaron said. "Have him divert to L.A.X....you know what, give him your phone for a minute."

Boomer pulled his flight headset off of one ear and pressed Zoe's phone tightly to his head to hear, which was still hard, but he could hear.

"Hey, dude, this is Aaron Armstrong. Can you hear me?"

Boomer looked over to his passenger who was looking back at him intently. He mouthed Armstrong soundlessly, raised his bushy eyebrows questioningly, and pointed at the cell he yet held tightly to his ear.

Christine nodded, cocking her head to one side to emphasize that this was indeed one of *the* Armstrongs.

"Yes, I can hear you, sir," Boomer responded to Aaron in what Zoe could see was a whole different type of respect than what her status had generated in the pilot.

"Okay, we are about fifteen minutes from the security gate to get to my jet. What we are going to do is declare for emergency clearance for your flight to land right by our jet, just like we already have declared for our immediate departure once we are aboard."

"You can't miss us. It is a pearl white Gulfstream with *Armstrong* written on both sides and on the tail in royal blue. There will be a ring of my security keeping your landing spot clear, along with at least one of those dudes that wave the flashlights at you pilots to tell you whatever they tell you."

"I guess you still have to radio in and request flight paths and clearances and whatever else you pilots have to do, but we will have it all arranged. So, do you got all that?"

“Yes, sir!” Boomer responded, and Zoe almost expected him to salute the helicopter’s windshield.

“Okay, dude, thanks and could you put the lady back on the phone?”

Wordlessly, Boomer handed the phone back over to Zoe, who only hearing one side of the conversation, which mostly seemed to involve, “Yes sirs!”, had no idea of what had transpired.

She put the phone to her ear and heard a bit of garbled conversation between Aaron and whoever he was with, when Aaron said directly into his phone’s mouthpiece, “Zoe, are you there? I have to make some calls and pull some strings. You are coming with me and everyone can just hold their horses, as my father is gone and my getting there a half hour sooner or later won’t matter to him. I’ll call my mom and tell her I am on the way.”

By the way, Christine will be coming along within a few days with my architect and his crew, so you will be able to meet her then, and you can give me some input. In fact with one thing or another you may find that you guys become companions as the funeral and whatnot will have me on the run during the day, and working with Michael my architect, but my evenings should be free for socializing.

Bring your workout sweats and gym shorts or whatever you use, as I have an excellent spa and fitness center complete with a trainer, and you will want to keep that beautiful shape and stay healthy.

“Don’t be crying any more. I won’t have it that you did your best to come help me out and didn’t quite make it. I am going to see that you do make it. See you in a bit. Your pilot knows what to do to get you to me. I gotta go.”

Unknown to her was that as with Michael before her, Aaron, when he had things to do, was actually a burgeoning true “mover and shaker” and would brook no interruptions in his communications or efforts to accomplish...while he was on a mission.

In this case, also unknown to her was that Aaron was going to use the Armstrong influence to control the control tower to get

her helicopter priority clearance to land immediately in a spot that might or might not be appropriate.

The Seraph Jon and the Angel Farol had observed the messenger demon apprise their brutish fellow ethereal being of something or other, and then after they had stood in attendance over the human female through the night, they had seen the demon wing away into the night with his minor henchman.

They wondered as always what the demons were up to next, but as they had received no new leading by The Holy Spirit, they continued following their original instruction and maintained their warding of the female in yet another of man's flying contraptions.

They, too, had wondered what was being said on the other side of the conversations that were going on, but with more than the patience of Job, they maintained their vigil with aplomb, content to observe and ward the female as The Lord had commanded.



In the spy proof underground Armstrong communications center, an almost middle-aged appearing Gavin faced the monitors that entirely obscured one walls surface.

Upon most of those monitors was the face of an elderly man of the newly passed Patriarch's generation, but on some of the screens were a few who could be seen to be in their thirties and forties.

Then there were a few empty screens that could denote almost anything, from where possibly a Coalition member might have passed away and left no successor or where possibly another Coalition member had for whatever reason taken over the holdings that represented the seat of power of the empty screen members.

For certain, though, as the Coalition respected to an extent, consolidations or takeovers by one Coalition member of another's holdings to make stronger seats of power by the member who now controlled two human principalities, no outsider could become a member simply by out maneuvering a member.

The entire Coalition would unite in undermining such an attacker.

In any event only a very few select within the Coalition knew the true business of the Coalition. Four of these of course, were The Patriarch, his brother, and the two heirs (once they became of age).

From among those assembled on the screens before Gavin now, he knew his father and uncle to have chosen those select who knew who the Coalition served, and their true purpose.

Gavin's education by his uncle had only brought him so far at the time of his father's untimely and unplanned (or so they all thought) death this very morning. So he did not know by his Uncle Gilbert's teachings, just who among the many faces, were the elite from being told by his uncle.

But with the new perspectives given him by the being the Armstrong's called their God, who usually only spoke to them in dreams...Gavin looked with wise eyes on the faces.

Right away he saw several Beings returning his questioning gaze with their own wise old eyes, and almost like he was in a dream state and hearing from their god, he distinctly heard whispered that these were beings not be of this earth.

These, then, were the elite, upon whom he could call upon to formulate his plans and to guide the others towards their fruition.

The silence of these inhuman leaders to challenge his authority must be why, therefore, no one else said anything to question why a twenty-year-old could assume the reins of power, albeit that twenty-year-old now looked to be in his thirties.

"Gentlemen, thank you for your quick response to my summons. As some of you may or may not know, we are, and have been...in position to conquer this planet without firing a single shot, and support our own candidacies to be the Presidents, Kings, and Emperors instead of using our wealth and power to place outsiders upon the world's Throne s.

Gavin slammed his fist down on the podium behind which he stood to emphasize his next words.

"Gentlemen, we are in position, and the time is NOW!"

EXERPT FROM CHAPTER ONE OF:

ANGELS, DEMONS, & SPIRITUAL
WARFARE

BY:

RICHARD GARTNER
w/GEORGE GARTNER

As was often his wont, and had been remarked upon by some in the Heavenly Hierarchy, The Archangel Michael sometimes phrased his entreaties and praises to The Lord and communications with others in the Realm couched in the Olde' English of his favorite translation of the Bible; 'The King James Version'.

Man was not alone in the desire to be knowledgeable and armed with an irrefutable copy of The Word of The Almighty God, right there in hand. For, as powerful as they were and are, Angels were not given to have the Omni(s) either, and also studied the exact occurrences and timelines of/in the prophecies in The Word.

To Beings "without number" of The Lord's creations, it was their history, guideline, foretelling of the future and Bible, just as much as it was mankind's. This included Satan and a few of those in his upper echelons.

If Michael was a gambling sort of Celestial Being (if in fact there were any gambling celestial Beings) he would lay odds that the prophecies in Scripture had been poured over and studied more thoroughly by Lucifer, than by any other being, if for no other reason than to be diligently searching for loopholes.

Michael knew this all the more so as during their brief rep-
artee, Satan had used some Old English himself, so like as with
Michael it seemed that Lucifer perused and had taken to what-
ever passed for a heart in such a being some of the “Thou(s),
‘Thee(s)’, and whatnots from his study the King James Versions
as well.



Satan again poured over prophetic Scripture, trying to find
loopholes that would let him survive nicely the ending times
as prophesied.

It was truly an unhappy realization to the dread lord and
Master of the earth to know that from among the very Beings
that he despised and hated, he had to figurative sit at the feet of
and be taught.

For only mankind was given through Grace and prayer
Spiritual discernment as to the (in Lucifer’s opinion) blatherings
of the prophesies. For this reason for times long gone by until
today, Satan had been overseeing and overhearing messengers
lurking where those devout Christians and theologians lived and
taught, who their Master thought might have an epiphany or
revelation that the little spies might catch.

Unfortunately, when such an oracle spoke with the Voice of
God, it just might kill the messenger.

He imperturbably shrugged his dragon form shoulders at the
thought. Quite a few such messengers did indeed get back to him
with stolen writings about such revelations, that in a second hand
copy of the original delivery, was survivable, or...at least didn’t
drive one of his imps mad.

Truly, Lucifer/Satan/the Master, thought to himself: I actu-
ally look forward to the possible demise of one such, as their lack
of return he construed to being a possible positive indication that
the Author upstairs had revealed something.

He neither knew nor cared about the “one third without
number” that fell from Heaven with him. Why bother to count?

As per Scripture, that you "...may be entertaining Angels unaware..." he had actually set up a foundation and live-in center, ostensibly for paranormal studies, and had himself in human form chosen it's residents and scholars.

It had been very tough for him to abide being around these men of God, and to be safe he had had to do video interviews, and then to chose ultimately from among them the strongest and brightest Christian that he could find to run the complex.

His entire plan was to focus these men on prophesy. He well knew that most Bible Colleges directed their studies of Scripture elsewhere, as continually pondering the unfathomable, rather than gaining knowledge and strength through knowing existing Spiritual truths, was sort of left to the theologians.

The 'pondering of the unfathomable' theologians, were exactly who he staffed his center with. Within its walls all knew that they were in study and praying for epiphanies' and revelations of only Bible prophesies, but those outside simply thought of the functions within as a sort of x-files type deal, and so, no organized religions questioned them.

It all led the receptionist to be very busy redirecting calls, and turning away unwanted visitors, but...

CHARACTERS APPENDIXES:

(Humans)

‘THE ARMSTRONG’ or ‘ARMSTRONG’:

- (Refers to the current head of the Armstrong Family. Also referred to as ‘The Patriarch’. Born Marcus Armstrong in 1946)

‘THE PATRIARCH’:

- (See “The Armstrong” above)

‘GAVIN’:

- (At twenty years old, the oldest son of The Patriarch and Heir Apparent to be the next head of the Armstrong clan.)

‘AARON’:

- (Just turned eighteen years old. The youngest son of The Patriarch. Next in line to be head of the Armstrong clan.)

‘MICHAEL CORPOREAL’:

- (Aaron’s architect and the man whose body The Lord used to host The Archangel Michael) Has been very intermittently dating Christine Zimmer over the last year, but the Archangel cannot discern the relationship exactly, though he knows that his host knows her. The Holy Spirit seems to be letting Michael the Archangel draw his own conclusions about interpersonal relationships, instead of inheriting his host’s opinions and/or feelings.

‘DAN GRUMMOND’:

- (Michael Corporeal’s architect partner in ‘Corporeal Buildings’.) Perspiring rotund worthy. Wears thick glasses that he continually pushes up on his nose.

‘SAM’:

- (Michael’s limousine driver when company cars are not available.)

‘UNCLE GILBERT’ or ‘GILBERT ARMSTRONG’:

- (The Patriarch’s younger brother and teacher of the Armstrong family secrets to Gavin and Aaron)

‘ZOE’:

- (Twenty-one year old Rock star friend of Aaron’s, who’s off stage (Christian) name, is Amanda Cabot.) Baby blue eyes, and a healthy voluptuous pixie cute wind blown haired farm girl look.

‘ZOE’S DAD’:

- (Pastor Bob.)

‘MERV’:

- (Zoe’s manager.)

‘STAN’:

- (Zoe’s head of security.)

‘CHRISTINE ZIMMER’:

- (Independent Investigative reporter. Granddaughter and daughter of billionaires. Now worth in excess of two billion herself without even trying. “Inquiring minds want to know” person.) 26 years old, with flaming natural red hair, bright green eyes, a pert upturned nose with freckles, and a dazzling smile above a fit trim figure.

‘RON SPELLMAN’:

- (Editor of Christine’s university newspaper. Her friend.)

‘KATIE’:

- (Michael Corporeal’s personal assistant, a friend, and very dear to him.) “A bright eyed and saucy little thing...”

‘BROOKLYN’:

- (Aaron’s security details head of security) Aaron began calling him that because of his New York accent, as he kept forgetting the man’s real name, and it stuck to where all Armstrong folks now called him Brooklyn.

Demons/Fallen Angels:

‘SATAN’:

- (Lucifer/The Enemy/Master/The Master.)

When in his own Throne room usually appears in a red golden dragon form. When out in the world or Heavens, might also appear as anything, but also as “Lucifer Son of the Morning” and have man like features of ethereal beauty.

‘TRANATH’:

- (Satan’s ‘Chief of Staff’. Second in command at Satan’s palace. Generally acknowledged by all demons to be the ‘go between’ demon when seeking an audience with Satan. Unofficially on a par with any ‘Prince’ of a “Principality”) Extraordinarily tall, with human like red hued features and massive horns. Wears a long black cape with a golden clasp of office.

‘STANCH’:

- (Primary demon responsible for bringing to fruition ‘The Armstrong Strategy millennia ago, by bringing Strongarm’s ideas to Tranth. Captain over Strongarm.) Huge, lumpy, and troll-like, with tusks. Sourly disgusted all of the time.

‘STRONGARM’:

- (Inventor of the ‘Strongarm/Armstrong Strategy, and he whom the Strategy is named after. Chief demon on site with the Armstrong Clan to hold them on course.) Has a burly great shaggy head. Smart. Maintains his original Angel appearance before the fall, but with baleful red eyes.

‘SLIMETH’:

- (‘Major-Domo’ in the Antechamber to Satan’s Throne room.) Sycophantic toady with frog like features to match.

‘RETCH’:

- (Minor demon that Stanch assigned to watch Zoe One of the few minor demons trusted with even knowing about the Armstrong’s existence.)

‘TORATH’:

- (Archdemon Prince of the North American Principality/Continent. Sometimes referred to as an ‘Overlord’. The most powerful of all of Satan’s Archdemons by virtue of his Principality’s pre-eminence in world affairs/”Strongholds”.) Wolflike vulpine features.

‘BALOTH’:

- (A lieutenant under Torath predominantly in charge of the West Coast of the North American Principality.) Has “huge red rimmed horny browed eyes, taloned hands...”

‘JANKH’:

- (Archdemon Prince of the Pacific Principality.) Porcine/vain/bejeweled.

‘GRANTH’:

- (Archdemon Prince of the Atlantic Principality.)

‘BAKAH’:

- (Archdemon Prince of the Europa Principality.) Crocodilian like teeth.

‘NASPETH’

- (Demon ‘Mayor’ of San Fernando Valley Area)

ANGELS/CELESTIAL BEINGS:

‘THE ARCHANGEL MICHAEL’

- (As Lucifer before him, is now first among all of The Lord’s Angels.) Typically attired in armor as the knights of old. Piercing emerald green eyes and scarred visage, with a hammered gold circlet holding back his long black hair.

‘THE ANGEL JON’

- (Actually a Seraph and one of the Seraphim who in Heaven bear no appearance to man at all, though in his personal Angelic form he chose to appear manlike. He had been unbound by The Lord in The Angel Jon, and who upon reporting the completion of his objectives to The Lord, was redirected to protect yet another human.) Sometimes can be slightly seen as multicolored twinkling lights. As a man appears about 30, clean cut and fair haired with twinkling blue eyes. (See ‘The Angel Jon’ by these Authors)

‘FAROL’:

- (An Angel just going about his business, which at a point just happened to be in line with Jon, and then Michael’s endeavors. The Lord kind of just sent him along with Jon as a protector and gofor’.)

‘SINATH’

- (A lieutenant of Jankh or Torath. Forced to grovel by Baloth in The Angel Jon [I believe] outside of LA. Then also forced to grovel in the clearing where Michael and Satan have confrontation.

‘TERMS’

‘ARCHANGEL’

- (‘Assumed to be first among the Angels’. Is now Michael and assumed to be formerly Lucifer/Satan.)

‘ANGEL or ANGEL OF LIGHT’

- (One of The Lord’s still faithful Angels.)

‘CELESTIAL BEING/CELESTIALS’

- (An all encompassing term used to denote any being still faithful to the Lord and allowed ready access to the Heavens, and to Heaven.)

‘SERAFH’

- (One of the Seraphim) ISA 6:2 Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. (KJV)

‘MAYOR’

- (A demon who is in nominal charge of a concentrated area of humans, who usually on the spiritual plane occupies the same space as the human official, so to be aware of human situations as come to a City Mayor’s office.)

‘CAPTAIN’ OR ‘CAPTAIN OF HOST’

- ‘The appointed leader of any size group of demons. Could be its typical function, or just a temporary assignment.)

'GERMANS, JEWS, & JAPANESE'

The author in fact, puts forth these somewhat genetic and perhaps fictional contentions portrayed and/or extrapolated from reality for the purposes of writing this fictional book:

***THE GERMANS** were/are kind of mechanical humans. More of logic and nuts and bolts, than a touchy feely lovey dovey type of human being.*

The demon inspired tortures and exterminations of subject races that were considered inferior, are legendary throughout history, and I believe the Nazis to have been heir to the same demonic obsessions, and in Hitler's case...possession. For a few examples I offer:

The genocides that spring up in Africa still today, killing millions in one small country alone.

The Spaniards tortures/genocide in the Americas on the Indians/Incas and Aztecs.

The American Indians enslavement or genocide efforts to other Indians or literally...to anyone not of their tribe. Burnings at the stake... Vlad the Impaler. The approximately 10,000,000 "democide murdered" by the Japanese from 1937 till the end of WW11...etc...

***THE JEWS** throughout the world seem in the main, to be still the "Money Changers"/grubbers, and lenders, which Jesus kicked out of the Temple back in his day. It is either in their DNA/handed down genetically, or spiritually inherited as one of the "sins of our fathers". Then, sharp business practices and greedy money hungry mindsets, must be being taught with mother's milk and at fathers hand.*

*It appears that they only really apply Mosaic Law to their dealings with each other. IE: They read "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself"...to read: 'Thou shalt love thy **Jewish** neighbor as thyself'.*

They appear to do just about no “works” for anyone other than another Jew, as individuals, a race, or (sadder still) as purported believers of a belief system, and yet eagerly seek and accept help or charity from anyone, while sending only an obligatory pittance of relief, charity, or aid to anyone less fortunate than themselves.

Israel (for instance) gets foreign aid of 3 billion per year from the U.S. as I write this in this book, (while there are far more needy countries), which is approximately one fifth of all U.S. foreign aid. Then, that they allocated a pittance of that back out as a country purportedly involved in some disaster relief efforts, is commendable, but probably just a white wash obligatory disbursement of a few bucks, while the other \$2,999,000,000 per year is perhaps worshipped as the real “Golden Calf-Idol-god” of the Jews.

We know why the demons hate the Jews, and that again, is because they are of mankind, but also as the “Chosen”.

The reason, however, that the common man dislikes the Jews, has nothing to do with religion. It is because of how they have banded together for centuries with a blatant common goal of gathering to themselves the wealth of the planet. This goal they strive for individually or as a group, seemingly without compassion, charity, or regard, for any other race or creed.

Sayings like, “Quit being such a ‘Jew’, or “Stop being such a ‘Kike!’” Had no religious connotation, but was because of the well deserved reputation of the Jews to be greedy in all their dealings with the “Goyim” (non-Jew).

GOYIM:

n. Offensive , pl. , **goy**’im (goi ‘ m), or goys . Used as a disparaging term for one who is not a Jew. [Yiddish, from Hebrew **gôy** , Jew ignorant of the Jewish ...

www.answers.com/topic/goy

goy (goi) n. pl. **goy**’im (goi m) or goys Offensive. Used as a disparaging term for one who is not a Jew.

DISPARAGING: Bing Dictionary

contemptuous or disapproving: showing or expressing disapproval or contempt

Synonyms: critical, unfavorable, disapproving, censorious, unsympathetic, judgmental, scornful

So, this is the term used by a Jew to refer to a non-Jew? All who can discern therefore can see that all mankind that are non-Jews have forever been considered by the Jews to be below the Jew... held in "contempt" by the original 'Master race'.

It can be seen therefore, that the only difference between the regard in which the Jew held the rest of the world, and the regard in which Hitler held the Jews, is that he was off his nut and demonically inspired to exterminate them.

It can also be seen that though Hitler and the Nazis thereby put forth in response to all non-Jews being considered sub-standard "unfavorable, scornful, and to be censored" as Goyim for two thousand years by the Jews, that in paying back the compliment and then carrying it to an extreme for a few years, they did not approach the Japanese who operated without discrimination, and just tortured and killed anyone non-Japanese to the tune of up to 10,000,000 souls or more. (See Japanese below)

Of course the reason that "Democide" (kill em' all) policy by the Japanese, and seeming never ending genocides in Africa, do not get the same air time as of Hitler and the Jews, is because of the predominantly Jewish run studios and media in Hollywood.

In most "western industrialized nations" circa pre-Nazi, your average Goyim had occasion to either personally or through friends and/or family, have gotten done dirty by Jewish business practices. And as Jews had ostracized and persecuted financially the Goyim for centuries, it is surprising that they did not understand, or pretended that they did not understand, when an avowed anti-Semite conquered the countries they lived in, and chose to lock them away and ostracize them in return.

(It is in fact, my contention that the hereditary overwhelming greed to which they were heir and prone to, finally worked against them in that their clutching and grasping avarice to keep their homes and possessions overcame what in a normal human being instinctually came first... "The Instinct of Self Preservation".

So, instead of fleeing and saving themselves, they stayed and hugged their possessions. They risked their lives and their children's lives for 'THINGS', and lost their things and their lives and the lives of their children.

That demons pushed Hitler and the Nazis into atrocities beyond a simple ostracism and taking back some of the wealth of the world that the Jews had plundered, is a terrible thing, and one that Jewish controlled Hollywood won't let us forget. But the Hollywood spin that the poor innocent Jews suffered persecution and genocide for their religious beliefs, and not because of their dedicated greed, is just not so.

*Perhaps through the centuries of when the Jews maintain that they have been persecuted, their supposed "persecutions" also stem from another long period of the Jews putting their sticky hands in peoples pockets and by hook or crook taking of a peoples wealth. Perhaps the decade or so of Nazi persecutions are simply "paybacks" from **centuries** of Jewish financial persecutions of the "disparaged" and "contemptuous" "Goyim".*

We don't in fact hear much about how the Jews were instrumental in persecuting Christians, and in fact having the Roman's do their dirty work, like crucifying Christ...I believe to relate to the lions getting to eat Christians in the Coliseum. If the Roman's would persecute those who didn't share their beliefs in their many gods, why would they go just after the Christians, and not the Jews also. So, I do not believe the Jews to not also be guilty of genocide.

The Japs on the other hand, just put genocide on anyone not Japanese, whatever gods they subscribed to.

Truly, the Nazis appeared to care less about the Torah, The New Testament, or the Old Testament, or what the Jews believed.

They were initially just happy to lock them away and remove the fangs of what were construed to be the western world's financial blood sucking vampires, from the necks of Goyim (non-Jew) humanity.

(Sadly, what were just formerly standard Jewish business practices have gotten out to become the mainstay of big business today, and the world suffers via the adoptions of the greedy and totally uncharitable Jewish mindset.)

And THAT would be to "Take all you can get, and let the Devil take the hindmost!"

THE JAPANESE: are in a category of their own. Those in power (IE: In Japan, the big companies like Sanyo, Honda, Toyota, and Sony etc...you may as well call 'the government') would not only gobble up the world, but figuratively, would eat their own young. They, as a race, really have inherited no real respect for life, and they truly seem to absolutely have no capacity for compassion or fair play.

They for instance, continue to deal off of the bottom of the deck with the U.S. today, and have done so since long before Pearl Harbor. As a rule of thumb since Nagasaki and Hiroshima, Japan has had its hand out for the U.S. to first rebuild their country, and then for the U.S. to give them our technologies to improve upon, and then sell back to us, meanwhile none to secretly vowing as unpatriotic any Japanese who buys an American product.

Hence the supposed "balance of trade" is non-existent with Japan and always has been. And though a whistle blower intermittently gets up and pounds the pulpit, someone pays someone(s) a few million here and there to shut the heck up about it,, and the billions of dollars continue to flow out of America....one way.

Japan's corporate and Government unofficial stance and policy: An original desire to see the United States bankrupt, humbled, and in debt to the hilt to Japan (but now amended to read... "in debt to the hilt to anyone, just as long as the US is brought to its knees".

To win economically, what they couldn't do militarily.

It is not only a matter of 'face', but of revenge. They had the entire Pacific, and were well on the way to having the Chinese and Indo-Chinese mainland as part of The Japanese Empire, until we took it all back from them.

Who is idiot enough to not see this...that they as a people and as a country, hate the U.S. and want to see us fall?

They have no Christian values or morals and would slaughter anyone not Japanese, whether Asian, or whoever...if they had their way as they did in China and Indo-China. Just like the Jews who considered anyone non-Jew to be sub-standard, the Japanese considered anyone not Japanese sub-standard, but also fair game to kill without a qualm.

And there went 10,000,000 or so, non-Japanese..

STATISTICS OF JAPANESE DEMOCIDE ESTIMATES, CALCULATIONS, AND SOURCES:

BY R. J. RUMMEL

From the invasion of China in 1937 to the end of World War II, the Japanese military regime murdered near 3,000,000 to over 10,000,000 people, most probably almost 6,000,000 Chinese, Indonesians, Koreans, Filipinos, and Indochinese, among others, including Western prisoners of war. This Democide was due to a morally bankrupt political and military strategy, military expediency and custom, and national culture (such as the view that those enemy soldiers who surrendered while still able to resist were criminals).

*(We don't hear much about this though, as the Chinese do not control Hollywood like the Jews do, and the Jews still want the world to focus on them as the only true victims of genocide. There is 3 billion dollars alone from the United States as an incentive, and their never ending avarice for a buck, **never mind 3 billion**...to drive their 'poor us, give us money' anti-Semitism propaganda machine. The heck with other far poorer countries deserving foreign aid just to feed their starving children. The Jews need it more to feed their perpetually starving avarices.)*

The Japanese also, demonstrably, seem virtually to also have no capacity for creativity, and so...perhaps really are aliens from another world, or perhaps were probed and made almost non-human by aliens (read: demons) from another world (read: plane of existence).

They can improve on another's invention, but do not invent. Their garments and cultures stem from their proximity with the creative Chinese and other Asian races. Their creative ability in cinema seems to have peaked with the ridiculous acting and dialogue to be found in *Godzilla* and *Mothra* circa even up to 2010. That is why they are so big with cartoons, or the idiotic 'Podunk Rangers', because it takes creativity and imagination to act, and with rare exceptions...they are shy of both. (To their credit though, I submit that they have a gift of dealing with the flora.)

Then the strange disrespect of life, of any species, including human and...whatever they themselves are. They would kill a whale for it's fins, while their other nets do not discriminate at all. Of course with 35,000,000 living in one city alone and no room for cemeteries, perhaps they have 'Soylent Green' factories, while who knows where that one city can put their garbage and trash but that it is floating in that 500 mile circle of plastic bags and garbage and trash occupying that one circular garbage dump in the center of the Pacific.

You may gather that after reading up on them and working as an Assistant Superintendent for Sumitomo Construction that I find them distasteful and untrustworthy as a whole. Witness Pearl Harbor alone...

From their early history on down to today... From the Samurais of centuries past and the grounds for Hari Kari or Seppuku, to the suicide bombers of WWII, to the 14th straight year of 30,000 plus suicides in 2011 alone, to the willingness to kill to extinction endangered species... The Japanese prove themselves to be no respecters of life, not even the lives of those of their own children. (Judging by the suicide statistics of school aged Japanese children preferring death to having to deal with their own cultures demands and inhumanities.)

2Co 12:2 I know a man in Christ, fourteen years ago (whether in the body, I know not; or whether out of the body, I know not; God knoweth), such a one caught up even to the third heaven.

Barnes Commentary on 2Co 12:2

To the third heaven—The Jews sometimes speak of seven heavens, and Mohammed has borrowed this idea from the Jews. But the Bible speaks of but three heavens, and among the Jews in the apostolic ages also the heavens were divided into three:

(1) The aerial, including the clouds and the atmosphere, the heavens above us, until we come to the stars.

(2) The starry heavens, the heavens in which the sun, moon, and stars appear to be situated.

(3) The heavens beyond the stars. That heaven was supposed to be the residence of God, of angels, and of holy spirits. It was this upper heaven, the dwelling-place of God, to which Paul was taken, and whose wonders he was permitted to behold - this region where God dwelt; where Christ was seated at the right hand of the Father, and where the spirits of the just were assembled. The fanciful opinions of the Jews about seven heavens may be seen detailed in Schoettgen or in Wetstein, by whom the principal passages from the Jewish writings relating to the subject have been collected. As their opinions throw no light on this passage, it is unnecessary to detail them here.

