

Rita pushed the button on the pad and the big steel gates slowly opened. She drove up the palm-lined driveway, took a shallow left turn and drove into the open carport beside the garage. She hummed a little tune as she got out of her car and unlocked the side door of the mansion. It was a glorious late spring day in Coral Gables, Florida, and as she walked into the kitchen she could see beautiful bursts of colorful flowers everywhere in the backyard. She quickly got the coffee maker going, just in time to hear the soft knock on the side door. She hurried through the house and let in Darryl Wiggins, Mr. Cochran's boat captain, who was coming for his morning coffee before starting his day's work on the boat.

"Good morning Rita," he beamed. "Beautiful day isn't it?"

"It really is," replied Rita.

Darryl was a big, handsome man and Rita had a serious crush on him. But she was very shy, and could never manage to think of anything profound or interesting to say to Darryl. For his part, Darryl thought that Rita was one of the prettiest, most attractive women he'd ever seen, but he couldn't figure out how he could date her while both worked for the same man, Steve Cochran. Frustration was the order of the day.

Darryl got up and took his coffee cup.

"Got to get to work," he said. "Steve called yesterday and told me he'd be coming here today and wants to take the boat to Nassau. The rest of the crew will be here shortly and we need to get ready to go."

Rita smiled pensively. "Okay. I wish he'd let me know he was going to be here though. Did he say what time he'd arrive?"

"Nope, but he told me to be ready to go at a moment's notice. I'm guessing he'll get here in two or three hours, tops."

"Okay. I'm ready and I'll give you a heads-up when I see him."

"Thanks kiddo. I'll see you when we get back." He walked through the kitchen and out the big French doors to the pool area, and then down to the floating pier where the 155-foot *Blissful* sat. She was a tri-deck Delta yacht and the apple of her owner's eye. Darryl hopped aboard and went immediately to the engine room to make sure the boat hadn't developed any minor shaft leaks or other little problems that could turn into big problems. He had just come around the outboard side of the starboard engine when he froze. For there in front of him, hanging from the ceiling, was the bloody, mutilated and barely recognizable corpse of Mr. Steve Cochran. He felt a little dizzy, and he began to taste the bile as it rolled up his esophagus and into his mouth. Then he vomited violently. He leaned against the big engine until he felt steady enough to move, and then he got off the boat and ran to the kitchen. He blew through the doors, grabbed the wall phone and dialed 911 to report the crime. Just as he'd finished and hung up, Rita walked back in.

"Darryl, what on earth is wrong. Are you okay?" she asked. Darryl was breathing heavily, his face was deathly pale and he was using a kitchen towel to clean his face.

"No, I'm not. I've got to get back to the boat and stop the rest of the crew from getting on. Our boss has been horribly murdered and the cops should be here any minute. Just send them down to the boat and don't let anyone else in the house. I'm sorry, but this is going to be a long, long day."



Reginald Lawrence Harris, III lived in a beautiful, small, home at the southern edge of Coral Gables. He had graduated from Princeton, gone to Yale

Law School and then, despite the pleas and displeasure of his family, joined the Coral Gables Police Department. He'd moved quickly through the ranks and now was a homicide detective with real prospects for someday, perhaps, becoming Chief of Police. On this particular morning, he was sitting on his patio, drinking his morning coffee and enjoying the sight of boats starting to move through the Bay, when his phone rang.

"Harris here."

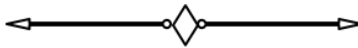
"Reggie, this is Chief Murphy," said the gruff voice on the other end of the call. "We've got a situation at a house pretty close to yours I think. 1400 Curtis Lane. It's owned by a guy named Steve Cochran."

"All right, I'm on my way," said Reggie. "But what's the deal?"

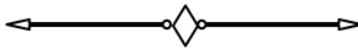
"Cochran's been murdered, and apparently it's pretty gruesome. It's got all the hallmarks of a drug deal gone bad, a situation that makes no sense given that Cochran was apparently a huge noise in the hedge fund business. So use the kid gloves—at least in the beginning. This guy was very well connected."

"I hear you Chief. I'll be on my best behavior."

"Good. And keep me posted. This has the potential to be both messy and public. I don't want to screw it up."



Adolph Gutierrez was pissed off and unhappy. There was simply no way that Cochran could have been holding out on him, given the horrible things Adolph had done to him. Cochran really must not have known, but that wasn't going to make it any easier when Adolph reported to his boss. He downed one quick drink from the hotel minibar to fortify himself, and then made the call. It didn't go well, but it also didn't go nearly as badly as he'd been afraid it might.



Doug Williams, the number two executive at Tejas Management, was shocked and confused. He was shocked because of Cochran's death, the gory details of which Mr. Harris had spared him when he called, and confused because of what he'd found when he did the cash reconciliation for the day. In fact, he'd done the reconciliation three times and kept coming up with the same result. Two hundred fifty-six million was missing, gone. And that was simply impossible. Two hundred fifty-six million dollars had simply disappeared and that just couldn't be. But it was. He called his secretary, Edith Turner, and asked her to set up an emergency meeting of the Board. This was going to be one awful day.



Their life in Monaco was blissful, quiet and elegant. Sophia and Jonathon had purchased a decaying mansion on the beach and had it completely restored. The back wall of the house, overlooking the Mediterranean Sea, was constructed of glass panels that slid back and into the side walls, opening the entire home to the warm ocean breeze. The floors were stone, the kitchen stainless steel and the furniture chrome, glass and leather. On the walls hung large contemporary paintings reflecting the architecture and color of the area. The one room in the home that was different was the office where both Sophia and Jonathon worked. For one thing, it was very secure and could be entered only by scanning the fingerprint of the third finger of the left hand, which in turn then opened a small aperture in the wall that contained a retina scanner. Sophia and Jonathon were the only people whose eyes were recognized and could open that door, which was, in any case, virtually invisible. The interior of the home had smooth plaster walls accented with alcoves in which the paintings were hung. The door was the back wall of one of these alcoves, the fingerprint reader was a blue ceramic tile on the left side of the alcove and the retina scanner was behind a similar tile on the right side of the alcove. When activated, the wall moved back, and slid silently to the right.

The office itself had no windows, but it did have one huge skylight that allowed sunlight to flood the room. The skylight could, at the touch of a button, become opaque which allowed clearer viewing of the huge LED screens that covered the walls on all four sides. In the center of the room was a chrome and glass desk, upon which sat a wireless keyboard and a polished, stainless steel cube measuring about twelve inches per side. This room was the command center of Jonathon's vast financial holdings. These holdings comprised banks, real estate, manufacturing and an array of service concerns that spanned the globe. The office also provided access to an enormous database of information on politicians and corporate executives. Jonathon's friend, Larry Green, had built this database by hacking banks, credit card companies, schools, phone companies and most importantly, email accounts. Larry had even hacked the NSA and CIA satellite systems.

On this June morning, Jonathon was happy and excited. Larry and Liz would be landing soon, and they had plans to stay for the week. With the exception of Sophia, no one gave Jonathon as much unalloyed joy as Larry and Liz. They were brilliant, articulate and had a great sense of the world and its foibles. Jonathon was looking forward to the coming week with them, since he hadn't actually seen them for a year. He walked into the kitchen to find Sophia and Juanita making fresh orange juice. Sophia, as usual, was radiant and beautiful. Her long brown hair cascaded down over her shoulders and her smile lit up the whole room. Her eyes were a deep emerald green in which there was a perpetual twinkle. Perpetual, that is, unless she was working. Then, her eyes deadened and her face took on a stony, intimidating look. She was extremely proficient in using a knife in battle, and was also expert with all kinds of guns. She had trained with a Spetznaz unit, and anyone who had seen her in battle knew she was a force with whom to be reckoned. At the

other end of the spectrum, Juanita was a very pretty, innocent Hispanic girl, who also happened to be Rosa's niece. Rosa Flores, and her husband Jose, were like family to Jonathon. They had lived and worked with his grandfather for twenty years, and when Grandfather died, he gave them his house in La Jolla, complete with an endowment sufficient to take care of the home, and provide salaries for them, in perpetuity. When Jonathon decided to move to Monaco, Rosa introduced Jonathon and Sophia to Juanita and it turned out to be a terrific match. Juanita was very intelligent and quickly became fluent in French. She also took cooking lessons, and soon was preparing continental cuisine as flavorful and well presented as many of the local restaurants.

"Good morning, ladies," said Jonathon. "The plane ought to be landing any minute and I think we should fix our guests a nice breakfast. Any ideas?"

Just as Juanita started to answer, Jonathon's phone rang.

"Jonathon here," he said.

"Hi Jonathon. This is Peter, and yes, I know you will be pissed off at me for calling on the day that Larry and Liz arrive. Unfortunately, we have a problem and it's something that could get big and ugly. We need to meet as soon as possible."

Peter Nicholas was the man that managed Jonathon's business interests. He was also one of the very few people besides Jonathon that Larry genuinely respected and liked. Peter and Larry had originally met at the Kiewit Computer Center at Dartmouth. Peter was having a very difficult time with programming and Larry offered his help. After a few weeks, the two had become great friends and enjoyed a mutual respect. Following graduation, Peter went on to the Wharton School, after which he accepted a job at Exxon. He flourished at the company, was promoted often and quickly, and was widely regarded as a possible candidate for the top job. But even though his future was exceptionally bright, he was frustrated and irritated by the politics intrinsic to a large company. So when Larry called and asked him to meet Jonathon, he was mildly intrigued. He and Jonathon hit it off immediately, and when he was introduced to the possibility of managing all of Jonathon's holdings, he was extremely interested. The compensation package that Jonathon offered sealed the deal. He could live wherever he wanted, had a Gulfstream 550 for his travels, and a salary and bonus package worth several times what he could ever hope for at Exxon. There was just one catch. He could not tell anyone who his true employer was, nor could he discuss with anyone the nature and breadth of Jonathon's holdings. He would be the chief executive officer of the Monaco Investment Company. It took almost a year of trips and secret meetings, but he finally accepted the position. And he had been exhilarated from day one. Jonathon's holdings were vast and profitable, and managing them properly provided a real challenge. In any event, Jonathon was happy with Peter's performance to date, and he knew that the man wouldn't call for this meeting without having a good reason.

"Peter, this had better be pretty damn important," he said.

"Jonathon, believe me, I know what an imposition this is. But we've really got to discuss this," he replied.

"Well, if we've got to have this discussion, we will. And Larry's presence may be quite helpful. When can you get here?"

"I'll be there tomorrow afternoon."

“See you then. Safe travels, Peter.”

Jonathon closed the call and responded to the unhappy look he was getting from Sophia.

“We do what we got to do my dear. Besides that, he really is a good guy and Larry will be delighted to see him. So anyway, what’s for breakfast?”



Peter drove through the gate at Atlantic Aviation, and pulled up alongside the plane. Sandy, the flight attendant, and Bill, the co-pilot were waiting for him. Peter got out of his car, and popped the trunk open. Bill got his luggage out, while Sandy walked Peter up the stairs into the big jet, and showed him to his seat. By the time she had brought him his usual glass of freshly squeezed grapefruit juice, Bill had stowed the luggage and was in his seat beside Tom, the pilot. The door quietly shut and they started taxiing toward the runway. As they left, Peter watched the guy from Atlantic driving his car into the hangar. Even though he was used to it now, Peter still marveled at the grace and ease of his travel experience, particularly as compared to the rigors of commercial airline flying. Sandy sat down next to Peter as they began the takeoff roll.

“The boys tell me we’re going to Monaco today,” she said. “I’ve never been, so this is exciting stuff for me.”

“I think you’ll like it,” Peter replied. “Particularly if you get to stay at the Hermitage. It’s, uh, well let’s just say it’s pretty magical.”

“According to Tom, that is where we’re staying. Your boss treats us pretty nicely you know.”

“He treats everybody pretty nicely, as you will discover. And it will be a real treat for you if you get to meet Sophia.”

“That’s what everybody says. She must be quite the lady.”

“She is that. But be on your best behavior. Besides being very nice, she’s also pretty formidable. Both she and Jonathon are. So what’s for lunch?”

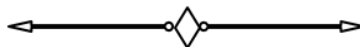
“BLT’s with chips. And I think we’re having a pork tenderloin for dinner.”

“Well, that sounds perfect. Thanks.”

When the plane reached cruising altitude, Bill came back from the cockpit, and handed Peter a piece of paper. “We’re off at an odd time,” he said, “so here’s your schedule. We’ve got a seven-hour time difference and an eleven-hour flight time—so eighteen hours total. You’ll be at the hotel in the early morning, so you can take a little nap and freshen up before your meeting.”

“Terrific,” said Peter. “I’m going to eat and work for a while, then I’d like to watch a movie before bedtime.”

“Consider it done. See you tomorrow.”



Jonathon whooped and ran for the door when he heard the bell ring.

“Larry, Liz—it’s wonderful to see you again. It’s been too long.” Jonathon hugged them both and ushered them inside and to the kitchen.

“Hello you two,” said Sophia, smiling. “And before I wait too long, meet the newest addition to our little gang, Juanita Flores. She’s Rosa and Jose’s niece. You’ve already met Tony, the man who picked you up at the airport. So how was the flight, besides being long?”

“The flight was lovely,” said Liz. “I didn’t think you could find anybody nicer than Toby and Bruce, but you actually did. John and Fred are just wonderful, and Alison, the flight attendant, was a dream. You’ve outdone yourselves.”

“Yeah, well in fairness, all the credit goes to Toby and Bruce. When they left, they found and recruited people for both planes,” said Jonathon, referring to his G650 and the G550 that Peter used. “Everybody is former military too. It’s a great bunch. But to tell the truth, I really miss Toby, Bruce and the rest of the guys.”

Jonathon was referring to the men who had joined forces with the four of them to stop a terrorist attack on U.S. ports a few years back. After that mission was complete, they all had settled down and started building families, a fact that made Jonathon very happy. They were able to live quite well on dividends from the investments Jonathon had made and managed for them, and they all had a grand reunion one time a year for the shareholder’s meeting of Ceres Investments, a Monaco based holding company they all jointly owned.

“You know, it’s kind of funny that you mention that,” said Larry. “We were talking about them on the plane, and what a great time we’d had with them at the meeting last year. But time rolls on, I guess. And on that note, do you have any grandiose schemes cooked up for this visit?”

“Oh yeah. You know Jonathon. He’s got too much idle time on his hands and now he’s decided he wants to buy a boat. A big boat. So I think he plans to have us do a little shopping while you’re here,” said Sophia, laughing.

“Is that true Jonathon?” asked Larry. “Because if it is, I am definitely on board with the idea. I love boats.”

“It is, my friend,” said Jonathon. “And I guarantee a good time will be had by all, including Ms. Rostova, who is more than a little skeptical about the idea.” Jonathon was referring to Sophia, who was a born and bred Russian and still a little overwhelmed by her life with Jonathon. “Oh, and before I forget, your pal Peter is going to be here tomorrow. He’s got something he thinks is real important to discuss. But right now, I don’t know what that is and frankly, don’t care too much either. So let’s go eat breakfast. Juanita makes the best eggs benedict you’ve ever tasted.”

With that, the four of them walked through the kitchen to the patio where they ate, surrounded by the scents and sights of the crystal clear, blue waters of the Med. They spent almost two hours reminiscing and just talking, as good friends do. When they finished, they cleared the table and took the used utensils, plates and glasses to the kitchen and a beaming Juanita.

“Those really were the best eggs benedict I’ve ever had,” said Larry. “Thank you very much.”

“Thanks Larry,” said Juanita. “And it is a real pleasure to meet you and Liz. You two are almost all that Jonathon and Sophia talk about.”

“Sophia, if you don’t mind,” said Liz, “I really would like to take a little nap before we do too much else. The time change has got me all screwed up and I want to be fresh for the rest of the proceedings. Is that okay?”

“Of course it’s okay,” replied Sophia. “I’ll show you to your room and you take all the time you want. When you feel rested, we’ll go into Monte Carlo and have some fun.”

Both Larry and Liz went to their room, and Larry plopped down in a chair while Liz showered. As he set there, he reflected on the crazy circumstance that had brought him to this wonderful place.

Larry had first met Jonathon as a roommate in college, and still marveled at the friendship they had almost immediately formed. Jonathon was tall, handsome, graceful and articulate. He had aqua blue eyes, tousled, brownish blonde hair, and a charming, bemused smile that made people feel like they shared a secret with him. Larry was a short, introverted nerd. But despite their differences, they developed a strong bond of friendship and trust. After graduation, Jonathon went to business school and then joined the Navy, where he became a SEAL. He fought for several years in Afghanistan and developed an international reputation as a fierce, brutally successful operative. He was reminded of those years every day by the pains he still suffered from being tortured by a Taliban chieftain for seven days, as well as the many bullet and knife wounds he carried. While Jonathon was in the desert, Larry focused on building algorithms to trade the market, something at which both he and Jonathon had done extraordinarily well while roommates. He also developed some very complex decryption programs that soon caught the attention of the entire intelligence-gathering community, both in the States and abroad. But he didn’t want to get caught in the trap of working for the government and signing his work away, so he soon devoted all his energies to the market. Within a few years, he had earned enough to buy a small ranch outside of Bozeman, Montana, and hire a small staff. And that was where he met the love of his life, Elizabeth Galati. She had graduate degrees in mathematics from M.I.T. and had moved to Bozeman to teach at the university there. Her work inevitably caught Larry’s attention and within just a few months she found herself living with Larry at the ranch. Physically, it was hard to imagine an odder pair. Larry was short and rather plain looking, except for a wild shock of unruly black hair and a playful smile. Elizabeth was a natural beauty. Her hair was light brown, streaked with amber from the sun. Her eyes were a beautiful cobalt blue and she had a playful smile. But intellectually, they were the Dream Team. They were brilliant at decryption analysis, and soon the people with all the initials for names were hounding them for help. They acquiesced to some of the requests and gradually developed a reputation as the team of last resort. If you had a decryption problem you couldn’t solve, you took it to Larry and Liz. With the money from consulting and profits from the market, they built a large, beautiful log home on the ranch, together with a lovely smaller home for their staff of young hackers. Except for groceries, they were entirely self-contained. Then one day Jonathon called, and they embarked on the adventure of a lifetime—an effort to put a dent in the money laundering trade while simultaneously stopping a terrorist attack aimed at closing three of the largest ports in the country. If successful, that attack would have plunged the States, and most

probably the rest of the world, into the worst financial crisis imaginable. But luck and fortune smiled on the effort. The attack was thwarted and the money laundering community was severely damaged. As a side benefit, they had also managed to steal around two hundred million dollars of the terrorists' money, which Jonathon managed for the group of participants in the mission. That group included six recently retired members of the Special Forces as well as Larry, Liz and Sophia. Sophia was far and away the most interesting person on the team, as she was a senior officer in the FSB, the Russian counter-intelligence service. Jonathon's grandfather, the man who started the whole mission, had recruited Sophia and she was granted permission to participate by the head of the service, Vladimir Baryshnikov, for two reasons. First, the Russian government knew that if the attack succeeded, Russia's economy would be severely impacted. Second, he owed Jonathon's grandfather a favor. The nature of that favor was something Jonathon never knew. During the course of the mission she and Jonathon had fallen in love and that was how she came to be with Jonathon in Monaco. And no one except Jonathon knew whether or not she was still active in the FSB.



Larry and Liz got up feeling fresh and full of energy. They found Jonathon and Sophia, and the four of them ventured into Monte Carlo. They had lunch at the Yacht Club de Monaco, which Jonathon had recently joined, and then walked through the marina, admiring the beautiful yachts.

"So Jonathon, Sophia said you want to buy a boat. Are you thinking about something like this behemoth?" Larry asked, gesturing towards a huge Lurssen yacht.

Jonathon laughed. "Hell, I really don't know. Looking is half the fun you know. I think I want something like that one, but really, I need to go to Fort Lauderdale to get a real idea about what's available and what it takes to run one of these things. And speaking of that, if you're not too busy, how about we all go to Lauderdale and you can be my wingman. Lauderdale is a pretty cool place."

"You know me Jonathon, I'm in for anything. Liz and I can take care of business from anywhere, so I'm good to go. How about you Liz?"

"Sure, why not? I've never even been there, so that sounds like fun to me."

"You know, this is exactly what I was afraid of—encouragement from his old pal Larry," said Sophia. "I'm still of the opinion that Jonathon needs a yacht like a moose needs a hat rack. But I'm not gonna spoil the fun for everybody else. Besides, there is the chance, the remote chance, that when Jonathon finds out how much trouble he's buying he might come to his senses. But who knows?" She had said all this with a smile and Jonathon walked over and planted a kiss on her cheek.

"You had me worried there for a minute," Jonathon said, sporting a big grin. "but now I think it's safe to start making plans. We've got a meeting with Peter tomorrow, and then we need to show Larry and Liz around the countryside. So maybe we'll plan on leaving next week. What does everyone think?"



Their smiles sealed the deal, and the four of them wandered around the marina and town for a while before going back to the house. Once there, they had a wonderful dinner, watched a movie and retired, happy and exhausted.

The next morning they all got up completely refreshed. After breakfast, Jonathon and Larry went to the office, the entry to which absolutely delighted Larry.

"Jonathon," said Larry, "you have really done this right. You're setting an excellent standard for the art of living well."

"One does one's best my friend. But tell me, what on earth do you think your pal Peter wants?"

"Beats the hell out of me," said Larry. "I haven't talked to him for a while, so your guess is as good as mine."

Just then the doorbell rang. Larry and Jonathon left the office to answer the door, where they found Mr. Peter Nicholas.

"Hi Peter. Come on in. You're a little early though, aren't you? I wasn't expecting you until after lunch," said Jonathon.

"Well, I'm a big believer in the idea that it's a mistake to let bad news fester, so I thought sooner was better than later. But before we get to that, I've got to say that you've got a fabulous place here. I haven't been here since you finished the remodeling job."

"Thanks Peter. Let's go out to the patio," Jonathon replied. "I find that the ocean breeze softens everything a little."

The three men walked out to the patio and sat down. Juanita brought a pitcher of iced tea and they filled their glasses. Then Peter began.

"Jonathon, when I first came on board, you told me to be active in the community. Accept appropriate board memberships and that sort of thing. I have done that, and one of the boards I'm on is that of Tejas Management. It's a large hedge fund based in Houston, and run by a guy of impeccable reputation, Steve Cochran. The other board members represent a who's who of Texas, including the former President, Mr. James Billings. Billings is a nice guy and I've enjoyed getting to know him. In any event, Cochran has a home in Florida where he was found murdered several days ago. And the murder was gruesome. Apparently, according to the police, he was brutally tortured before finally giving up the ghost. They said it looked like the work of a Mexican drug cartel. Now, as if that wasn't bad enough, the number two guy at the firm says that it looks like over two hundred fifty million dollars is missing. And I use that term very precisely. It doesn't appear to have been stolen. It's just missing. No one can figure it out and the board is frantic. No one on the board can afford to be affiliated with a concern that's involved with drug cartels or even simple theft, and that is particularly true of Billings. So what to do? Apparently, you have somehow come to the attention of Billings, and because of that, the board wants to hire you to investigate and hopefully find the missing money."

The look on Jonathon's tanned face genuinely frightened Peter, and he didn't even really know about Jonathon's history and reputation.

"Peter, do I look like Dick Tracy to you?" replied Jonathon. "I am stunned you would bother me with this kind of shit. What the hell do I care about some ding-dong's hedge fund in Houston? Good grief man, I thought you were smarter than

this. And how is it that Billings knows me? That makes no sense. Even though I always vote, I'm completely apolitical, and I certainly do not socialize with politician's. Hell, I'd rather clean outhouses that consort with those scumbags." There was an edge to his tone that Peter found very unsettling and he didn't know what to do or say. Larry was confused as well, and then it occurred to him.

"Jonathon, I smell Mason's involvement in this. It's got to be him and Billings must have asked him for help."

Mason didn't have a last name as far as anyone knew. He worked at the CIA in charge of all the black ops that nobody wanted to know about. Even the Director of the CIA didn't know much about Mason. He was the guy that did things the official government couldn't or wouldn't do and as a result, he was the ultimate backstop of plausible deniability. Only one or two people at the CIA knew of Mason's existence and nobody ever really knew in what nefarious activity he was involved. He was the guy that had contacted Jonathon's grandfather about the terrorist attack that Jonathon and his team had stopped. But that mission had been organized and funded by Grandfather and Jonathon's team had met Mason only once.

"Shit. That's got to be it," sighed Jonathon. "But screw him and the Tejas guys. They can clean up their own stinking mess."

Peter looked both chastened and alarmed, but to his credit, he kept going. "Jonathon, President Billings said you would probably react this way. And before you ask, I have no idea why he would know that. In any event, he asked me to give you this note."

Peter dug a creamy white envelope with an engraved blue seal out of his briefcase, and handed it to Jonathon. Frowning deeply, Jonathon opened it and read the enclosed, hand-written note.

Dear Jonathon:

*I know that you will be unhappy and reluctant to accept this assignment. However I really do need your help and trust that you will at least do me the privilege of hearing me out on this very sensitive issue. To that end, I will be happy to meet you at the location of your choice. There is a lot more to this mess than Peter knows, so don't be too hard on him. And by the way, my father knew your grandfather, William, very well. Dad told me you're among the most honorable people around, and that you would most probably agree to at least hear me out. Thanks, and I look forward to hearing from you.*

*James*

Peter and Larry both noticed Jonathon's shoulders slump as he read the note, and more than that, saw his look of resignation. Things had changed and he simply couldn't refuse a simple meeting request from a former President.

"All right, you win," Jonathon said to Peter. "And I apologize for getting so mad, regardless of how infuriating this is. So hightail it back to Texas and tell him to meet me at the Carlyle Hotel in New York. We'll be there three days from now. By the way, how are my businesses doing?"

“Well, at least I can say that your businesses are doing great. We’re on track for record profits this year. So, all is very well. I hope the next time we see one another, it will be more pleasant,” said Peter.

“You just keep on doing what you’re doing,” said Jonathon. “I’ll think of a good place we can go to have a complete presentation on all the businesses and you can bring your wife to that one. That will be in six months or so. But right now, you better get going. Take care, and I’ll report on my meeting with the Prez.”

After Peter left, Jonathon and Larry found Liz and Sophia and they all went back to the patio for lunch and a bottle or two of good wine.

“Well ladies, it’s looks like we’re off on another adventure,” said Jonathon. He related in detail the meeting with Peter and was both surprised and happy by the ladies’ reaction.

“Jonathon, really,” said Sophia. “How can you possibly be irritated by a former President asking you for a favor? I for one am kind of excited at the prospect of just meeting him, and I would guess you’re one of the few people on earth from whom he’s ever asked a favor. Get a grip boy. And when we’re done there, we’ll all go to Lauderdale. Liz and I have been doing some snooping on the Internet and that place looks like fun. It apparently is widely known as ‘Liquordale’ by the boating gang and that sounds like my kind of place.”

Jonathon shrugged his shoulders. “Okay my friends—away we shall go.”

