

TRUST ME

A Novel By

Paul Slatter

This book is entirely a work of fiction. References to real people alive or dead, events, establishments, organizations, or locales are for the intended purpose only to provide a sense of authenticity, and are used fictitiously. All other characters, and all incidents and dialogue, are drawn from the author's imagination and are not to be construed as real.

TNCS - Publishing Edition

Copyright – 2020 by Paul Slatter – 1103027 B.C. Ltd.

Kindle Edition

ISBN: 9781794504615

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used, reproduced, transmitted in any form or by any means, or stored in a database or retrieval system, in any manner whatsoever without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

The publisher is not responsible for any websites, or contents of any websites, that are not owned by the publisher.

First Trade Edition:

1103027 B.C. Ltd.

The Vancouver Series

Book Three:

Trust Me

Chapter One

Mazzi Hegan could still hear the clicking of the small stunt bicycle as it freewheeled around and around somewhere in the distance behind him. The guy had passed him earlier trying to look tough, once then twice, riding the bike with his knees up around his chin, giving Mazzi the eye, sizing him up as he'd passed.

Now he was out there still, cruising around somewhere in the background, the rear gears ticking as he coasted. He took a left, then a right—the roads quiet at 3 a.m. on a Tuesday morning in downtown Vancouver. He saw the steps for the small park just west of the convention centre that would take him down to the seawall and Mazzi Hegan took them quickly. If the guy on the bike was following him then he'd think he'd have gone straight on; and if somehow the guy'd seen, then he'd have to come down the steps. And if he did that then Mazzi himself could disappear into the darkness and wait it out, let the man go and then take the seawall back to his place that looked out across the city at the bottom of Davie Street.

Moving quickly, he reached the bottom of the steps. It was clear down there—well lit on the seawall, that is. The park where he'd hide if need be was dark against the silhouette of the street lights and apartment blocks on the other side. Mazzi carried on, listening as he looked around, hearing only the faint lapping of the water on the wall as the gentle swell hit home having travelled across the globe.

There was nothing, no clicking, no young man with a hoodie trying to look cool riding his little brother's bike. Mazzi continued, thinking about the night—this guy he'd met earlier causing trouble like he had because Mazzi liked to drink, throwing a beer Mazzi should have already drank in his face, then leaving with Mazzi's wallet while Mazzi stayed, alone with his phone sending drunk texts to anyone stupid enough to reply until the music stopped and security asked him politely to leave.

He carried on along the seawall, looking behind him at the steps as he went. Another man was there now in the distance, halfway down the wall looking through the telescope to North Vancouver on the other side of the inlet with its streetlights and industrial sodium burning light back across the blackness. Mazzi moved forward, looking behind him again at the steps and at the empty warmth of the trees lining the way. If the guy on the bike had followed on foot, sneaking down when his back was turned, he'd be trapped.

He continued on, the man ahead more visible now in the faint street light as he pulled his eye from the scope and looked back to Mazzi as he drew closer. The man young, in his teens, with a newspaper delivery bag slung over his shoulder, stared at him as he drew ever nearer. He looked to the ground, knowing too well he shouldn't and then looked up again just in time for the teenager to smile as their eyes met and say clearly, "Howdie partner!"

Mazzi carried on, passing the kid and looking to the ground again for another twenty feet, wishing he'd stayed up on the road, feeling for the phone he knew he'd lost when they'd thrown him out of the bar in his drunken state. Quickly he looked back over his left shoulder for the young man with the bag—he was gone now. Then looking over his right into the darkness, Mazzi saw him moving, following, hiding in the darkness. Feeling the knot in his stomach tighten, he spun around. In front of him at the end of the park just above the yachts all moored up and sleeping, the kid on the bike was waiting under a lamppost.

The *fucking prick* had corralled him he thought, steered him onto the steps, pushed him down them with his presence. Now he was trapped.

He slowed almost to a stop looking quickly down the bicycle path again, the kid with the bag nowhere to be seen. He looked back, the one on the bike doing nothing but sitting low in the saddle waiting, pushing him further into the darkness of the park again with his presence.

Turn, he said to himself, *turn and walk back—head for the steps*. The kid with the newspaper bag was no bigger than him, but what was in the bag?

He carried on, feeling the sweat on his back under his shirt—don't go into the dark, he told himself, walk up to the guy and carry on past him, that's what you do—walk up, stare him down and let him know with your eyes he's in big fucking trouble if he decides to get off his little brother's bike.

That's what I'll do, he thought, I'll say that as I get to him, say, hey fuckhead, come near me and you'll wear that bike like a hat.

He could do it; he'd done it years before when he'd been bullied after school, passing a whole gang of older boys every day as he walked home. Mazzi thinking they were cute and wondering why they were calling him *fag-boy* and *cocksucker*. Way back then, when he was all confused. Then one day he'd come home with his mother, walking the same path and forgetting about these guys who always hung at the same corner trying to look cool. Seeing them and hearing them call him names as they always did, shouting out *dogface* and *fagboy* and asking if his mother was a dyke as they passed, Mazzi all tough like he should have been before when it had started, instead of there and then when it was too late on that hot summers afternoon, when the sun was setting and he'd lashed out blind and hit his mother in the nose by mistake.

But this time he didn't have his mother's honor to protect and could lash out without her getting in the way like she had. All he had to do was go for the guy, kick the fucker off the bike, thump him if he could land one and keep going till he started crying like his mother had after the gang of pricks had seen how hard he could punch.

Then the blow from the baseball bat the kid kept in his bag hit him across the side of his head and knocked him off his feet. His elbow hit the paving stones hard as he landed on the ground and felt the power of the kid's foot hit him straight in his chest, winding him as the kid followed through with his other, spinning Mazzi's head around towards the boats in the marina just in time to see the blur of a figure of a woman dressed like a guy running along the dock, clearing the gate just as the kid on the bike arrived. The woman screaming out at them both, "Get away from him you pricks—I'm a cop." And she was, and her name was Daltrey.

Chapter Two

Daltrey stood above Mazzi Hegan and watched as the kids disappeared across the park into the darkness. The man now half up and back on his feet in his tight leopard skin trousers, stinking of booze, with blood running from his mouth.

How long has it been since she'd ventured outside, Daltrey thought as she stared at him, days or weeks? How long had she spent holing herself up in the boat she knew would be empty with her face and hands burned and what felt like half the hair on her head gone. Locking herself away, sitting there, crying for hours, feeling her hands shake, knowing she was a coward.

What had she been doing thinking she was so brave? Following the Russian like she had and failing herself, failing the street woman who'd been the brave one, the woman trying to protect her and being burned herself. The woman, without fear, doing everything and a terrified Daltrey had done nothing, except run. And run she had, like a kid running for their mother on the first day of school, with her face and hands burning from the flames the Russian had poured down upon her. Running both from him and from her shame.

Day after day, hour after hour, she'd sat locked away from the real world, too frightened even to look in the mirror as her delicate fingers felt her burnt hair. Waking from dreams of him coming at her spitting death, seeing this woman beneath him, who should have been her, dying, feeling the boat rock on the water in the dock as people passed, clonking the wooden planks with their feet, she'd hid and watched them looking in as she looked out at the world through portholes of pitted brass. Until one day, as if it couldn't have gotten any worse for her, she'd felt her hands shaking as she saw something across the water, something that could only make her question her sanity—a poster of Dan standing there in a pair of silver underpants.

How could she have left her there? How could she have run as she did, Daltrey asked herself again, as she walked over to pick up a phone and handed it to the guy who should've know better than to walk alone through the park at night?

It was around three in the morning when Chendrill, the private eye who used to be a cop, arrived back at Dan's mother's house and, using his key, crept inside and took a shower before climbing into bed.

A lot had happened over the last few days or so, and he was wondering if things could get any worse. Nearly burned to death, electrocuted, almost drowned, beaten in the ribs by a baker, kicked in the throat by a Sikh.

Things needed to start settling down.

Dan's mother, Tricia, was stirring now, her body smooth and warm beside him. He could wake her and make love, but why, what was the point? All he'd do was be thinking about how long the wannabe gangster he'd just sent swimming out into the dark sea only hours before had taken to drown?

Then he heard his woman say, as she turned naked to him and feeling her light touch upon his chest, "I was beginning to worry again."

Chendrill lay still and said, "There's no need."

But there was and Tricia knew it. This man who was big and strong and took no shit from anyone, the guy who used to be with the force but now was paid handsomely to keep an eye out

for her son, who, despite his newfound fame as a supermodel/actor, still lived downstairs in the basement.

Chendrill watched over him and had been staying with her since they'd become lovers. The night before, he'd disappeared and come back in the early hours with his hair full of salt, smelling of the ocean, with his shins ripped up and calves bruised.

He had been a mess—now she'd sensed the sadness after he'd returned again. She said as she leaned up and placed her head on his chest, “Something's upset you?”

God, Chendrill thought, she was right but how could she tell that just from him walking in the room? But she had sensed it, heard his breath, his silence. The way he lay himself next to her and didn't move. She asked, “Is it about last night?”

It was—a man with a diamond in his front tooth had tried to end his life and almost succeeded, and only a few hours earlier Chendrill had turned it around giving the same man a taste of his own medicine. He took a deep breath and, lying, answered, “No, it's all good.”

But it wasn't good, not by a long stretch. So already knowing the answer, but changing the subject, he asked, “Is Dan home?”

Dan wasn't; his red Ferrari absent from its usual spot outside his mother's small stucco covered two-bedroom home.

The truth was Dan had gotten back home from work and without showering jumped straight into his speed restricted racing car and headed into town to climb back into Adalia Seychan, who was now riding herself up and down on his cock with just enough light on in the hotel suite for her to see him but him not to see her.

Not that Dan cared.

He could have had the lights on full blast or the suite could have been pitch black and he'd have been happy. All he wanted was to feel her pushing down on him, her stopping as she felt him about to come every minute. He'd wondered what a woman's pussy felt like for years and now he knew—with hers all smooth and shaven and still tight for a woman in her fifties—or sixties, but who was counting—and all courtesy of a combination of yoga and a very talented surgeon who'd also done her neck.

Smiling as she looked down at him holding her waist with one hand and with his other in a packet of family sized Cheesies, she said, “You like that do you—when I ride you like this?”

Dan grinned and stuffed another handful of Cheesies in his mouth, the Rock Solid brand tablets he'd been given earlier in the day still living up to their name.

“If we're going to be working together and you're going to love me in the movie Dan, then I want the chemistry to be real—you'll need to know what I like, and I like this.”

And she did, she liked riding him and staring at his tight stomach as she let her thigh muscles bring herself up and down, feeling his dick on her cervix. She said, “You know what you're rubbing inside me don't you?”

Dan did, he knew all about the sexual reproductive organs of a woman on paper and for the last few years had been trying his best to get as close to the real thing as possible, so he said, “Yeah, when I was a kid, the cat next door got in and started playing with one of my mum's mice.”

Adalia stopped and looked down upon him, this young lad, sexy enough for her to dream up a bullshit excuse and leave her heart-shaped California swimming pool for Vancouver in the hope she could meet him. This guy, now inside her bareback, whose photo in a pair of silver undies had made her come her silk panties in the back of her blacked-out limo on Rodeo drive—her

calling out to her driver through the communication device to make another four lefts so she could see him again. She said, “Oh!”

“Yeah,” Dan said, “Mum got all embarrassed, pretended it was the real thing, and chased it out into the garden with a broom.”

Then as Adalia pulled herself almost off of him and slowly dropped back down, she said, “That's not the best thing to be talking about when you're making love to a woman, Dan.”

And that's what he was doing at last, making love, or fucking and eating Cheesies—depending on who's perspective you took. He heard Adalia carry on, saying, “You need to be telling me how beautiful I am, how much I mean to you. Make me feel like a beautiful woman. Tell me I'm special Dan—tell me what you want to do to me.”

Dan gave it some thought as he looked up at this woman he could barely see in the faint light coming in from the hotel suite's minibar that he'd left open, then said, “I wanna fuck you in the ass.”

That, he thought, *was what she wanted to hear*—as it was all this other older woman who'd picked him up in the street and sneaked back to his basement a couple of nights back had kept saying. That is, before his mum burst in the room, turned on the ugly lights, and kicked her out.

“Really? Don't try to run before you can walk Daniel,” Adalia said with a grin to this kid who'd obviously spent too many late nights on the internet as he'd said it like a porn star. This same kid who could act and ad lib like a natural and with whom she was about to make a movie. The same kid who she was going to show to the Western world and turn into a star, so that when he was just that and the people had begun to forget her, she could let it slip they'd been in love and ride the tabloid wave until no one longer cared.

Leaning down she felt her breasts touch his chest as she gently kissed him on the mouth and said, “You think you can do that to me, do you big boy? Well why don't you start by fondling my breasts then, since you've got your big hard cock where it's supposed to be—try holding me down on top of you and give me everything you've got before you start fantasizing.”

And raising her buttocks a little to meet him, Adalia pulled Dan's hand from her waist and whispered in his ear, “Go on Dan, I'm waiting—touch my breasts, feel them, caress them, hold me down and fuck me as hard as you can and try not to come whilst you pound me until I have.”

Dan reached up and began to touch Adalia Seychan's breasts with his right hand, feeling their softness as her nipples grew harder beneath his fingertips. He watched as Adalia closed her eyes whilst he lifted his other hand up and began rubbing both breasts with both hands, squishing them, tugging them, stretching out her nipples, pulling them away from her until Adalia worried he'd undo all the work she'd had done and asked him to stop, “Oh Dan, please be gentle with me.”

And with her own hands she pulled his hands up, placing them onto her shoulders. Then she said, “Hold me down Daniel, hold me to you,” as he looked up at her breasts, seeing them all covered in orange Cheesie stains and sticky crumbs from his fingers.

Adalia looked at him staring up at them as Dan panicked, leaning up quickly before she could see the mess he'd made; he took her breasts in his mouth and began to lick them all over. Closing her eyes in delight as she felt his tongue sweep across her breasts, his teeth nibbling at the crumbs around her nipples, Adalia saying, “Yes Dan, do that. Oh yes, Dan. Yes! Do that and fuck me, Dan. Fuck me hard.”

And he did begin to fuck her hard as he licked all the delicious flavored Cheesie grease from her million dollar breasts as she ground down, filling herself with his cock as Dan lapped like a dog with his paw on the edge of a ripped open empty bag of chips, getting every sticky morsel

with long hard strokes of his tongue. Adalia moaning, Dan in double ecstasy and unable to speak, and eventually in the heat of passion they both came together, Adalia feeling every inch of her body shudder as her muscles tightened and the nerves along her back and down her legs tingled calling out to her as her wetness flowed out onto Dan's balls. Dan feeling himself involuntarily unload as the muscles in his groin pumped his sperm into her the same way they had each time his mother had treated him to a papaya and he'd taken the whole thing to his room.

It was about the second time Adalia had come that night when Chendrill got the phone call as he lay asleep back in Dan's mother's bed in the suburbs on the other side of the city. Not knowing the number, he hoped it was Archall Diamond calling to taunt him, telling him he'd survived as Chendrill had himself the night before.

And as he lay there feeling Tricia's warmth beside him, listening to the breathing of whoever it was on the end of the line, nothing could have surprised him more when after a few seconds of picking up the few words she spoke through the tears he realized who it was and sitting up said, "Daltrey?" as she cried harder through the earpiece.

He got up again and walked naked to the window and looked outside on the off chance she could be sitting there. Then wondering what the hell was going on, he said, "Where are you?"

"On a boat, hiding—like a coward."

It was hard to work out, this girl who he'd used to know intimately and who he believed, like everyone else, had burned to death just over a week before was now crying to him down the telephone. He stayed calm trying not to ask questions, yet still said, "Let me know where you are and I'll come see you."

"I'm on a boat."

"In dock?"

Then there was silence for a moment before he heard her simply say, "Yeah."

Then even though he already knew she wasn't, he asked, "Are you okay?"

"I've been better," Daltrey answered as she choked back the tears.

Chendrill asked, "What's the name of the boat you're on?" And again heard Daltrey's silence. Then he said, "People think you're dead. There was a body in an..."

"Alley," Daltrey finished for him. Then she said, "It should have been me but it wasn't... It wasn't and it should have been."

Charles Chuck Chendrill walked through the darkness of the park, dropping further towards the water's edge. In the distance, he could see the sun silhouetting the mountains as it lifted the morning sky from darkness. If he was right, Daltrey was sitting on one of the hundred odd boats tied safely to the floating wooden docks held tight by the steel posts smashed firmly into the seabed below.

He stepped out onto the dock, feeling it move as the rig adjusted itself to his weight, and headed into the maze. In amongst the tears and words she'd tried to speak she'd said that the boat was blue, but in the darkness blue could also mean black or brown or green. Then in the distance, he saw it with its twelve-volt light burning dimly in the galley.

He sat on the edge of the small bench in the yacht's galley and stared at Daltrey as she used the sleeve of a man's fleece she'd found in the closet to wipe snot from her nose. Small droplets of tears were falling on the formica table, her hair on the side of her head burned, old bandages

and ointments from the contents of the boat's first aid kit were still strewn across the small counters alongside opened tins of salmon and empty water bottles.

Daltrey not seeing the mess, Chendrill giving her time.

"He came at me out of nowhere with this flame gun. I felt my hair go first and covered my face, then somehow pulled my jacket over my head, then for a second it stopped and this woman was there and he was burning her face away... she must have been in the alley... She must have been trying to save me, she fell at my feet and all I did was throw my jacket at his face and ran. I ran and tried to get my phone, but it was gone and my gun and everything and I just ran and ran and I could hardly see."

Then she went silent.

And that's how it had played out that evening in the alley at the back of the luxury condo building where a realtor named Patrick watched women walking naked from his window. The man had come at her from behind, taking her by surprise. This Russian, who spat fiery death from his fingertips, throwing out a wall of molten flame, singeing her eyelashes and what was left of her already plucked eyebrows. She'd gone down, crawling on her hands and knees, as he'd walked behind her spitting death onto the back of her hair and the thick leather of her jacket. Then she'd curled into a ball as the Russian's victims always did, covering their faces with whatever they could while the rest of their bodies burned.

Then the girl had come out of nowhere, pushing his arms away and, in the last moments of her sad life, saved Daltrey's before the monster had stood above this heaven-sent angel who'd spent her life on the streets, selling herself for heroin and sending poison flowing through her veins, ended her harsh tenure in this unforgiving world.

Chendrill said, "The Russian's dead. His past caught up with him before I could get my revenge for what I'd thought he'd done to you."

Daltrey looked up, her eyes red and bloodshot.

"He did to me, what do you mean?"

"We all think you're dead, Daltrey. Everyone thinks it was you in that alley. They found your gun there, your phone, your ID, everything."

She sat there staring out the side of the small porthole at the picture of Dan lit up in his silver underpants out there in the far distance. Then taking a deep breath, without looking back, she said almost to herself, "Well maybe I am dead. I keep seeing things."

"You look pretty much alive to me," Chendrill answered, carrying on straight after with, "you're upset yes, but your hair will grow back, your burns will heal."

"What about the girl though, the one who died for me, will her hair grow? No it won't."

Chendrill stared at her, this girl who he used to date and who had been scared of no one but who'd hidden herself away in fear and shame. He still couldn't believe he was here though, here and talking to her when only a few hours before he'd been wondering why he'd not heard about a funeral date. He said, "Can I ask a question?"

Daltrey turned away from the porthole and just stared, the morning sun catching what was left of her hair.

"Why'd you take so long to call?" Chendrill waited for the answer he already knew deep down. The girl needed time, time alone to come to terms with what had happened, time to process her shame and her fear of a man who was never going to rise again—not from the grave, as Daltrey had just done.

Then out of the blue, Daltrey took him by surprise, "I didn't have a phone—but there were these guys, I was watching them and I could see they were going to fuck with this, this man, and

then one hit him across the head and I just burst up and out of here on what must have been instinct. I got to them before the other could join in. Funny thing is, after the fuckers had gone and left the guy on the ground with a fucker of a sore head—I found this phone. He said it wasn't his and when I got it back here, I found Sebastian String's number in it and right below his was yours."

It was just past 6 a.m. when Chendrill got Daltrey to the hospital emergency at St. Paul's and as they sat and waited to be fast tracked through the junkies asking for ice, Chendrill said, "The Russian you're frightened of was chopped to pieces."

Daltrey stared at him, feeling her skin tighten.

"He was?"

Chendrill nodded, stretching out his legs as he did, feeling the pain in his shins, "Yeah very much so, I saw him lying there up in his flashy suite, so you can forget about that fucker."

For the moment that is, Chendrill thought, she was still a cop and there was little chance of her not getting torn apart with questions once the world caught up with what had happened—even if she was still in shock.

He said, "I'll put a call in this morning to that thief Ditcon and straighten things out for you best I can, but there'll still be questions."

Then he heard Daltrey say with a sigh, "I can't see myself doing the job anymore anyway—not now."

And to Chendrill, it seemed that she wasn't wrong.

Chendrill got back to Dan's mother's home just after seven to see Dan's Ferrari sitting outside and the light on in his mother's room. Letting himself in, he walked along the corridor, hearing his weight creak the old wooden floorboards beneath his feet. He opened her bedroom door softly to see her sitting up in bed reading with her knees up and her small delicate feet with her toenails painted red poking out from under the duvet. Looking up for a second, she briefly said before returning to her book, "I'm starting to get worried about you."

And she wasn't kidding, in her eyes the man could keep better hours, even though it was painfully obvious sometimes it wasn't his fault. But she drew the line at nighttime phone calls from women. *Especially if they're crying*, she thought, and still looking at her book she said, "This woman who called all upset, it was so important that you had to go right there and then to help her with her problem?"

It was, Chendrill thought, but kept it to himself, instead saying, "I'm sorry it could have waited I agree, but, you see it was the girl Dan was seeing who everyone thought had died."

Trish sat there taking that one in, staring at her book, the words now just a blur, this mysterious girl who Dan was seeing who'd been murdered and who recently Dan had suggested she meet for the first time at her upcoming funeral.

"And she called you instead of Dan?"

Chendrill nodded, then sitting down said, "Yeah, it's complicated."

"And you've slept with her in the past have you, you and my son have both fucked her I suppose?"

Wow, Chendrill thought, he wasn't expecting that one coming at him from left field. There was no point in lying, so he just said, "A long time ago yes, but it was nothing."

And regretted it the moment he heard her snap back, "Dan's nineteen now and was dating her—so you're saying you left my bed and run out the door for some girl, twenty years your junior?"

It wasn't getting any better.

It was almost an hour and a half later when Chendrill took the Aston into the flow of traffic and headed back towards the city still ruffled by what had been their first fight and for the first time ever he had been happy that Sebastian had called him with another 'emergency.'

A fight with Dan's mother, if you could call it that, an argument more like, comprising of him keeping quiet whilst his new woman vented and threw stuff. Like her son had warned him, the woman had a temper.

He took a left off the highway onto Hastings, passing the PNE on his right, the place looking deserted now with its empty rollercoasters and rides. Years before when he was a cop, he'd been called to meet a man at the exit of their biggest ride—designed to make you puke. A man who had somehow managed to get all his clothes off throughout its duration, throwing them into the air as the carriage twisted and turned until he arrived completely naked and sated to meet a young Chendrill at the bottom. The man saying it was an accident and how he just loved the ride as Chendrill covered him with a towel, declined the offer of them both going around once more, and put him in cuffs.

He hit the lights, trying to remember the man's name and then remembered seeing him only a few days prior lying unconscious face down on the man's living room floor. Now though there were other issues, like what he'd say to Ditcon as he'd promised Daltrey he would. The man who'd built his career off the backs of others' careers was almost the sole reason Chendrill had given up on his. Wondering why he still had the guy's number, Chendrill pulled out his phone and hit 'The Thief' on speed dial, waited for a moment, then heard Ditcon's voice on the other end.

"Ditcon here."

Taking a moment, relishing the words in his head before omitting—*you stupid fuckhead*—Chendrill simply said, "It's Chendrill, I think you fucked up again—I just had breakfast with Daltrey."

And hearing the silence as Chendrill's words churned around and around in the mind of the most incompetent man he had ever met, Chendrill followed it up with, "Oh yeah and she's decided she's not interested in working with you guys anymore."

To which Ditcon, gathering himself, replied, "Thank you for your information. We already know the welfare of Officer Daltrey and we are not at liberty to comment further regarding ongoing investigations."

Chendrill hung up and let out a long breath, half throwing the phone down onto the soft leather of the Aston's passenger seat, he said out loud to no one but himself, "Not at liberty? The fucking idiot." Then he laughed. *Why should I be surprised*, he thought, the man had worked his way this far up the ladder without getting his hands dirty, so why should things suddenly have changed?

It would take about another thirty minutes for the phone to ring again asking him to come down to the station on Main Street for an interview and about another thirty for someone to look into all the hospital entries over the last week so they could prove they'd done some work and say to him, "We are fully aware of your and Officer Daltrey's movements this morning," or some other form of bullshit like it.

He reached Yaletown and parked up on the meter outside Slave Media and took the elevator up to the offices. The place was now a hive of activity since the company's owner, Sebastian String, had decided—on a whim—to indulge Patrick, an old real estate friend's desire for a life time makeover, giving him the go ahead to make a film only the writer could understand.

Chendrill reached Sebastian's office situated in the corner of the building, knocked once on the stained window of the door, and stepped in to find Sebastian tickling the stomach of his dog Fluffy with a duster, who with the slightest movement of his head just looked at him.

Smiling, Sebastian said, "Fluffy loves it when I do this Chuck. Why don't you see if you can make his leg kick?"

Chendrill shook his head and walked to the window putting his backside against the sill and watched this advertising media wizard in his bright yellow trousers and Italian shoes trying to send his dog into ecstasy. Then he said, "Is this the emergency you mentioned?"

It wasn't, but there was one—at least in Sebastian's eyes—and putting the duster down on his desk he said, "Mazzi's called in sick."

Chendrill looked at him, waiting for more. Then when it didn't come he asked, "Is that it?"

"No. I think a sash window came down and banged his head last night when he was working late. Either that or he made it up and fell over because he'd been drinking."

Chendrill waited again, this news being nothing new when it came to Mazzi Hegan, who he knew from past experience to be a party boy—and falling down drunk came with the territory. He said again, "Is that it?"

It wasn't. After waiting in vain and wondering if Chendrill was going to ask if the man was okay, Sebastian carried on, "Well last night I was all alone and I didn't want to bother you because I know you're tired, so I let it go, but I'm not sure if you'd heard on the radio about this man who crossed the border a few nights back? Well, I've had this thought and its worrying me, it's about the situation with the company and Gill Banton—you know, with Slave taking over the contract she had with Marshaa. Anyway, I was worried because I heard some noise outside my door last night and I thought it could be this guy who crossed the border, maybe he's come here to hurt me."

Chendrill stared at him for a moment, taking it in. He'd not heard on the news about the man stealing a U.S. Customs officer's 4x4 and crashing it across the border two nights prior, but he did know about the incident more than anyone, because it was him. He said, "I can tell you, Sebastian, you have nothing to fear from this man."

"But how do you know Chuck?" Sebastian asked, wanting to believe Chendrill.

"Because I know the guy who did it and his problem is not with you or connected in any way with you."

Sebastian stared at Chendrill with his mouth open, then he said, "You know him. How? How do you know him?"

"It doesn't matter, just relax and know you're cool with this guy. However, if you're worried at night at your place call the police, it's what they're there for and then call me."

"I don't want to be a pest Chuck, you know what I'm like. I'll only ever call if it's important."

Chendrill did know exactly what he was like and at times wondered if the \$1000 a day plus expenses was worth the ‘emergencies’ he had to deal with every other day—after all incidents such as ‘someone’s looking at my bicycle’ hardly categorized as an emergency. He did, though, get to drive the Aston Martin which was looking good below the window as all the pretty girls were passing alongside it.

He felt the side of his face, which was still sore, and thought of Dan’s mother. Chances are she’d have calmed down by now, but you couldn’t tell. Like she’d said after she’d slapped him, ‘at least you know I care.’ He looked back to Sebastian, held up the phone Daltrey had called him from a few hours earlier, and said, “I’ve got a question for you though Sebastian. Last night a man was mugged around the marina close to your place and he dropped this; strangely though it has yours and my phone numbers on speed dial.”

Sebastian looked at the phone then asked, “A man?” And before Chendrill could answer, he carried on with, “You see—I’ve got this friend.”

“The man who was mugged, you think?” Chendrill asked, as he saw Sebastian start to blush.

Then Sebastian stood saying, “No, not like that, you’re misunderstanding what I’m saying, we’re talking about a woman Chuck, a woman I met.”

“Oh?”

“I haven’t got a man, I haven’t. I’ve got no secrets Chuck, there hasn’t been another man in my life since Alan.”

And there hadn’t, Alan had been the sole reason Sebastian existed and since he was gone there could be no other who’d come close to filling his shoes. Except for Charles Chuck Chendrill of course, but that was a secret fantasy as he played for the other team, which in its own way only made it all the better. He carried on, “I’m friends with this woman Chuck, no kinky stuff though, so don’t get any ideas.”

Kinky stuff? Chendrill thought, male and female together, that’s the way he sees it.

“She’s so sweet, I met her in the park, we chat and she’s got such a wonderful family.”

“And?” Asked Chendrill, waiting.

“And she doesn’t have a phone... so I bought her a phone. And put yours and my number into it,” Sebastian said, smiling like a guilty child who was lying to his mother.

“And?” Chendrill asked again.

“Did I do wrong Chuck?”

He hadn’t, but in his mind what was wrong is that the woman took it. Chendrill asked, “What’s her husband do?”

“She said he’s looking for work Chuck that’s why I helped out.”

Chendrill took a deep breath; it was getting better by the minute. The next thing Sebastian was going to suggest was either the husband come and work with Chuck or Sebastian was going to buy the guy a car so as he could get to work.

But for once, he was completely off the mark, as Sebastian carried on saying, “No Chuck, I just bought them a house.”

Jesus Christ, Chuck thought—the man was a sweetheart and generous to the bone but who was this woman? He said, “What’s the woman’s name?”

“Oh I don’t know.”

Chuck took a breath, fuck me, he just bought a house for a woman and he doesn’t know her name, so he asked, “She has a first name?”

“Oh yes—Suzy.”

“Suzy? Right. And how old is Suzy?”

Sebastian thought about it, staring down at his dog as Chendrill waited—this man who was worth a fortune and could see through any level of bullshit in his own world was now talking like a fool.

“Maybe forty, but she looks younger.”

“Where does this friend and her family live?”

“They used to live on the East Side, but not in a home with a nice garden on the East Side. They were in sheltered housing Chuck, right in the East Side.”

Chendrill asked, “Where?”

As he picked up his duster again then put it back on his desk, Sebastian said, “Right plum front and centre to that nightmare Hastings Street with its drug and social problems.”

Chuck sat quietly for the moment still staring at the dog laying on his back showing off his dick. Then as he was about to speak, Sebastian said, “Oh, and she used to be an erotic dancer.”

A stripper? Chendrill thought, as he wandered around Sebastian’s office at Slave. Then turning said, “Used to be?”

“Yes Chuck, she used to be.”

“Why, is she too old now?”

Sebastian shook his head; this wasn’t the case, far from it. “Oh no Chuck, the girl’s still got it, she has a medical condition that’s all and I think it’s best we leave it at that.”

A medical condition, Chendrill thought and not taking the slightest notice of Sebastian’s hint at protecting the woman’s privacy asked, “What is it?”

“She’s got a bag Chuck. So like I said, let’s leave it at that.”

Well chances were high he wasn’t referring to Burberry or Coach, Chendrill thought, so he put it out there, “What type?”

“There’s more to it, Chuck. She’s unemployed now because she’s wearing a colostomy bag. And I don’t want to betray the woman’s privacy, so please let us leave it at that,” Sebastian said back in the kindest voice he could muster.

Okay? Chendrill thought as he found his way back to his usual spot by the window and carried on asking Sebastian, “Why’s this girl not taken a real job then, one where she can keep her clothes on, like everyone else?”

For some reason unknown to Sebastian, Chendrill had become hostile, he’d seen it building in him, ruffling his red Hawaiian which clashed with the car, then saw it run through him the moment he’d mentioned the lady used to be an erotic dancer. He’d said to Chendrill, “There’s nothing wrong with that Chuck, I’ve known a couple of friends who danced burlesque. They were completely sane; it’s an art.”

But it wasn’t art for this woman—that was for certain. Chendrill could feel it. It was a business, and in his eyes strippers were one short step away from laying down for a few dollars more than they could stuff into the lining of their panties when they left the stage.

Someone was coming after Sebastian and him being gay only meant that they were coming from a different angle. That was all, playing on the man’s softness and generosity. But how the fuck had whoever it was gotten this far so quickly?

Chendrill sat outside Slave at the wheel of the Aston thinking for a moment before pulling away. That one had taken him by surprise. He had asked when they’d met, and Sebastian, getting candid, said he’d been sad on the day after the fireworks when he’d seen Chendrill trying to be discreet holding Dan’s mother’s hand. Then the next day he’d been for a walk in the park and seen this beautiful lady crying and explained how he’d sat with her on the bench and heard her pour her heart out and how he’d got on the phone without a thought and bought this woman he

didn't even know a home, doing it on a whim. He'd told Chendrill how beautiful the place was with its big bay windows and how they met now occasionally in the park. Chendrill had stood there by Sebastian's own window, no longer looking at the dog's bollocks but shaking his head in disbelief.

Trying to justify himself, Sebastian had said, "Oh, I'm just letting them live there, Chuck—I'm not stupid."

Sebastian snapped back at him in the kindest of ways, and heard Chendrill ask, "For free?"

"For now, yes. Until the family gets back on their feet. I did it because I was feeling sad Chuck and it made me feel good.

"It's just a cheap place Chuck, old and cheap."

Old and cheap? Anywhere in Vancouver old and cheap these days was going to be around a million dollars regardless if it was on the East Side. Chendrill had said, "Vancouver's not cheap Sebastian."

"Neither's making a film Chuck, but I can tell you, buying that house and telling that beautiful lady she and her family now have a proper roof over their heads has given me more satisfaction than I'll ever have shelling out on Patrick's movie."

It was a family of four, the unemployed stripper, her unemployed husband and their two boys, probably the same two 'wonderful' boys who'd stolen their mother's new phone and who Daltrey had stopped from mugging the guy in the park.

Probably.

He took the flyover passing through the sports stadiums and headed towards Strathcona on the East Side of town with its trendy wooden houses full of aging hippies and families in rentals.

The address on the piece of paper Chendrill had squeezed out of Sebastian read, 2123 Salsbury Street. And just as he pulled up along the road from the newly purchased property which made his employer feel good, he got the phone call he was expecting from the Vancouver Police Department—a message politely asking him to come in for an interview.

Chendrill estimated that the house was at least a hundred years old and looked like any other on the street with its steps leading up to the front door and big bay window, except for the sold sign sitting in the front garden and the stacks of new furniture boxes and cellophane thrown down the side alley—from the extra twenty thousand Sebastian had splashed out to fit the place out.

He got out and walked along the road and stood outside, feeling the wind heading south away from the mountains, hitting the trees with purpose like an invisible ghost rushing away to nowhere.

Walking up the short stairs, he knocked on the door and waited until he heard a stir and then knocked again and moments later saw the silhouette of a slim woman with big fake titties walking towards him through the stained-glass window of the front door.

She opened the door and before she could speak Chendrill said, "Suzy?"

Suzy looked up at him, this big guy in a red Hawaiian and, still clinging to the front door, pulled her long hair from her face, tucked it to her shoulder, and asked, "Who are you?"

"Sebastian asked me to come over, see if you have anything you need sorting out?"

"Sebastian?" the woman asked, her face as blank as an empty cinema screen. Chendrill stared back at her in her tight top, clinging to her stomach and oversized bosom, and wondered if Sebastian had been correct about this bag.

"Yeah, Sebastian. The guy who owns this place."

That did it, Chendrill thought, that jogged the memory as he saw the lights go on in her eyes as she remembered Sebastian, the nice kind hearted gay guy who just forked out over a million on a whim for this place because she was crying, kitted it out with furniture so the family could get away from the drug ridden neighbourhood where the woman probably used to work twenty-seven days out of thirty in a strip club.

“Oh Seb? Yeah Seb, he’s so cute.”

“Cute?” Chendrill asked and was about to carry on speaking when he heard the voice of a man call out unseen from the living room.

“Hey! Tell this Seb guy to get his ass over here and get rid of all that shit piled up in the alley for fucksake.”

Chendrill looked to Suzy and smiled, raising his eyebrows as he did and said quietly, “Okay, I’ll pass the message on.”

Then he heard the man, whose big boots were by the door and who did not bother to get up, call out again, “Tell him if it ain’t gone tomorrow, I’ll be doing it and he’ll get the bill.”

He’ll be doing it, Chendrill thought, this unseen unemployed man who’d just been given a home. Telling the guy who’d bought it for him to shift his ass or he’d be sending him the bill. *Take it out of the rent*, Chendrill thought, before he placed his hand in his pocket and handed her back the phone she’d also been given for free.

Suzy’s eyes lighting up, saying, “Oh my God, where did you find this?”

Chendrill looked back smiling and said, “The police found it, came round and said they wanted to speak with your two boys.”

Which in a roundabout way was half true, although in Daltrey’s mind she was no longer a cop.

Chapter Three

Ditcon sat in his office and fumed. So far he'd had everyone he could think of in there with him, one after the other and he'd shouted at them all. Now his throat was sore.

How the fuck could anyone in this day and age let something as simple as checking the DNA of a corpse slip through the cracks? Now he had to deal with it and on top of that he'd have to look that smug fuck Chendrill, who still wasn't returning his calls, in the eye somewhere in the process.

It hadn't been that long though and he'd be able to skate around the borders of truth like he did, hiding behind a closed door which only the Mayor could open. But there was an election coming up soon, so chances were that the sweaty prick would be gone and there'd be another guy he could bamboozle with the bullshit he had become so good at preaching.

Tell the guy what he needed to hear, bore the fuck out of him with charts and so many statistics that the man just stopped listening and started thinking about pussy or worried about the parks and bike lanes and looking good to the small percentage of people who'd bothered to get off their asses to vote in the first place.

He walked to the corner of his office and opened the small drinks cabinet with its secret bottle of vodka at the rear, cut a quarter lemon, reached down, pulled his underpants away from the crack of his ass, and poured a drink.

Chendrill, the big fucker, gone from the force but not forgotten. Still out there sticking a thorn in his side like he'd never left. A legend when he was here and even now, after he'd left, he somehow carried it on. Even driving a fucking spanking new red Ferrari, which Ditcon had managed to have towed. Now though he'd heard a report that the prick was cruising around in an Aston Martin.

Nonetheless, the guy was a mini Che Guevara in the local legend department. *Minus the stupid shirts*, Ditcon thought as he took a huge hit on the vodka bottle and sunk back the lemon. Walking to the window, he looked out, almost hoping to see Chendrill pulling in to the carpark like James Bond with Daltrey at his side looking all sexy like she did so she could explain to him herself just how she'd pulled a Lazarus and risen from the dead like she had. The woman was now well on her way to being a bigger pain in the ass and too smart to manipulate into the sheets the way he'd have liked to.

This woman, who didn't sleep and who got results that he was never able to twist into being his own, where the hell had she been for the last week or so? Pretending to be pulling some barbecue action in the morgue that's where. But what had she been doing in the background while everyone was asleep and who was the crispy-crunch impersonator waiting in the freezer closet in the meantime? It was all he needed, especially with what seemed half the Border Security workforce calling him every five minutes asking bullshit questions.

He picked up his phone and, finding Chendrill's name, held his thumb just above the screen—one half of him wanting to push the button and to get a start at sorting the mess out, the other wanting to go back and reopen the fridge.

Maybe he should do both, he thought, and did the latter.

If he called, he thought, as he took another huge glug and followed it with a lemon, the big fucker will get all smug and say something back to him like 'I thought you were the detective?'

Or some other shit like that.

Then he'd have nowhere to go but to eat humble pie. He closed the fridge door and felt the taste of the lemon on his tongue as he heard a slight knock on his office door and a female officer

in full dress uniform—just the way he liked them—stepped in and said, “We’ve found her sir, she’s at St. Paul’s. Chendrill brought her there this morning.”

It wasn’t often Ditcon rode in a squad car with the sirens on, but when he did he enjoyed it. The same young woman driving, nervous as hell, with her hair up and jacket pulled tight—it put the icing on the cake.

He leaned into the corner, enjoying the feel of the inertia squashing his body tight into the door as they hit a red and took a left onto Burrard as the lights and sirens screamed out. Fuck, he thought, this was what it was all about as he looked at the civilians holding their ears and staring at him looking cool in the back of the car.

It didn’t matter that he’d been told Daltrey was asleep; he wanted to be there when she woke so he could say something clever like, ‘You may think you’ve been hiding but I’ve known exactly where you’ve been the whole time.’

Then he’d give a little look to the girl driving the car with the sweaty palms after he’d ordered her to park illegally right in front of the hospital and insist she then join him upstairs so he could show off.

Or better still, he’d simply pretend the whole thing was part of a bigger plan that was in operation and, while Daltrey was weak, convince her she’d been used unwittingly as a pawn in a massive scheme and award her with a medal or something like that.

That’s what he’d do, Ditcon thought, as they smashed through the lights at Georgia, destroying the eardrums of anyone not smart enough to cover up.

It was all part of a bigger plan. And Daltrey had done such a fantastic job in her part of it all.

They entered Officer Daltrey’s room on the ward, Ditcon being noisy, making sure that he wouldn’t have to wait long for her to wake. As soon as she opened her eyes, Ditcon was right there—front and centre in his suit applauding, clapping his hands together with a smile as big as the window as though the girl had just blown the socks off a panel of judges in a singing contest, and with one fist clenched in victory he said, “You should be proud of yourself girl, real proud, we’ve got them now!”

And he’d left it at that, turning abruptly and exiting the room before Daltrey could make sense of what had just happened, let alone respond.

As they rode the elevator down to the ground floor of St. Paul’s, he turned to the young police woman hiding her titties underneath her heavy jacket and said, “Let’s just say ‘illegal border crossing’ shall we? That’ll give you some sort of clue as to why we burned all that extra gas getting here today.”

It was absolute bullshit, of course, but it sounded good and was actually completely feasible; after all, it was little bullshit gems like the one he’d spat out that had got him where he was today. Never let the truth get in the way of a good story, as they say, especially one that moves you forward.

Yes, at some stage they’d be a very high ranking official arriving in his office from both the U.S. and Canadian Border agencies once this young and sexy number dropped that juicy bit of gossip to the eight or so other officers who’d be sitting around her with their tongues out in Starbucks, but by then he’d have worked the end bit out and until then he was looking good.

So Chendrill could fuck off and suck his dick, he thought.

Ditcon stepped out first as the elevator doors opened and, seeing his car still sitting there in the street with the lights going, realised what a fuck up he'd just made. As cool as it was for him to have this fit young female officer with her hair up Starsky and Hutch it out front with the lights going so he could whip out the rear and hit the front doors with meaning, why oh fucking why had he not done exactly the same but at the other end of the hospital?

Then he could have carried it on, looking cool and tough, staring at all the sexy nurses as he went marching down the corridor crashing through as many double doors as he could with his badge shining brightly on the front of his lapel.

If he'd really thought it through he could have had two squad cars pull up full of cops and formed the diamond formation as he had on big occasion's such as the Olympics, when they'd moved through BC Place like a flock of geese heading for warmer climates—him in the centre flanked by burly officers with attitude and dark glasses.

They reached the car and, opening the rear for himself, Ditcon got in and pulled out his phone, waiting for the young female officer to get in and thinking that what he needed to do now was avoid another sexual harassment issue like the last time and play it cool with this beauty.

He found Chendrill's number on speed dial and, putting himself on speaker phone, began to rub his neck and shoulders; despite the huge traffic problem the car was causing, he signaled for the young police woman settling into the driver's seat to hold off a moment on starting the car.

This time around he hit the button with no hesitation and, on hearing the legend that was Charles Chuck Chendrill answer, he said so that the young girl in the driver's seat knew exactly who he was talking to, "Chendrill... Chief Superintendent Ditcon here, thanks for the enquiry earlier. We have Detective Sargent Daltrey fully secured at St. Paul's but request that you hold off on making contact with her at this time while we deal with this border fugitive issue."

"Really?" was all the girl heard Chendrill say as she sat in the driver's seat of the squad car and played with her computer pretending not to be listening. Then she heard Chendrill follow it up with, "You're telling me Daltrey was fine and working on this issue with the illegal border crossing two nights back—you've known this all along?"

"This is Police and Government Border Security business and I'm not at liberty to say at this moment," was all Ditcon replied with the usual air of superiority he kept in reserve and pulled out whenever he had no idea what he was talking about.

"But I presume you know the identity of the suspect currently at large?" Chendrill asked.

Ditcon gave the officer a knowing look as their eyes met in the rear-view mirror and turned to look at the congestion he was causing outside, and said, "I can let you know yes, that we're fully aware of the individual and his whereabouts."

Then they heard Chendrill say, "Fuck me you're good," and begin to laugh, slowly at first, growing louder with each guttural roar building from deep within. Then settling himself, Chendrill said, "Are you going to continue to be a complete and utter cunt all your life?"

Chendrill stood on the opposite side of the road and watched Ditcon pull away from the hospital and disappear through a red light in the distance with the siren blaring.

He'd wondered what the hold up in the traffic was on the way to see Daltrey and, after switching back, had parked the Aston alongside the forecourt of the Wall Centre Hotel. He slipped the concierge a tenner and spotted Ditcon sitting in the back of the squad car. Then his phone rang.

Fuck, the guy was so full of shit, ‘yes, we’re fully aware of the individual and his whereabouts’ when in fact he was talking to the very same person to whom he was referring.

He crossed the road and found his way to the room where Daltrey lay in bed recovering as she should have been doing two weeks prior. He opened the door to Daltrey’s room and sneaked a look inside to see her lying there all bandaged up with her eyes closed and heard her say, “You’re supposed to knock.”

He was—he knew that only too well—and suddenly embarrassed by his own behavior, ran his hand across the top of his head and then his neck, “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be,” Daltrey said, “you look more tired than me.”

She was right; he was. It had been a busy week and he was hurting all over, but more than anything he was hurting inside from the spat he’d had with Dan’s mother earlier that morning. He said, “You’re the important one right now.”

Then lifting herself up, Daltrey said, “Ditcon was just here.”

“And?”

“And he woke me up with his presence, then when he saw I was awake just gave me a standing ovation, said some shit about me being great, doing a great job, and left.”

“You tell him you’re out?” Chendrill asked as he sat on the end of her bed, and saw Daltrey look away towards the window as if the problem was somehow just outside.

“It’s hard to do anything with that man the way he takes over the room.”

“Take your time,” Chendrill said. “Don’t go crashing the door down like I did.”

And he had done just that when he’d had enough of Ditcon and left the force, crashed the door open with his right foot and stuck his resignation letter straight to the front of Ditcon’s sweaty forehead.

But that was years ago.

Daltrey said, “I don’t think I could carry on now, you know I’d always be that girl.”

“What girl.”

“The one that ran away and left a girl to die.”

Chendrill looked at her, this girl who was as tough as old boots but who was now distraught beyond belief with herself for doing nothing other than acting on basic instinct and surviving. He walked across to the small chair at the side of the sterile room and sat down, taking his weight off of his lower legs and said, “There’re only four people in this world who know the truth and two are no longer with us. For one, this is a blessing; for the other, a tragedy—which was not your fault. And if anyone ever hears about it it’ll have come from you and not me, and that’s a promise.”

“There’s this guy, though. I was up in his place watching before that Russian guy attacked me, maybe he saw?”

“Patrick, the realtor?” Chendrill asked butting in.

Daltrey looked up at him, “How did you know?”

“I’m a detective, you know that. As soon as I’d heard you were gone, I was all over it and was onto the fucker within a few days.”

“Which fucker?” Daltrey said, showing the slightest bit of her old self before sitting there staring into nowhere for what seemed an age. Chendrill noticed and gave her time, looking at the floor.

Then she asked, “So, you met him then?”

“I met them both. The Russian in a café where he got away and Patrick—along with his teeth—except he wasn’t smiling a few days back, he was shitting himself.”

“Why?”

“Because he saw you in trouble and didn’t pick up the phone.”

Daltrey looked up, the news of this guy she’d kind of liked betraying her seemed to hit a nerve. Then she said, “Worried the bad press would hurt home sales no doubt.”

And Chendrill looking up smiling said, “No. Houses are not his thing anymore. He saw a picture of himself looking back at him like an idiot and didn’t like what he saw, so now he’s a film producer and they’re making his film over at Slave and your old boyfriend Dan’s in it.”

Chapter Four

Patrick DeSendro, who used to be a realtor, walked through the now crowded offices of Slave Media teeth first with a smile saying, “Hey how you doing?” and “Hey here he is! Here she is!” He reached Sebastian’s office without a clue as to who the people were or what they did—all that mattered was they were going to be helping him in his quest to be famous. Opening the door to Sebastian’s office as though it was his own, he saw Sebastian holding his dog Fluffy up towards the ceiling and held out his hands and said, “Put that dog down, you don’t know where he’s been.”

Ignoring him, Sebastian simply said it as it was, “I think he’s got worms Patrick, what do you think?”

Patrick moved closer and joined Sebastian staring up at his little dog’s backside, then said, “Is he rubbing himself on the carpet?”

He had been, that’s what had been bothering Sebastian. He replied, “Maybe, you have experience with dogs do you Patrick?”

Patrick didn’t; in fact, many a multimillion dollar property he’d been ready to show had been disastrous because of them, despite having his team go over the place, cleaning from top to bottom, getting rid of miscellaneous furniture by stuffing it into a truck that parked miles away—getting the place perfect, only to have some prospective buyer step in a stinky coiler left out on the lawn to ruin the magic.

“A little, and, trust me, you need to be careful!”

“I think I’ll call the vet, Patrick,” Sebastian said.

Patrick nodded in agreement, as though it was the most important decision of the day. And to Sebastian it was.

Patrick walked to the window and looked down.

“Did I see Chuck here awhile back?”

He had and had been coveting the guy’s car. Sebastian had been in such a generous mood lately that Patrick was up here hanging about, not knowing what was going on around him, but still fancying one for himself because they looked so cool. The fact he could easily afford to go to the showroom and smack down enough cash for two was beside the point—there’s no fun in that.

Putting his dog down and watching Fluffy walk, Sebastian said, “Why?”

“I just thought it would make us all look so cool if we all had a sports car.”

“How’s the script Patrick?” Sebastian asked without looking up.

It was a good question, and one Patrick was still unable to answer because he had yet to read it. Megan Rawlis, his friend the writer, who used to be a cocktail waitress, had said it was incredible, though, so what was wrong with that? Yes, she may have been a raving lunatic flower child from LA, but she looked hot with no clothes on and seemed to like working him and milking his dick as much as she enjoyed living the dream. So who was going to upset the apple cart with that one? Not him, that was for certain.

Holding his hands out in a gesture impossible for Sebastian to ignore, he said, “Trust me—it’s fantastic.”

Sebastian stared at him and said, “That’s it? That’s all you’ve got to offer? No plot points, story line, perhaps, even, possibly an idea of your own?”

This line of questioning wasn’t what Patrick had been expecting. Maybe it was a bad time to come in and mess about with the man, especially since he was worried about his stupid dog’s

ass. So he said, “Oh, trust me Sebastian, I know the script from top to bottom. I just don’t want to ruin it for you when the latest draft comes through. Why kill the magic hey? If you want though, I’ll have Megan come over and sit down for an afternoon and break the whole thing down after she’s given you a personal reading.”

That’ll do, Patrick thought. He knew how much the Joni Mitchell-singing hippie chick drove everyone crazy in the office with her long skirts and wild hair and Sebastian would rather put needles in his eyes than suffer that. And right on cue after just a moment’s thought, Sebastian said, “Sure, bring her in and all three of us can sit down and go through it together.”

Ditcon was still rubbing his neck and shoulders when he’d arrived back in his office on Main Street and turned the heat up. His driver *de jour* still with him, now wandering around the large room with her fingers unconsciously trailing across his large wooden desk as she looked at all the photos of the big guy receiving medals and playing golf with celebrities.

He’d left the hospital and had her gun it right through town with the lights on all the way to his favourite Italian restaurant near Boundary Road. They’d stopped off for an early lunch with some wine, at which he’d told her how good a driver she was and how her handling of the corner earlier on Burrard was so precise he’d cricked his neck—not her fault of course, his entirely for not having expected such acumen. She’d just been too good for him—taken him by surprise.

Now they were up in his office, waiting for an important phone call coming in that she could listen in to as long as she didn’t let on that she was there. After all it wasn’t often that you’re on a conference call with the head of the CIA. In the meantime, she could watch him work, see how the big boys do it, learn some stuff that the ego maniacs at cop school, with their fuck you attitude, can’t teach you because they don’t know it themselves.

Oh, and if she was getting hot, she should take off that tight-fitting jacket and fix them both a drink from the bottle he had stashed at the back of the mini bar.

Ditcon watched as the young police woman unzipped the front of her jacket and let those titties out. *Fuck she was nice this one, apart from her ass being a little too big*, he thought. She seemed to like him, giving him that little look when they were eating at lunch, laughing at his stupid jokes. Him not touching her, her getting tactile with him instead after the glass of wine, grabbing his arm and punching him really hard when he teased her, telling her she was going to make detective.

Looking up as he watched her pour them both a vodka from his little minibar, he said, “I’ve got some blow if you want?”

“Sorry?”

He smiled at her.

“You’re kidding, right?”

He wasn’t. Blow was easy to come by when all the alleys that surrounded your police station sold drugs—and women, but that was another matter. It was the moment of truth with this one, either she was going to start to play or she was out the door with the knowledge that her superiors may hear about her drunk driving—which was not good, especially since it was in front of the boss.

Ditcon looked at her with that big, stupid grin on his face, trying to remember the girl’s name. *Dorothy—that was it*, he thought. He was good with names, it was his strong point and partly the

reason he'd moved up the ladder so fast—that, and meeting, by chance, the then teenage boyfriend of a now long-forgotten Mayor.

He said, "What do you think Dorothy, am I playing with you?"

He heard her say back, "My name's Stephanie."

Shit.

"Just playing with you Steph, I knew that," Ditcon confessed.

Then he heard her say, "I never thought I'd be offered that up here."

Ditcon leaned back in his chair and, still feigning his neck injury, said, "Yeah well, life's strange."

Then she looked at him and totally serious said, "Is this a test?"

"Maybe?" Ditcon said back with a smile.

Stephanie stared at him, unsure of what to do. The guy she'd seen walking around the station with purpose, looking all serious and kicking ass was not the same man who was sitting there grinning like a fifteen-year-old and rubbing his shoulders. Yeah, she'd done a bit of coke in her day, back in her late teens during Stampede week in her hometown, Calgary. She'd been trying to be cool, then lied about it in her confidentiality report when she applied to be a part of the Vancouver Police Department. She'd even taken a line an hour before the polygraph test they put her through to straighten herself out.

The wine had already been going too far, but now vodka while on duty—and cocaine? *Jesus*. But who knows, she thought, the guy is the top dog around here and partying with the boss could do no harm. After all, he's the guy who'd be firing her, either out the door or further up the ladder if she played it right.

Turning to him and holding both glasses to her chest, she said, "How do I know you're not a cop?"

Ditcon laughed, that was a good one. He said straight back, "How do I know you're not a cop, hey? Could get dangerous, here in my office, both of us carrying guns and all."

Your office. Stephanie thought, your office on the top floor, away from it all with its huge desk and sofa and view of the mountains.

Then taking him by surprise as she handed him his large vodka with a little piece of lemon, she said, "When you take this call later from the big shot in the U.S. about this guy who stole one of their cars and crashed it across the border, why don't you tell them you've heard from a good source that it's Charles Chuck Chendrilla they're looking for? That'll set him straight for disrespecting you the way he did this morning."

Megan Rawlis sat in the chair opposite Sebastian with Patrick flanking them both from the side in a manner that showed without a shadow of a doubt that he had absolutely nothing to do with this read through meeting.

Moving his chair out purposely, making a circle, and holding a notepad and pen, Sebastian looked at Patrick and said, "Patrick before we start, why don't you give us both your thoughts on the script, and then tell us, maybe, how the plot points could be strengthened and, possibly, if you think there are any weaknesses in the plot or sub plots."

Patrick stared back at Sebastian sitting in the middle of his office in his yellow trousers like a king. His ass was still aching from the working Megan had just given it, the way he liked her to

do. Megan milking him onto the nice clean sheets on her king-sized bed in the suite Sebastian was paying for at the Sutton.

For once, he had gone over there to go through the script as they had a meeting that afternoon and the flower child had surprised him with the offer of giving him what he liked. And this time she hadn't gone easy.

He said with a grin that had sold a hundred condos, "Trust me Sebastian this script is just fantastic! Adalia's going crazy about it."

Asking in a clear and precise manner that left no doubts in the mind of anyone in the room that it was Sebastian who was paying for this project and in charge, and definitely not Patrick, despite the man's front and bravado, Sebastian said, "Like I asked before. Tell us how maybe the plot points could be possibly strengthened and if there are any weaknesses within the plot or sub plots?"

And Megan piped up for the first time since she had sat down and despite being nervous ever since Chendrilla had given her a talking to regarding her behavior said, "I think we should scrap the ray guns altogether and put all the emphasis on love and bringing peace to the world, let's be different."

Smiling and holding out his hand with the gentlest of touches, Sebastian held it to the young girl's arm, stopping her in her tracks and said, "Megan love, we'll get to your thoughts soon enough, please let Patrick have his turn."

And he turned to Patrick, waiting.

Patrick shifted in his seat, his ass still burning inside, wishing he'd looked at the script at some stage or known a character's name at least. But then he remembered he did, there was Dan's character's name the one Dan was on about when Dan had humiliated that guy with the ego who'd written the script in the first place. Dan had told him about the binoculars and how it was impossible for them to work the way it was scripted. He said, "The binoculars, they've got to go, maybe use a laser system—you know get ahead of technology same as Star Trek used to do. Let's make incredible gadgets up that scientists can latch onto after the movie's been released. Same goes for the ray guns as Megan just mentioned, I'm all for that 100%. Trust me, it's what this script needs. It'll make all the difference. Oh, and I was also thinking maybe we introduce a pet for the kids to love, you know like a little dog that can save the planet. Maybe even a really cute one like your little Fluffy. Trust me, kids'll go crazy. How is he by the way?"

Sebastian watched from his window as the producer and new writer of the film he was indulging Patrick with left the building and hailed a cab out front. The man obviously had no idea what was going on, but he'd seen worse—at least the guy could sell. Once the thing was finished that's where he'd be coming into his own, and truth was he liked the idea about having little Fluffy in the movie. Even if Patrick had used it as a deflection like he had.

Fluffy would like that as well, and he'd be able to get him all shampooed for the film and double up the glam for the premier, bring him there in his own limo—give his little dog the red-carpet star treatment. This would be amusing.

But for the moment, the little dog had other issues. The biggest one being the fact he was leaving tiny skid marks on the rug. He picked up the phone and called Charles Chuck Chendrilla, "Chuck! It's Sebastian, what are you doing? I've got an emergency."

They drove slowly across the Granville Street Bridge, Chendrill at the wheel of the Aston, Sebastian in the back discreetly blowing on his dog's backside to keep it cool as they went.

Two emergencies in a day was a record for Chendrill. Sebastian waking him again happily—this time in the middle of the afternoon—pulling him from a dream where his mouth was taped up and he was drowning while he was sprawled out on his oversized sofa back at his condo.

As they took the right exit towards 4th Street, Sebastian said, "I know when he's not well Chuck, I always have."

Chendrill looked in the mirror, just nodding on the way over and doing the same on the way back as Sebastian said exactly the same thing but in reverse, "I always know when he's feeling better Chuck, I always have."

Feigning interest, but not wanting to know about what had been going on behind closed doors at the vet's, Chendrill kept quiet. Sebastian nonetheless telling him how Fluffy hasn't liked it there at the vet ever since he and Alan had the dog shaved after they'd found a flea. Keeping it up, Sebastian carried on and said, "You wouldn't believe it Chuck, it was an infestation!"

"Really?"

"Alan was beside himself, kept scratching all day at work, thinking he had them also. We had bites on both our ankles."

Telling him it comes with the territory if you have a pet, Chendrill joked, "They can lie dormant in the carpet for years you know."

They parked out front of Sebastian's building as the sun was making its way towards the west, Chendrill picked up Fluffy, carrying him to the door—the dog making the most of the fuss, seemingly half asleep in his arms.

As they rode the public elevator up to his penthouse suite, Sebastian said, "Patrick's saying Fluffy should be in the movie, Chuck."

Chendrill looked to the dog lying almost comatose in his arms. The dog had star quality, that was for sure. It spent enough time at the doggy spa to qualify. They reached the top floor and the doors opened. Seeing a man standing in the corridor looking to them both, before then getting into the elevator himself and closing the door behind them, they stepped into Sebastian's suite as Chendrill said, "What's Patrick's after?—Besides, how do you know Fluffy can act?"

"Oh, he can act, Chuck. Look at him now lying there as though he's dying when all he's got is a sore backside. I don't know who was worse today, Fluffy or Patrick with the way he could not sit still."

Chendrill didn't want to go there—he'd seen the photos of Patrick being taken by the Russian woman and that had scarred him enough. As he stood by the window looking down to the road below waiting for the man who'd stepped into the elevator when they got out to appear, he asked, "That guy who was just up here, you know him?"

Sebastian stared at him confused. Then answered curiously, "The one up here, who got in the lift?"

"Yeah."

"No—Why?"

"Because he's just appeared downstairs and he's now sitting on a park bench."

Sebastian walked over to the window and looked down. The park below his place was packed with people laying, sitting, walking, running, riding bikes, each enjoying the last of the afternoon

sun as it sneaked through the trees. He said, "There's got to be a thousand people down there, Chuck."

"The one on the bench."

Sebastian stared down trying to see who on earth Chendrill was referring to. He said, "You've got better eyes than me Chuck, I can't see a thing."

Then Chendrill made it only too clear.

"The guy looking up at this place."

At first he couldn't tell and wondered if Chendrill was going crazy, then, looking down to the man, Sebastian said, "You even sure it's the same person, Chuck?"

"One hundred percent."

Sebastian moved to another window and, calling out unseen to Chendrill, said, "He might be looking at the other building's penthouse suite at the back, Chuck."

"He's not."

"Maybe he's just looking at the birds in the sky."

"Maybe," Chuck answered, not wanting to get Sebastian any more alarmed than he already was or he'd be asking him to stay overnight on the couch or in the guest room. The guy was no bird watcher, nor was he looking at the neighbours.

Three minutes later, Chendrill was outside, leaving through the parking garage and nipping across the road to stand in the park as the general public passed him by.

The man was still there, looking up, looking down, scratching his head, rubbing his eyes. The man in his forties with darkish skin, making him look almost Italian, the guy trying to look younger in his turned-up jeans and cowboy boots.

An hour later, he moved on with purpose, his head down, hands in his pockets, stopping for a piss at the public toilets on English Bay, then up the steps and across the road onto Davie Street, then up the hill to the top where the rainbow coloured shops and bars screamed out at him making their own sexuality statements until they faded back into the vanilla yuppiedom of Yaletown and the offices of Slave.

And there he stood as he had at the bench, looking up at nothing from a doorway, this man with thinning hair whose youth had long past, waiting and watching while Chendrill watched him.

It was almost an hour that passed before he checked his phone and moved off again, Chendrill sitting in the bar three doors along watching the man through the reflection of a hat shop window next to Slave.

He kept on heading east, crossing the boundary where rich become poor, and where the poor came home to rest their heads in sheltered housing and the cheap hotels, feeding off welfare and selling their infested beds in cramped damp rooms to these poor, emptied souls stuck in a cycle of poverty.

From what Chendrill could see, this is where he was from, this man who'd been waiting up in the corridor outside Sebastian's home. The man whose up-market clothes didn't match the people who knew his name.

From the diagonal direction the man was heading, it was odds on that he was on his way to the strip club at the top of Main Street. By the time he'd reached it and paid the cover, Chendrill was already sitting inside watching him through the long thin legs of the girl on the stage as she pranced about, hanging onto the pole that would be hers for the length of five songs.

He knew them and they knew him was all Chendrill could tell as the man sat down at the corner of the stage ordering a beer as he watched the girl's shoes and felt her pink boa whisk past

his face. An hour passed along with five more beers and five other women on the stage dancing and trying to look keen, the man banging the flat of his hand on the stage as his spirit loosened with booze as he watched the legs and tits of the girls on stage and the perky asses of the lap dancers roaming the room seeking their prey.

By the time his hand was sore and his sixth beer was half done, the lap dancers moved in, sidling up using their sex and the smell of their soft skin to entice him until they lured him away to a room upstairs where they could all take turns rubbing themselves into his crotch as his hands hovered inches from their wiggling tits as they floated in tantalizingly close, touching his lips for the length of one song and another and another until he could take no more and staggered away with the smell and feel of the girls still fresh in his mind, down the stairs to lean his giddy spinning head against the stall wall of a piss stained toilet, pull his erect cock from his pants and stroke it until he came. It was what he liked to do and what did he care what people thought of him as he heard them chatting bullshit as he jerked himself silently, breathing heavy as his hand ran. What did he care if the door was half open? What did he care of their laughter and their taunts? They were nothing in his world—after all, how many people had they killed?

He walked out staring down the young men in the rest room and checked himself in the mirror. He still looked good even if his hair was messed and his cheeks were red. He opened the door and walked out, hearing the music blaring now as he passed through the crowd and back towards the stage towards the big guy in the Hawaiian now sitting on his stool. Reaching him, the man sat down and, leaning in, retrieved his beer.

“Sorry, am I on your stool?” Chendrill asked.

The man answered, telling him it wasn’t a problem and looking at the girl on the stage with half the interest.

“You’re good, you’re good.”

Chendrill got straight to the point, saying, “Now that you’ve jacked off, you can tell me what your interest is in Sebastian String and Slave?”

The man stared at him, the girl on the stage now right there with her snatch out in his face. The man turned his head and looked at it for a moment, her skin shaven all around with a tiny stud in her clit. Looking away and back to Chendrill he said, “Can you imagine doing that to your dick?”

Chendrill stayed quiet, waiting for an answer. The man continued, “You the guy who got out the elevator with him then?”

He was, they both knew that. Then the man said, “How about I just get up and walk away and we leave it at that. Pretend neither of us ever met? Then we can both grow old.”

“How about you answer my question so you can come back in here again without feeling embarrassed,” Chendrill answered.

The man turned away looking back at the stage to the girl, on the other side now, and took a deep breath. Did he need this bullshit right now from a big fuck who couldn’t dress properly? No. He looked at the girl for a second longer and then to one of the lap dancers who’d just ruined his hair and, turning to talk to her, leaned down pulling a gun from his cowboy boot and stuck it quickly in Chendrill’s stomach. Smiling as his other hand dropped a wad of twenty dollar bills next to his unfinished beer, he said, “How about the last thing you see is that girl’s crotch?”

“I could think of worse,” replied Chendrill quick as a flash with a smile as he watched the man get up and slowly back away with the gun tucked up the sleeve of his top.

Calling out as he went, Chendrill said, “Next time, you’d better have two.”

The name of the guy who'd pulled the gun after wacking off in the shitter was Mattia, Chendrill discovered from one of the lap dancing girls as she dropped the hundred dollar note into her purse while Chendrill did his best not to look at her breasts.

"Says he's Italian and from Calgary," she said, "and he worked as a drover until he fell and found Jesus. But that's bullshit, because he ain't no cowboy. And yeah, he does this thing, takes two or three of us upstairs at a time then goes down and wacks one out in the stall, but there's nothing new there. Oh yeah, he's got a big dick and he smells."

"What of, sweat?" Chendrill asked. The girl shook her head and said straight back, "no, more like death," as she watched the door for prey as it opened. Chendrill looked at the girl's shoes, wondering what would happen to her ankle if she missed a step. She was a good-looking woman though, despite the shoes, perfect in almost every respect, her hair long, lovely shoulders, face, breasts, flat toned stomach, tapered legs, what the hell was she doing here he thought. But she was there, her and the others who floated about looking sexy. As he pulled out another hundred-dollar bill, he said, "Is he with the Angels?"

She shook her head again, looking about, there were a few here in the crowd sitting in groups, feeling special in their VIP booths along the wall. She looked back to Chendrill.

"No, he doesn't run with that crowd. I've heard he lends money though. He comes here and gets it on with us, but I've seen him alone with one of the other girls if you get my drift." He handed her the other hundred.

"What like he's fucking one of them?"

The girl, not giving a shit, said straight back. "Yeah but not here though, if you know what I mean, people have relationships, even us."

"If he comes back in here, send me a text before he goes upstairs and I'll give you another one of these," Chendrill said.

The girl looked at the cash and took it before saying, "Make it three and you've got a deal."

The first thing Chendrill did when he got back up to Sebastian's penthouse was to ask Sebastian what was going on. Sebastian sitting there, not wanting to look up at Chendrill, holding little Fluffy in his lap on the verge of tears with his tea shaking in its porcelain cup, Chendrill telling him straight as he looked down upon Sebastian saying, "Sebastian, I can't help you unless I know everything."

Sebastian stared back at him with watery eyes, shaking his head and saying in an unsteady tone, "Chuck, I'm telling you I don't know. Maybe the guy just wanted to rip the place off."

Shitheads like that don't carry guns and blow two hundred on three lap dancers at a time, Chendrill thought, they're opportunists—this guy wasn't.

"Have you done anything illegal?" Chendrill asked as Sebastian stared back at him with a look of astonishment on his face.

Sebastian simply replied, "You know me Chuck, I don't even walk in the bike lane in the park."

It was true, he didn't, thought Chendrill. He'd seen him struggling through the crowd on the seawall when the bike lane was empty. Then looking about the room to the art and pictures on

the wall spanning the man's life, Chendrill said, "May I ask, Sebastian, what about Alan? Is there anything there that may be an issue?"

And that's when Sebastian started crying.

"He was a man's man Chuck—you know, like you are," Sebastian said once the tears had stopped and he'd been able to breathe again. "He really was, just like you Chuck."

Like me, Chendrill thought, and wondered how that could be at all possible as Sebastian carried on, his face brightening as the memories came flooding back.

"He loved to go to the races, it was his thing, you know? I didn't really care, but I went anyway. Every time one of the big stallions came strutting past and its penis would drop down, you know like they do, Alan would say, 'Oh if only I could take the weight.' Oh, he was so funny Chuck, it was like his own little catch phrase—he never missed the opportunity."

It wasn't what Chendrill wanted to hear and, rubbing his hands across the top of his brow, he said, "And?"

"And, you know, it's the way he was."

What is going on? Chendrill thought, what was this little secret Sebastian wanted to let out but was having such a hard time doing? He stared at him waiting, watching as the bubbles inside Sebastian floated towards the surface.

Then taking a deep breath and suddenly letting go, Sebastian said, "There was this man, Chuck. Alan liked him, see he was really into horses and Alan—bless his soul—wanted to have a stake in one. So, he could feel part of it all instead of just one of the punters watching. This man was selling his stake in a thoroughbred from the Island who'd won this and that cup and they wanted to go the whole hog with the horse, hire jockeys and such."

"And you paid?" said Chendrill in the softest of voices.

Sebastian nodded, "Yes Chuck, I was doing well then and it wasn't such a huge amount to put a smile on Alan's face."

"How much?" Chendrill asked in a tone so firm Sebastian had no choice other than to answer.

"Just two hundred and fifty thousand."

Just! Chendrill thought, wondering how much the man actually had made in his life. Then he carried on saying, "And?"

"And Alan bought his share of the horse and it raced and won and...and then it died."

"How?" Chendrill asked in a similar tone.

"It was strange Chuck, in an around about way it was killed by a mosquito."

"It caught a disease from one?" Chendrill replied, wondering if he'd ever heard of a disease horses could catch from a mosquito.

Sebastian stayed quiet for a moment and then taking another deep breath said, "No, Alan was taking the horse to a race out on the island. Alan was driving the vehicle which was pulling the trailer. Anyway, Alan said there was one in the Range Rover around his legs and he freaked out, started swatting it because he was wearing shorts and they went off the road and into a ditch. He said the trailer twisted over and ended up resting against a tree."

Chendrill stared at Sebastian for a moment. A mosquito took them off the road? It didn't sound right. He asked, "And were they hurt?"

"Alan was okay because he was wearing his seat belt—this other guy was knocked out though, Alan said he thought he was dead."

"What about the mosquito?"

"Oh well, who knows if it survived Chuck. They only live a week or so anyway."

Chuck waited a moment, then asked, "No, what I mean is it true about the mosquito?"

“Yes Chuck, they can give a nasty bite, you know that.”

“What about your horse?”

“He said it was ok, but when he got to the racecourse, the horse was dead.”

“So you lost your stake in this horse?”

“Yes Chuck.”

“And anything else?”

“Like what Chuck.”

“Like who was this other ‘Partner’?”

“No, nothing like that, he was straight, Chuck—though I do admit I was jealous as hell. But no, nothing like that. Alan was so upset Chuck, I remember him calling me and crying.”

“And?”

“And, that was it, apart from Alan being sick with worry about it, and then not long after he started getting sick, Chuck. I think it was the stress of it all. Then he got really sick and the man disappeared and I thought that was the end of it. But at Alan’s funeral, when I was in a daze, someone came up and shook my hand and I didn’t know who he was until he said quietly in my ear, ‘you still owe for the horse.’”

“The same guy who was downstairs?” Chendrill asked quietly.

Sebastian shrugged, shaking his head, saying, “It’s a blur Chuck, the whole thing—maybe?”

“And Alan passed on eight years ago?”

Sebastian nodded, closing his eyes, as the whole event replayed in his mind like a nightmare.

Chendrill gave him a moment before saying, “Well it looks as though this is what it could be all about.”

And as always Chendrill was correct, but just how far things were about to go, he could never have imagined.

End of preview chapters

[Buy the full book here](#)