

## Chapter One

"Ah Ahmad," Sheik Ali Hasheeshee sighed to his camel, "The desert isn't what it used to be."

Indeed it was not. The desert of the oil-rich Emirate of Quais on the Arabian Gulf was home not only to its wealthy indigenous population, oil executives, traders, fishermen and ex-pearl divers and a large ex-patriot community of western business executives and engineers, clerks and teachers from neighboring Arab countries, mid-level workers and laborers from the Indian sub-continent, beauticians and cooks from the Philippines, maids from Indonesia and Sri Lanka and drivers and chauffeurs from Bangladesh, but also home to three oil refineries and a massive petrochemical complex along the eastern coast, the culmination, Sheik Ali believed, of a development that had started with the discovery of oil in the country -- the extinction of the nomad. The pulse of life had slowly accelerated from the easy rhythm of the five daily prayers and the cycles of the moon to the roaring five thousand revolutions per minute of the internal combustion engine. The first oil price shock with the vast inflows of petro-dollars gave the patient his first stroke and the second price rise a few years later placed him in a coma. For Sheik Ali himself, certification of death occurred while ambling along one day on Ahmad somewhere vaguely to the southwest, when he was stopped by Saudi Arabian border police and asked for his passport. "A passport for a bedouin! What is the world coming to?" he said to Ahmad who continued to amble along without troubling himself to reply.

However, one aspect of the desert had not changed in ten thousand years: the heat. It was a searing, shimmering heat that made the head throb. Sheik Ali, whose desert bloodline disappeared back into the sands of time, ignored it. His mind was on his discontent. Of short stature, lean, fifty years old with dark-eyes, a gaze as firm as his jaw, an aquiline nose jutting out over a black, unevenly-cut beard showing traces of gray, he suffered or enjoyed, depending on one's viewpoint, one handicap. He bore an unmistakable likeness to the international terrorist, Osama Al Bader. He was also gifted with enormous wealth from the government payoff for the oil reserves discovered under the property on which the government had originally forced his family to settle and the wise investments in the banking, insurance and shipping industries that followed. Greatly respected for his knowledge of the Koran and rigorous observance of Islamic law, the Sharia, dutiful husband and father to his four wives and seventeen children, Sheik Ali lacked little that earthly resource or human manufacture could provide.

Much of that human manufacture lay spread out in the distance before his eyes: the huge steel towers and power lines paralleling the modern motorway from the Mina Al Zafat Generating Plant to Quais city, the three refineries cracking crude oil for the western and eastern economies round the clock, the numerous tank farms storing crude oil and petroleum products, the pipelines, desalination plants, oil loading jetties, the busy port of Shuweelah discharging every conceivable mechanical and industrial whim for the insatiable Quais consumer market, the multiple satellite dishes covering every roof, the glass-covered, multi-storied, air-conditioned souks, the American fast-food restaurants along the Gulf Road, the marble shopping galleries, the skyscrapers crowding Al Soor Square and the city of

Quais crowned by the tallest building in the Middle East, the Liberation communications tower.

For Sheik Ali, however, the tower represented something else -- a modern Tower of Babel. He had watched it rise as he witnessed his countrymen's morals sink. Not that morals had ever been unassailable in Quais, but they had steadily worsened, he was convinced, under the impact of western values. Frequent visits and energetic harangues at the most influential diwanias, the customary late-night gathering of males, produced only the grinding of teeth at best and politely suppressed yawns at worst. He became a tick on every young buck's hide until one of them, raising a wily eyebrow, said, "Ya Sheik, our small sins are beneath the notice of a character so great as yours. Why not go to the source of the great evil where you can truly exercise your virtues. Go to America."

As Sheik Ali turned his camel away and urged Ahmad down a steep dune, he reflected on the young man's statement. "He might be right," he said to himself. He knew how the conquering Muslim armies in history had converted their subjects. "I could just update their tactics. It would be a challenge," he said to Ahmad who concerned himself with his footing and did not trouble to reply. "And it would give them something they badly need, moral improvement," he added as Ahmad shook his head and let a gob of green spit fall to the ground. Sheik Ali knew he was right when, having crossed forty meters of level ground, he and Ahmad were assaulted by the noise and smoke of two high-powered dune buggies which roared around them playfully for three minutes before shooting off for a new target leaving Sheik Ali cut and bruised on the ground and Ahmad racing in fear into the sunset.

"I'm going to America," Sheik Ali informed his wives the next day as they sat in the lounge of his large villa by the sea drinking tea. None asked why -- it was not their place. However, his hard-headed, twenty-two year old daughter, Noora, his eldest child by his second wife, characteristically did ask.

Sheik Ali looked doubtfully at Noora. She was the brightest of his children and very attractive. She had the dark, wavy hair, full, gentle lips, and dark, almond shaped eyes of her mother, the short stature, firm jaw, and slightly aquiline nose of her father and a slim, proportionate figure, unlike her mother. She was also self-confident and with a strong sense of her own superiority. But she also had the tenacity of a fire ant and the persistence of a woodpecker and would hammer away at her father whenever she wanted her way -- just like her mother -- whom the Sheik had divorced so many years ago.

When he explained his reason, she said, "You'll never succeed unless you take me with you."

Sheik Ali looked at his daughter in silence.

Noora did not expect an immediate reply. She knew her father well. She knew he was honest and well respected in the community. But she also knew he viewed the world through a very a small peephole. Apart from his pilgrimages to the holy city of Mecca, he had never traveled to a foreign country and she knew that he would never be able to maneuver through the cultural minefield of American society with his meager grasp of the English language and his resemblance to America's public enemy number one. Noora, however, had spent many summers as a child at her Uncle Abdullah's house near Houston where he passed much of his

time after he had comfortably retired from his last post as Quais's ambassador to the United States. Her English was fluent, she had a good understanding of American ways and the timing was perfect. Noora had just graduated in American studies from Quais-American University with two goals in mind: to visit the United States for an indeterminate length of time and to avoid surrender to an arranged marriage with a visit to the United States for an indeterminate length of time. And here was the opportunity.

"It's time for you to get married," the Sheik finally replied.

"I can do that after I help you in America," Noora said.

"And I have a list of candidates for you to choose from," the Sheik added.

"I can look at it while we're in America. You'll need a translator and a secretary. And I can do both," Noora said.

Sheik Ali did not reply. He knew that Noora was using this as an excuse to avoid the marriage it was his duty to help arrange. However, he also knew his English was not the best and he knew that secretarial assistance would be helpful. But he balked. Staying with his sister's family in Houston when she was younger and under their protection was one matter, but exposing a young, single and very attractive woman from a traditional society to the full gaze of American eyes unfiltered by anything resembling Sharia law or Islamic morals offended his sense of parental and religious duty. Further, with a character just like her mother, Sheik Ali knew that he would be spending as much time doing battle with Noora as protecting her.

"You know you look like the terrorist Osama Al Bader and if the American government even lets you into the country, no one there will have anything to do with you," Noora added.

Sheik Ali's similarity to the terrorist had been driven home to him often enough by shocked or admiring encounters in the streets but he had not yet adjusted to the change. He did not like it and wished it were otherwise. He had no sympathy with the terrorist whom he regarded as the destroyer of all that was best in Islam thereby handing the West an excuse to look down upon their religion and culture and set up shop in their backyards. He was aware that few Americans would have anything to do with him and would recoil instinctively at the likeness which had already been so demonized in the American mind. It was a problem he had yet to solve.

"You have two choices," Noora added. "You can try and adopt a new image that the Americans can understand and relate to or you can have plastic surgery to change your appearance."

"I'm older than Osama Al Bader, so he looks like me. He's the one who needs plastic surgery," the Sheik finally spoke up. "And I don't need a new image," he added.

"You will if you hope to have any chance of success," Noora insisted.

Her father was silent again but Noora knew that he knew she was right. Noora went to her computer and looked up the websites of New York advertising agencies and public relations firms on the internet. She researched the various advertising campaigns and products that each had promoted and drew up a short list

of five in order of preference. At the evening meal, she gave her father the list with full contact details."

"Here," she said. "These are the best public relations and advertising firms in New York. We'll visit the first firm on the list as soon as we get there and see what they can do for you."

"I'm not taking you to New York," Sheik Ali replied.

Noora ignored the statement and asked, "Have you applied for your visa yet?"

To a bedouin, thoughts of passports and visas were as common as fears of U boats surfacing in the Empty Quarter and Sheik Ali did not reply.

"Just as I thought. We'll go to the American Embassy tomorrow morning together."

"I'm not taking you to New York," the Sheik repeated.

Noora did not reply. She knew she would get her way in the end and Sheik Ali said nothing further. He knew she would get her way in the end too.

Being a well-known and respected figure in the community, despite his likeness to the terrorist, Osama Al Bader, Sheik Ali had no difficulty obtaining a six month visa at the American Embassy to visit the United States. Neither did Noora.

However, when Sheik Ali boarded his plane at Quais International Airport and twenty hours later was explaining to the immigration authorities at New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport that, no, he was not the terrorist Osama Al

Bader, that he was older than Osama Al Bader, so Osama Al Bader looked like him, Sheik Ali, the immigration authorities were only half-convinced and reduced the Sheik's visa to three months. And Noora was not with him.

## Chapter Two

Eighty-seven year-old John-boy Rivers sat asleep in his wheelchair at a board meeting in the conference room of Consolidated Amoeba Corporation of Muleshoe, Texas, the largest family-owned firm for sewage treatment products in the county while his son, fifty-nine year old Angus, unaffectionately known as “Big Sludge,” recalled to the reluctantly-assembled board members -- his younger twin brothers, Wyatt and Wesley and Wyatt’s son, Clayton -- the acts of god that had recently brought the corporation to its financial knees.

“One of you boys just might remember the flight of our pension fund manager along with the pension fund to no forwarding address—” Angus said.

"Sure. I remember his no forwarding address," fifty-seven year old Wyatt commented as he turned a bored look out of the window at the dry, desolate, windswept landscape surrounding Muleshoe.

"And the arrest of our chief financial officer who couldn't quite remember what he did with the company cash reserves," Angus continued ignoring his brother's comment.

“Yep. I remember he couldn't quite remember,” Wesley said and turned a bored look up at the ceiling where an equally bored horsefly was casually circling the light fixture.

"Good, then you might also remember the plunge in the company share value right after the news reports of his arrest when one of our lenders called in his loan," Angus replied.

"I remember the plunge in the company share value right after your near unanimous reelection as chairman last year," Wyatt said while Angus turned on him a look of pretended amusement, which Wyatt ignored.

The ointment of unanimity had indeed greased one very awkward fly, old John-boy himself, founder and largest shareholder of the firm, who had little respect for his son's management of corporate affairs and blamed him for the recent financial disasters. His was the sole vote against reappointment.

"If those are your acts of god, then I'm for opening talks with the devil. That's your department, brother Wyatt. I heard you talking to him the other day after you missed that putt for a double bogey in Vegas," Wesley said.

"That was after I first heard you praise the Lord and drive your shot straight into the water," replied Wyatt.

Rivers brothers gatherings always had a bit of the bovine about them. They were all well over six feet tall and plus two hundred and fifty pounders with their movements slow and aimless like the milling herd. It was also a herd in which the bulls predominated. Angus was a widower. His wife had died of breast cancer five years earlier. Wyatt's wife had divorced him after thirty-five years of marriage though she had dutifully remained in the area to harass him with suits for ever more

alimony and be near Clayton. Wesley's wife had left him years ago taking to California all the money in their accounts, the jewelry, the stocks and bonds and the title deed of their house while thoughtfully leaving behind the bill for her celebrity divorce attorney.

Any hint of the bovine, however, ended at the dinner table. They were not ruminants. On the contrary. Family barbecues at old John-boy's ranch saw the brothers eagerly exercising their twin passions for the carnivorous repast and the arcana of 1950's rock n' roll culture of which each believed himself to be the master.

To the casual observer, there was little to distinguish the brothers. Along with the paunch, they each had brown eyes and light brown hair going gray and thin, though Angus was an inch taller than the twins and preferred a rumpled business suit to the rumpled western suits favored by the twins. But to the Rivers brothers themselves, differences were fundamental. While they all agreed that Elvis was the king of rock n' roll, Wyatt placed the killer from Tennessee, Jerry Lee Lewis, in the number two spot whereas Wesley reserved that honor for fellow Texan, Buddy Holly. Angus could not accept that anybody could deny the number two spot to the creator of the duck walk, Chuck Berry. Family barbecues often had the taste of sour apples.

"Looks like the Muleshoe High School football team is in for a plunge this year," Clayton commented as he looked over the Sports section of the local tabloid, the Muleshoe Muleshoe, and noticed a no-wins prediction by the Sports editor.

Thirty-year old Clayton Rivers was a former football standout at Muleshoe High which had earned him a scholarship to South by Southeast Texas Tech. But Clayton had found fame at college, not for the athletic ability that his two hundred and forty pound, six foot four inch River's frame would suggest, but for an achievement of which he was the most proud. He had been voted the best Elvis impersonator on campus all four years.

Clayton, however, raised Elvis-worship to an impressive level. He had memorized the lyrics to all his songs, dressed like Elvis most days, maintained thick sideburns, dyed his hair black and discussed his most recent encounter with the King to anyone who would or would not listen. Forced by the company crisis to economize, Clayton had been acting as chief financial officer and, as a physical education graduate, his relationship with the world of finance was fraught. However, Clayton was good-natured, easy-going and willing to please for his salary and assigned himself a work-out of no less than two hours a week with the company books.

Clayton was negligently fingering the long silver chain and large medallion set with a shiny, light blue, imitation gem he wore around the collar of his Elvis jumpsuit as he folded the newspaper while Angus continued his recital of doom in the weary voice of a schoolmaster well-acquainted with the foibles of his pupils, "Now then, anybody object if we go through item one on the agenda? It's called finding a solution to our liquidity problem."

"That's not item one on my agenda, Big Sludge," Wesley commented looking impatiently at his watch. "Mine says 'old business' and we haven't got any. I move we go to item two."

"Item two on mine says 'new business'," Wyatt said looking with equal impatience at his watch, "and unless an apple falls on the head of the Research and Development department, we don't even have a prayer for that. I move we adjourn the meeting."

"Not so fast brothers," Angus said. "Why don't you just try adding up items one and two on the agenda and tell me what you come up with."

"A weekend in Vegas?" Wesley offered.

"Not this time brother Wes. It adds up to just one thing -- no jobs."

"Make that a month in Vegas then," Wesley commented.

"It's going to be a lifetime on Lonely Street if we don't find any money soon," Angus responded.

"I don't know what you're worrying about, Big Sludge. The sums in our books have never added up," Wyatt commented then turned to his brother Wesley and said, "Ed Cooley and the Dimples, brother Wes. First and only hit?"

While Wesley considered the question with another look at the horsefly circling the ceiling light, Angus ignored the question and continued, "Our numbers have not always added up because of the advances on salaries you brothers have a habit of loading up on. But they're not adding up now at a rate that's putting our balance sheet into a whole new science," and searched round the conference table for physiognomies of concern.

He found none -- he didn't really expect to -- although the spasm that crossed old John-boy's brow at that moment could have been interpreted as one of concern had anyone thought to look in his direction or imagined him to be in anything other than the deepest of reveries.

"As you brothers would know if you paid as much attention to company business as you do to the ladies at the Pink Pussycat," Angus continued. "The patent on our microbic sewage digester, the Sludge-Hammer, expires in three months and so does our line of credit with the bank. With no money-maker in the pipeline to replace it with, our jobs won't be worth a mule shoe," and smiled with pretended humility at the cleverness -- which no one acknowledged -- of his reference to the corporate homestead.

"Priscilla', Royal Roost record label," Wesley said while slowly removing his eyes from the ceiling.

"Year?"

"1957."

"Damn," Wyatt replied not quite under his breath.

"Do you mean our jobs as in yours and mine, Big Sludge?" Wesley asked in a tone indicating strong satisfaction at brother Wyatt's distress and a slight hint of reproof that he could imagine for even a moment that he, brother Wes, would not have known Ed Cooley and the Dimples.

"Exactly," Angus confirmed. "Without the income from sales of the Sludge-Hammer to the sewage industry, the gravy train's over."

"What's our Research and Development department working on?" Wyatt inquired.

"The French Riviera. He's still on vacation and won't be back until the August Board meeting," Angus replied shaking his head ruefully as he reflected on his son, twenty-two year old Matthew, an honors graduate in chemistry this past June which the shortage of capital had made the sole researcher and developer in the R and D department. Angus had rewarded him for his honors achievement with a trip to Europe and sent him off with strict instructions and feint hope to find something useful that the company could work on and develop into a money-spinner. It would also keep him a bit longer away from the center of corporate affairs. Just as old John-boy had lost faith in his son's management of the company, Angus had yet to discover any reason to place a premature faith in the management prospects of his own son. Based on the historic and the contemporary, the trajectory of Matthew's career path would end on the dance floor of a Las Vegas disco. Angus viewed the trip to Europe as a test of Matthew's maturity. As his glance fell on the wilted cactus plant that his secretary, Millie-Fay, had placed in the center of the conference table in a forgivable attempt to give the room some atmosphere several months ago, any optimism Angus was inclined to feel went the way of the plant.

"I can't wait to have a look at his research. We all know what a great developer he is," commented Clayton who had a very different opinion of his cousin. Eight years senior to Matthew, Clayton had a great deal of affection for his cousin -- especially after Clayton had begun to take him to places that Matthew would not easily have run across unguided so early in his teens and Matthew had demonstrated an ability to keep secrets.

"It better be something serious if he wants this company to survive," Angus commented as Wesley said to brother Wyatt, "'Oh Julie', recording artist and record label."

Wyatt looked away from the cockroach he had been observing cross the length of the conference room floor and disappear into the kitchenette and replied with feigned weariness, "The Crescendos, NASCO Records, Nashville, Tennessee," and gleefully watched brother Wes turn his head away in disgust. Wyatt added to Angus, "What do you suggest we do in the meantime, Big Sludge?"

"That's what I thought I was paying you to know," Angus replied.

"I would know if I thought you'd listen," Wyatt responded.

"Well I'm listening now. And where's your report?"

"What report?"

"The report on trends in the sewage industry you were asked to submit."

"Lost it," Wyatt replied.

"How?" Angus pressed.

"If I knew that, I'd have it again."

"And what about your report?" Angus said to Wesley. "Don't tell me you've lost yours too."

"Nope. Brother Wyatt lost it. Mine was with his," Wesley replied unaware that he was supposed to submit a report.

Wyatt looked at his brother in surprise but said nothing.

“Does anybody in this family care about this company besides me?” Angus rhetorically asked as old John-boy, suddenly springing to life, shouted, “Paint that horse,” before sinking back to sleep again in his wheelchair.

Never a memorable speaker -- the chewing tobacco didn't help -- since resigning the chairmanship a few years back, old John-boy's verbal forays in the boardroom had grown increasingly cryptic. So had his behavior. Never one to put up more than token resistance to feminine charms and a widower of fifteen years, he had recently developed an indiscriminate tendency to propose to any member of the opposite sex which, if left unchecked, could see him married and his sons inheritance correspondingly reduced. And his alarmed sons had done the checking. At a crisis meeting four months earlier, the Rivers brothers had discussed the matter.

"We need a three hundred pound prison guard to keep old John-boy away from the females," Wesley had said.

"We need a three hundred pound all-in wrestler to keep the females away from old John-boy," Wyatt had said.

Angus placed an ad on the internet for a nurse cum bodyguard to which a thirty-five year old former prison guard and dominatrix from Hamburg, Germany had responded with her curriculum vitae and photos. Her body type compared favorably with a Holstein milker, she had the stern, unsmiling visage native to her race and former duties and she was duly hired. Her name was Helga, but the name so appalled the Rivers brothers, -- "it just doesn't sound Texan" they said, -- they renamed her Helga Sue.

“Anybody know a song called 'Paint That Horse'?" Wesley queried.

"Anybody know a group called 'Paint That Horse'?" Wyatt asked.

"I don't know any," Clayton said. "Maybe that's something he wants in the minutes."

“We don't take minutes of our meetings," Wesley commented.

"Yes we do," Angus said. "My secretary takes them."

“How does she do that? Mind reading? I've never seen Millie-Fay at any of our meetings," Wesley said.

“There's no need with you lot. Since I make all the decisions, I just tell her what to write down afterwards," Angus replied.

“Then I move we adjourn the meeting so you can get on with it," Wesley proposed and got up to leave.

“Not so fast brother Wes," Angus stopped him. “This meeting is special. There's a financial crisis and I want everyone here in this family to understand that.”

“Right, Big Sludge. I move we understand there's a financial crisis and adjourn the meeting," Wyatt interrupted and also got up to leave.

“And we've got to find a solution now!" Angus said raising his voice. As Wesley and Wyatt sat down, Angus continued, “We have just enough cash to cover salaries and overheads until the end of October which is exactly the date when the

patent on our Sludge-Hammer runs out. Now, without straining too many muscles, has any one of you got any ideas about how to turn this company around?"

"I've got all kinds--" Wyatt said.

"You haven't had an idea since Elvis came out of the Army. And even that one was bad," Wesley interrupted. "Jody Reynolds first hit?" he added.

"'Endless Sleep'," Angus cut in before Wyatt could answer. "Now can we get back to the purpose of this meeting? Brother Wyatt? You said you've got some ideas? Let's hear just one."

"We can start by cutting costs. Abolish the finance and the marketing departments. The finance department's got no cash and marketing's got nothing to market," Wyatt replied. "We can rehire if we ever get both."

"I'd like to hold onto them just awhile longer. Miracles do happen. That son of mine might just come up with something from the Riviera and we just might come up with a solution at this meeting," Angus replied.

"Ok then, combine the two and reduce the staff. One department doing nothing is cheaper than two departments doing nothing," Wyatt said.

"That might cut the spending of some of the money we don't have. Anybody got any ideas how to fill in the income side of our balance sheet?" Angus asked looking around the conference table at the familiar blank faces.

"Gwaine. Clip that rabbit's ears," old John-boy said renewing signs of life before sinking back to sleep in his wheelchair once again.

"Now there's one for you, brother Wes. Know any recording artist named 'Gwaine'?" Wyatt challenged.

"Know any song named 'Gwaine'?" Wesley countered.

"Know any rabbits named Gwaine?" Clayton added.

"I'm still waiting for an idea," Angus said as he glared at the twins.

"Borrow from the bank, Big Sludge," Wesley proposed.

"There's one small problem with that," Angus said. "No bank is going to lend us any money if we've got no new product to sell to put money back in the bank. And do you know how I know this? Our bank has already told me so. Isn't that right, Clayton?"

"Yup. Last time I went in there, they wouldn't even break a tenner for me," Clayton replied.

"I don't see the problem, Big Sludge. Do it like the corporate big boys," Wyatt said.

"Oh? And how do the corporate big boys do it?" Angus asked.

"With other peoples money," he replied.

"And what kind of people would give money to a firm on the edge of bankruptcy?" Angus pressed.

"Someone interested in the business."

“Why would anyone be interested in a business going bankrupt?”

“Any number of reasons. Tax loss, revive an old trademark, a shell company for speculation, a job for your mistress to see her when you want.”

“At a sewage company?” Angus interrupted irritably.

“Well, it may not be the ideal, but why take the tragic view of things, Big Sludge? The point is there might be some one out there willing to invest in the firm,” Wyatt said.

“Right,” Wesley added. “We could sell some of our shares to some white knight and give ourselves a raise.”

“Any buyer would most likely insist on buying a majority of the shares. It would mean a loss of family control,” Wyatt said.

“If we get the right price, why not? None of us is going to live forever. Might as well take it while we can,” Wesley replied.

Angus shook his head in disbelief. “And just where do you think you're going to find anybody fool enough to buy our shares even if he does develop a sudden allergy to the company books?”

The question seemed unanswerable as no one spoke.

Wyatt removed his glance from the kitchenette and looked over at old John-boy asleep and breathing heavily in his wheelchair, observed the shriveled pink frame, the wispy remnants of white hair, the bent, hairy ears, the sagging, road-

mapped skin, the spot of dried chewing tobacco on the left side of his mouth -- and found inspiration.

“Why a facelift, Big Sludge!” he exclaimed.

“A facelift! You’re going to find someone with a facelift to buy our shares?”

“That’s not what I mean, Big Sludge. A facelift gives a person a new look, a new self-confidence and improves their image of themselves. It also makes people look at them differently too. What we need for this company is a facelift so to speak, something to spice up our image and attract a new investor.”

“And just how do you spice up the image of a nearly bankrupt sewage company?” Angus insisted on knowing.

“A good public relations firm should be able to do that. That’s their job,” Wyatt said.

“That’s right,” Clayton agreed. “A good PR firm could give us the image of a solid, progressive, cutting-edge company on the verge of an important technological breakthrough. Then we start the rumor mill going that a big competitor or some merger and acquisition folks are interested in us and there it is. The buy-out buzzards will be circling Muleshoe in no time.”

“Exactly. I move we engage a public relations firm,” Wesley proposed.

“And how are we supposed to pay for a public relations firm without any cash?” Angus queried.

"On commission," Wesley answered. "If we sell part of the company as a result of their efforts, they can have a percentage of the price."

"I can't think of any reputable firm that would take a fee on that basis," Angus reflected.

"I can," Clayton said. "Fellow I met at a convention. He's with an agency in New York City."

"That convention couldn't have been at the tables in Las Vegas, could it?" Angus asked with a knowing look at his nephew.

"Now that you mention it, there was a table there," Clayton replied. "Want me to contact the agency? Best in the business, so I'm told."

"I'll bet it was him who told you," Angus remarked. But as he looked at his nephew in his Elvis pompadour playing with his Elvis wristwatch, at brother Wes gazing languidly up at the ceiling again, at brother Wyatt turning another expectant look at the door of the kitchenette and at old John-boy dry-frozen in his wheelchair with a new trickle of tobacco-colored spittle running down the left side of his mouth, he knew that he had no choice. "Ok, Clayton, arrange the details, but tell Mr. Ad-man we've got to have our white knight checkbook in hand by 31 October or no payment."

"Good. I move we adjourn the meeting."

Without waiting for a second to the proposal, the twins got up from the conference table to return to the Pink Pussycat while Clayton recombed his Elvis pompadour before going off to meet his girlfriend, Priscilla imitator, Gloria.

As they passed old John-boy in his wheel chair, Wyatt said to Wesley, "The Bellnotes first hit?" when old John-boy suddenly woke up and shouted, "Three out of four pies, bingo! I've had it!"

The brothers puzzled over this one. They couldn't think of a single title, artist or record label named or containing the phrase, "Three out of four pies, bingo." They did, however, recognize that old John-boy had correctly identified the Bellnotes first hit, "I've Had It" and concluded that old John-boy must be only half-crazy.

## Chapter Three

“Super Thing Advertising Agency,” the fifty-one year old secretary answered the phone as ambitious and rising advertising star Brian Berman strode into his outer office, said, “Morning Rose,” and walked into his office, an office tastefully furnished with the appropriate attributes of his creative personality and commercial success. There was a wide Italian-styled desk expressive of the breadth and scope of his advertising genius and the large bookcases and shelves bursting with his offspring: the studies, the reports, the surveys and the numerous campaign ideas responsible for his growing reputation and lengthening list of clientele. A sleek, multi-media computer and communications system was his command center over the world, and the long conference table and chairs gave him a strategic, seventy-fifth floor view of his special part of it -- lower Manhattan.

One wall testified to the satisfaction of the beneficiaries of his advertising wizardry in the form of certificates of achievement, plaques of excellence, awards of distinction and admissions to various exclusive societies while the opposite wall displayed the products of this success -- the photos, posters and exhibits of some of Brian's greatest creations. In one, Alexander leads the march through Asia in a popular brand of cross-trainer while in others Nero is fiddling before a burning Rome with a well-known brand of filtered cigarette dangling from his lips, Washington and his men are speeding across the Delaware in high-performance jet-skis, Mr. Stanley is presenting Dr. Livingstone with the latest generation mobile phone in the deepest African jungle, Jonah is emerging from the whale to refresh himself on parade with a new generation of fizzy soft-drinkers while in another

Genghis Khan affirms his military dependence on the reliability of a top-rated courier service.

Opposite the large-framed Life-time Achievement Award of the American Society of Psychology and Advertising, stared the cold, manic gaze of Adolf Hitler dressed only in a pair of camouflaged, beltlooped boxer shorts manufactured by a market leader with the large caption overhead in bold print, "He Had a Pair." It was Brian's favorite and the culmination of some original market research he had carried out which had earned him the Society's award. Brian had conducted a study of the ordinary American's reaction when shown the photographs of fifty different individuals of various classes, ages and occupations. Correlating the reactions with the actual status of the individuals in the photographs, Brian hoped to establish the core characteristic to which the average American responded positively.

"My first volunteer," Brian had explained to his girlfriend at the time as he tied her loosely to the bedposts in his lower east side apartment, "identified each of the fifty individuals as serial-rapists."

Brian's girlfriend was aroused. "What did you do?" she teasingly growled.

One thing Brian did not do was immediately report the volunteer to the police. He regarded him as a statistical anomaly and went on to the next volunteer.

"And what did the next one say?" his lover said arching her back and tugging at her cords.

"The next one said the same thing," Brian answered as he removed his shirt and loosened his belt.

"What did you do then, you big thing," she challenged as she lowered her gaze.

“In the interest of science of course, I plunged ahead,” he explained as he stood in front of the bed, removed his trousers and shorts and opened the festivities. “I interviewed another one”--moan--”got the same result”--groan--”interviewed another five”--ooh--”got similar results”--sigh--”interviewed smiling teachers”--bite--”friendly housewives”--yelp--”proud laborers”--moan--”confident doctors”--shudder--”elderly matrons”--aah--”kindly clerics”--sigh--”about one hundred in all,” Brian continued as his lover released herself from the cords and the ensuing battle covered the four corners of the bedroom and all parts of the anatomy.

”An average of eighty-seven point nine percent of the volunteers”--thud--”identified those in the photos as serial-rapists”--crash--”And that lead to my great discovery,” he said plunging even deeper in the interests of physiology.

Stressing her satisfaction with fingernail scratches to his chest, his lover's final tribute was a healthy bite of his ear as Brian summed up, “The survey shows that the ordinary American is full of aggression,” he said feeling his ear for blood.

He got up slowly and went into the bathroom followed by his lover. As she soaped his chest in the shower, Brian added, “The successful ad has to appeal to that aggression and link it to the client's product,” and let out a yell as his lover dug into his chest with a hard scrubbing brush.

It was shortly after this discovery that Brian wrote an article about it in the Society's house journal, “Psycho-Adman.” It attracted the attention of an underwear manufacturer who approached Brian for his advice on the launch of a new line of men's slim wear. Putting his new discovery to work, Brian rejected not only the product design, but the entire concept as well. It was not to be slim. It was to be macho.

Brian had the firm develop the camouflage boxer short with cartridge belt loops sized to hold the ammunition of lovers -- packages of condoms. He then searched the annals of history for its great heroes and oppressors, dressed them in the new garment and pictured them with a smug look one after the other in a 'he-man of the month' campaign with the phrase, "He Had a Pair", featured just below the manufacturers' logo. Attila the Hun had a pair, David slew Goliath in one, Pyrrhus owed his victory to it, Caligula and his horse each had a pair, Constantine saw one at the Milvian Bridge, William conquered in one, Robespierre wore his till Thermidor, Ivan the Terrible never took his off, Torquemada put them on his head, Quisling wore his inside out and Big Daddy Amin wore two pairs at once.

The ads were so successful that the Society quickly presented Brian with its life-time achievement award, a remarkable tribute to a twenty-nine-year old, nearly as remarkable as the bruised and bandaged appearance he made at the honorary presentation dinner one night after his girlfriend became his ex-girlfriend.

The manufacturer saw his sales and profits soar. Men took pride in them, ideas grew kinky in them, women surrendered to them, and the shorts quickly became a fashion item as men took to revealing the belt looped waistband slightly above their trousers in order to attract partners with a tantalizing view of a full stock of condoms. It soon became more fashionable to attract even more partners with a view of the waistband holding a very small stock of condoms suggesting great demand for the wearer's services. It was only a matter of time, Brian imagined, before one fashion pioneer would begin wearing his outside his trousers.

After Hitler brought the series to a successful close, Brian revealed the true scope of his advertising genius when he produced another series of ads of losers of

the month with the caption, "What did this man forget?" under the manufacturers' logo. With the briefs now on everyone's lips -- figuratively of course -- the answer was obvious. Darius forgot his at Marathon, Caesar went briefless on the Ides, Abelard stepped out thoughtlessly in love with Heloise, Magellan sailed searching for his, Murat should have bathed in his, Napoleon faced Wellington in a competitor's brand and neither the Commander of the Light Brigade nor General Custer had the sartorial presence of mind on the morning of their fateful encounters. The series was brought to a successful climax with a close-up of an absentminded-looking Saddam Hussein on the eve of the mother of battles.

Brian had recently completed his campaign for the undecided twelve percent of the population which surveys exposed sitting dangerously on the fence in the Emperor's brand. In the new ads, Icarus completes his flight, the Qumran scribe his scrolls, Leonardo his supper, Schubert his symphony, Oedipus his analysis, Freud his cigar and Toulouse-Lautrec his spinach all clad in the well-known undergarment.

Contemplating the launch of a ladies version of the "She Had a Pair" campaign for a brassiere, Brian had already penciled in appearances for the Amazon Queen, the Biblical Judith, Salome, Empress Theodora, Charlotte Corday, Lizzy Borden and was searching for one more name when he switched on his computer and noticed an e mail message from his ex-wife. He added Mrs. John Wayne Bobbit to his list.

He also noted a message from Clayton Rivers of Muleshoe, Texas asking him to phone. However, before he could do so, his secretary entered in a panic to say that there was a strange person in reception, someone named Sheik Ali Hasheeshee claiming to be from the Emirate of Quais, who looked suspiciously like

the international terrorist, Osama Al Bader, and wanted to see him. She asked if she should call the police, but Brian declined reasoning that any individual who looked like the terrorist Osama Al Bader and undertook to see him had client potential. His secretary cautiously led in the Sheik dressed in long, white dishdasha, white skullcap, white cloth and black headband, into Brian's office.

As his secretary left the office and closed the door, Brian asked the Sheik, "What can I do for you?" as he got up from his desk and indicated a chair for him to take at the long conference table in his office.

"I need a new image," the Sheik replied sitting down.

Brian scrutinized the thin, austere, Al Bader lookalike, in strange desert dress, standing in front of his office window framing a Manhattan skyline, a skyline that once contained a view of the Twin Towers, and could only agree. Indeed, he could think of nothing more urgent. Al Bader lookalikes bustling about New York City could not be conducive to public tranquility.

"Have you thought of plastic surgery?" he asked. Brian had the blunt edge.

"Why?" he replied. The Sheik had the blunt edge too.

"You can't be unaware that you resemble to an extraordinary degree, both in dress and appearance, America's public enemy number one, Osama Al Bader," Brian replied.

"I'm older than Osama Al Bader, so he resembles me," the Sheik replied.

“Perhaps so,” Brian commented. “But even with a halo and wings, a public enemy lookalike is a very hard sell.”

“You were recommended to me and I was told you could do the job.”

“Thank you for the confidence,” Brian replied.

Brian again scrutinized the short, white-robed figure which contrasted so sharply with his own tall frame, light brown hair, straight nose, pale blue eyes, clean-shaven face, Jewish ancestry and Italian suit. If Brian's ancestors sprang from the same ancient Semitic tree as the Sheik, it must have been cut and grafted onto another species at a very early stage of its growth.

“In order to create the right image for an individual, we usually start with a few tests to determine his type of personality and character,” Brian continued. “Then, with the individual’s goals in mind, we create an image best suited to the personality type. What are your goals, may I ask?”

“To conquer America for Islam,” he replied.

Brian looked at the Sheik in complete surprise and said, “You want a new image to conquer America for Islam?”

“Right.”

“And the American government gave you a visa to do this?”

“Yes,” the Sheik replied without offering any details.

Brian made a mental note to have his secretary call his congressman immediately after the interview. “And what kind of image do you think you need to conquer America for Islam?” he asked.

“I don’t know. That’s why I’ve come to see you,” the Sheik replied.

The Sheik’s confidence was flattering. But as Brian ran a list of the world’s great conquerors through his mind -- Attila, Genghis and Adolf prominent among them -- he could not think of a single one who had concerned himself with his image or had consulted a public relations executive prior to giving the signal to rape and pillage no less obtained a visa from the authorities of the nation he was about to lay waste. “May I ask you who recommended me?” Brian asked.

“My daughter.”

“I see,” Brian said, though he did not. “And did your daughter advise you how to conquer America for Islam?”

“No. I know how to do it,” Sheik Ali replied. “But I need the right image.”

“Of course.” Brian looked at the Sheik with deep curiosity. “Can you tell me how you plan to conquer America for Islam, if that isn’t giving away too many of your military secrets. It might have an influence on our image-building strategy.”

“It’s no secret. It’s in the Koran. I’m going to buy an American company,” the Sheik replied.

“The Koran says you can conquer America by buying one of its companies?” Brian asked in some surprise and wondered why no Muslim had thought to do this before.

“Not exactly. But the tactics are there.”

“I see,” Brian said as he made a mental note to have his secretary purchase a copy of the Muslim holy book and pass it to his broker. “What kind of company do you plan to buy? Weapons industry shares are at an all-time low, so my broker tells me.”

“I don’t need weapons. I want to buy an American company that is solid, progressive, on the cutting-edge of science and on the verge of an important technological breakthrough.”

Much relieved, Brian cancelled that mental note to have his secretary purchase a copy of the Muslim holy book and pass it to his broker and continued, “And when you buy this American company -- one that is solid, progressive, on the cutting edge of science and on the verge of an important technological breakthrough -- America will convert to Islam?”

“Yes,” the Sheik replied.

“Good god,” Brian said to himself and lamented the shortage of Brooklyn Bridges for sale. He quickly calculated the cost of creating a new image for the Sheik adding in a hefty nuisance factor for a public relations campaign required to transform the face of an international terrorist into something approaching Mom’s

apple pie and a Texas longhorn. Such a fee would also boost his own image with his broker, he reflected.

Brian named his fee plus expenses and Sheik Ali replied, "Ok, but only if I agree to the image you come up with. And I have to have my company within three months. That's when my visa expires."

"What? You have to conquer America for Islam in three months? That's impossible."

"I don't have to conquer all of America in three months, but I have to have my company and get the process started," the Sheik explained.

"One hi-tech company in three months is still a tight deadline. I'll expect a success bonus of fifteen million dollars placed into a bank account designated by yours truly."

"If I accept the new image and succeed in buying a company within three months, I'll put ten million dollars into your designated bank account."

"And you'll have to follow all my instructions and my timetable regarding your image."

"Only if I like the image."

Brian could hardly believe it. Ten million dollars. He had always planned to open his own agency and become a multi-millionaire, but he thought it would take a few more years of hard work. But suddenly it appears in the form of a diminutive, image-seeking, terrorist lookalike from a far-away desert. The three

months' deadline was tight indeed. It was now the first week of August which meant that Brian had to succeed by the end of October. However, he knew his skills to be incomparable and considered his fee and his ten million dollar bonus already in the bank. He made a mental note to phone his broker, have Rose book a week-end flight to Las Vegas and reminded himself to pack a whip, then cancelled the mental note and reminder. "I'm in the big leagues now," he said to himself and made a new mental note to have Rose open an offshore bank account in the Cayman Islands and book a week in Honolulu and reminded himself to pack a whip and handcuffs.

"Alright then. Let's begin the tests," Brian said and got up, went to his desk where he selected some folders and a notepad from a desk drawer and returned to the long table. Taking a gold pen from his inside pocket, he said, "First, I'll need some information on your family background, education, interests, etcetera, etcetera. Now then, full name?"

"Sheik Ali Mohammed Al Hasheeshee."

"Married, single or divorced?"

"Married with four wives."

"Really?" Brian looked up in surprise. "Don't they allow divorce in Quais?"

"Of course they do. I've had eleven."

"Well, that takes care of the question on hobbies. What about children?"

"Seven boys and ten girls."

"That answers the one on occupation. Education? I think I can guess what you studied," Brian commented.

"I studied the Koran."

"Anything else?"

"Nothing else is necessary," Sheik Ali replied.

Brian looked at him skeptically before commenting, "Well, I suppose if you studied one book, married fifteen times and produced seventeen children, you must be right," and revived that mental note to have his secretary purchase a copy of the Muslim holy book, but amended it to keep the copy and not to pass it to his broker.

"Have you read the Koran?" Sheik Ali asked.

"No."

"I'll give you a copy," Sheik Ali said.

"Thank you," Brian said and cancelled that revived and amended mental note to his secretary. He continued, "Now then, let's start the tests. I'm going to show you photos of fifty different individuals and you're to give me your reaction." Holding up a photo of kindly-looking grandmother, he said, "What do you see?"

"An infidel," Sheik Ali replied.

"An infidel?" Brian looked again at the photo he had used in so many tests, saw the same kindly-looking matron and said, "Do you see anything else?"

"No."

"Well, all right," Brian said and held up a photo of a determined-looking young man dressed in a track suit and asked, "What do you see in this one?"

"An infidel," Sheik Ali replied again.

Brian looked at the photo once more and saw only the determined fresh look of a competitive, young athlete. He picked out the photo of a freckle-faced child eating ice-cream and Sheik Ali saw another infidel. It was the same for the heavy-lidded airline pilot, the panic-stricken stewardess, the impatient doctor, the shocked patient, the grinning lobbyist, the wider-grinning politician, the exuberant stockbroker, the crest-fallen bankrupt, the pouting starlet and the forgiving priest. All were identified as infidels.

"What makes you identify them all as infidels?" Brian asked.

"I can tell."

"How can you tell?"

"I can't tell you."

"Why not?"

"You're an infidel."

There seemed nothing more to be gained with this test and Brian put the pictures back in the folder and selected another folder containing various forms of inkblots. He wrote on his notepad, "consistent."

Brian held up an inkblot form universally recognized by previous subjects as having the general shape of a butterfly. "What do you see here?" Brian asked.

"The crushed skull of an adulteress," Sheik Ali answered.

Brian viewed the picture again with some surprise and said, "How can you tell it's the skull of an adulteress?"

"Because the penalty for adultery is stoning. It's written in the Koran. Her skull's been crushed with a rock."

Brian made a mental note to tell his secretary not to keep the Sheik's gift copy of the Koran but to pass it to his broker and continued, "But how do you know it's the skull of an adulteress and not the adulterer?"

"It's a small crushed skull."

Without comment, Brian produced another inkblot showing the general outline of a dirigible and said, "What do you see here?"

"There's the adulterer."

"How do see that? It isn't anything like a skull."

"Yes it is," the Sheik insisted.

Brian looked doubtfully at the Sheik. He next held up a form easily identifiable as an octopus though lacking part of one tentacle and asked him what he saw.

"A thief," Sheik Ali replied.

Brian could scarcely believe it. "A thief! How on earth do you see a thief in that?"

"Because it's missing part of a tentacle. According to the Sharia, the penalty for theft is amputation."

Brian made mental note never to take a holiday in the Middle East as he next held up the perfect silhouette of a duck and when Sheik Ali correctly identified it as a duck, Brian frankly didn't believe him.

"What makes you think it's a duck?"

"Anyone can see it's a duck. It's got the wide bill, the slender neck, the webbed feet, the swept wings and the rising tail. What makes you think it isn't?"

Brian was still skeptical. "Have they got ducks in Quais?"

"Have you got camels in Manhattan?"

"No," Brian replied.

"But you'd recognize one, wouldn't you?"

"Let's try another test," Brian suggested as he wrote on his notepad, "good duck recognition." He selected a folder containing photos of various landscapes designed to determine sensitivity to nature. He looked at the first one, an idyllic south sea atoll with a solitary palm tree and two coconuts, thought of the octopus and put it back in the folder. He chose another folder and said, "OK, I'm going to describe the beginning of an action scene for you and you're to complete it for me

when I give you the word. Now then, you go into a bar. You ask the bartender for—“

"There are no bars in Quais," Sheik Ali interrupted.

Brian looked up dubiously at the Sheik. "Then where did you meet all those wives of yours?"

"At my mother's house. Our society is traditional. Marriages are arranged by the bridegroom's mother," he replied.

Brian stared for an instant and then continued, "OK. You go into your mother's house, you ask the bartender for a shot of whisky and--"

"No one drinks whisky in Quais. Alcohol is forbidden to Muslims," Sheik Ali interrupted again.

"Then what do you drink?" Brian asked.

"Mostly tea, sometimes coffee."

"Right. You go into your mother's house, you ask the bartender for a shot of mostly tea, sometimes coffee and a beautiful, young girl dressed in a bikini--"

"No woman would dress in a bikini in front of a man. She would be covered in a black veil," the Sheik interrupted once again.

"Fine. You go into your mother's house, you ask the bartender for a shot of mostly tea, sometimes coffee and a beautiful, young girl dressed in a bikini and covered in a black veil and carrying a whip -- you have no objection to the whip?"

"No."

"Hum. Good. The young girl comes up to you--"

"No young girl would come up to a man by herself," Sheik Ali broke in yet again. "She would be accompanied by her mother or some male relatives."

"Of course. You go to your mother's house, you order a shot of mostly tea, sometimes coffee, a beautiful, young girl dressed in a bikini, covered in a black veil and carrying a whip, comes up to you accompanied by her mother and some male relatives and lifts up her veil to reach into to bikini bra and pulls out--"

"She would never lift up her veil--"

--She lowers her rubberized arm to the floor, reaches underneath her veil and all the way up the her bikini bra, pulls out a package of condoms--"

"A good Muslim doesn't use birth control--"

--Pulls out a package of chewing gum, retracts her rubberized arm and says to you--"

"She would never speak to the man first--"

--She holds up the package of chewing gum while some of her male relatives say to you. Ok, it's your turn," Brian stopped and then said, "What would they say?"

Sheik Ali looked dubiously at Brian and replied, "It's time for prayer."

Brian looked dubiously back at Sheik Ali as he thought to himself, "It certainly is," and wrote on his notepad, "Traditional."

Brian looked through some more folders though with diminishing hope. There was the series of three pictures of various items or activity to establish preferences. He picked up the one with three sporting scenes and said, "I don't suppose you have a preference for sky-diving, leaping over canyons on a motorcycle or bungee jumping?"

"I prefer reading the Koran," Sheik Ali replied.

He looked at another with scenes of a young couple dancing in a night club, a line of bathing-suited contestants in a beauty pageant and bare-breasted groupies at a rock concert and put it back in the folder. Neither did the one of the clown, the court jester and Harlequin seem appropriate at that moment. While he was looking for any test that he could use with the Sheik, his phone rang.

"Have you decided on my image?" the Sheik asked as Brian got up to take the call at his desk.

"One minute. I've got to take this call," Brian said.

Rose informed him that Muleshoe, Texas was on the line with a matter of importance.

Brian listened as Clayton Rivers explained his firm's corporate research, sales, financial and public relations problems.

“Have you got any hot new products in the pipeline?” Brian asked in a low tone of voice and turning his chair away from the Sheik to keep the call confidential.

“Yup. Our R & D department is on the fast track to a biggie. But we need more cash to keep the motor running and take the checkered flag,” Clayton replied and Brian eagerly agreed to accept the challenge for a percentage of the purchase price, expenses and a bonus of fifteen, “Ok, make it ten,” million dollars if he succeeded in finding a white knight by the end of October.

As he hung up the phone, Brian was nearly beside himself. The god of fortune was not merely smiling on him, but lay prostrate at his feet awaiting orders. He cancelled the mental note for the offshore bank account and made a new one to open a bank in the Cayman Islands, have Rose book a ticket to Monte Carlo for a month and reminded himself to pack a whip, hand-cuffs and chains. “I’m truly in the big leagues now,” he said to himself.

"Have you decided on my image?" Sheik Ali asked again as Brian returned to his chair at the long table.

Brian picked up his notes, read, “consistent, good duck recognition, traditional,” tossed them aside, looked benevolently back at the white-robed Sheik, resisted the urge to put his arm protectively around his shoulder and replied, “Sewage.”

## Chapter Four

Sheik Ali returned to his hotel, looked up the meaning of the word 'sewage' in his English-Arabic dictionary, decided Noora's linguistic skills would be helpful after all and summoned her to join him.

"But you'll stay only until I buy my company, latest end of October. Then you go right back to Quais to get married," he said to her on the telephone. "And I've got my list of candidates with me. You can look at it while you're here," he added.

"Right," Noora replied to her father and said, "No way," to herself.

"And don't forget to wear the veil," he admonished.

"Right," Noora replied to her father and said, "We'll see about that," to herself.

Meanwhile, Brian began drafting the outlines of his public relations campaign for Consolidated Amoeba Corporation and for Sheik Ali.

In order to maximize his commission from Consolidated Amoeba Corporation, Brian knew that he had to generate as much interest in the company as possible in order to obtain the highest possible bid price. On the other hand, he had to construct an image of Sheik Ali sufficient to avoid a stampede of corporate bulls whenever the Sheik showed his face in a boardroom to secure the purchase of a hi-

tech company. And all had to be done by the end of October, a tight deadline. What better and easier way to secure his fees and two bonuses than to persuade the Sheik to tie the financial knot with Consolidated Amoeba Corporation, Brian reflected.

Accordingly, Brian drafted a two phase campaign for Consolidated Amoeba Corporation, the first to extend the company's name-recognition from the four corners of Muleshoe's lone intersection coast to coast and the second, the cultural phase to educate the public about the company, to begin two weeks thereafter. He asked his secretary to call the graphics department and have them send over Ed Steiner, the graphic artist with whom he customarily worked and phoned his bank manager to ask him to do a search on the Sheik to find out the source and scale of his wealth.

Fifteen minutes later, twenty-two year old Rickie O'Neal, a new graphic artist with the agency, entered Brian's outer office and said to his secretary, "Hi Rose. I want to thank you for giving my mom the tip about the job."

"Hi Rickie. I'm not so sure you should be thanking me," Rose replied and indicated Brian's closed door with a nod of her head. "I didn't know you'd be working with him."

"Oh? Is he difficult?"

"Not at all. The clients love him."

"Then what's the problem?"

“Well, let me put it this way. The girls have already started a pool giving him a maximum of three months to get you in bed. Most of the bets are in the twenty-four hours to two week range.”

“But we’ve got harassment laws in this country,” Rickie said.

“He’s not a harasser. He’s charmingly direct.”

“Really. And how would anyone know if he got me into bed?” Rickie asked.

“Our computer security guy, Gus, hears and knows all. It seems Brian e-mails a friend of his named 'Joe Huff' whenever he makes a new conquest. Gus circulates the news.”

“Is that so,” Rickie slowly answered as she reflected. The daughter of a bar owner in Queens of Irish origins and a French immigrant mother, Rickie had the playful and mischievous spirit of her father and the quiet self-assurance of her mother and it was her Irish nature that emerged first. “Maybe he needs a lesson. How much is in the pool?”

“Around three hundred dollars.”

“Have you taken part in the bet?” Rickie asked.

“Of course not.”

“Good. Would you do me a favor? Place a bet for me in your name that he won’t win, at all.”

Rose smiled and said, “Ok. But I’ve warned you. Good luck.”

“Thanks,” Rickie said and opened the door to Brian’s office, entered quietly and closed it behind her.

Brian was turned around from his desk away from the door, leaning back in his chair with his hands behind his head, looking out of the window at the lower Manhattan skyline seemingly lost in thought while a radio played in the background. The Tammy Wynette song, “Stand By Your Man,” came on and Brian sang along with the opening line, “Sometimes it’s hard to be a woman,” then said aloud to himself, “It sure is. Shaving my legs every day, having that electrolysis on my face, walking in those high heels and tight skirts, putting on all that make-up and even if I do manage to explain away that thing between my legs, faking those orgasms is a real pain in the butt,” and slowly turned around to observe Rickie O’Neal standing in the middle of his office, well-dressed in high heels, green skirt and yellow cashmere sweater to make a good impression her first day at work and with tumbling red hair, hazel eyes, full lips and the slim figure and beauty of a fashion model.

Brian looked in surprise and some awe at her beauty and began to smile as did Rickie and in a brief second the two burst out laughing.

“Who are you?” Brian asked as he turned off the radio.

“I’m a graphic artist. I was told you needed one.”

“I do. But you don’t look much like Ed Steiner.”

“Graphic artists come in all shapes and sizes,” she replied.

“So I see,” he said with an admiring tone in his voice. “I won’t complain. You are an improvement. Like a rainbow after acid rain. An intelligent squid would be an improvement, for that matter. Ed was a bit on the humorless side. What’s happened to him?”

“I don’t know. All I was told is that he left the agency.”

“For greener fields to illustrate, I hope. What’s your name?”

“Rickie O’Neal.”

“Ok, Rickie. Shall we sit over here by the table?”

As she took a seat, Rickie looked around his office at all the certificates and awards he had received and found the samples of his various ad campaigns amusing.

“I’ve got two ad campaigns I need help with,” he said and explained to her his ideas for Consolidated Amoeba Corporation and for Sheik Ali and what he wanted her to do. He showed her a few sample layouts he had printed from his computer and asked, “What do you think?”

She tilted her head slightly and pursed her lips in thought before replying, “I think it’s quite good and more than a bit daring. But it should work.”

“Dinner with me tonight will work better,” Brian said.

“Rose was right. He is direct,” Rickie reflected, but she replied, “I’m engaged to be married.”

"Is that a 'yes' or a 'no'?" Brian asked with a mixture of surprise, skepticism and faint hope.

"That means 'no,'" Rickie answered.

"Are you really engaged?"

"Yes."

"But that's customarily followed by marriage and divorce. Are you planning on getting married and divorced?"

"No. Just on getting married," Rickie said.

"But young and beautiful graphic artists are not supposed to get married and not divorced."

"I don't know of any law against it," Rickie replied defensively though secretly pleased at the compliment.

"There should be. I'll have to phone my Congressman about that. He owes me for the re-election campaign ads I did for him."

Rickie did not comment and Brian said, "May I ask how old you are?"

"I'm twenty-two."

"Why do you want to get married? I thought young people didn't do that nowadays."

"They do if they want to be together with someone for the rest of their lives," Rickie said.

"Oh I don't know. Many famous people have successfully mastered life without it."

"Oh? Who, for example?" Rickie challenged.

"Adolf Hitler and Eva Braun," Brian answered.

Rickie was amused but she was careful to hide any signs of it. "But even he married her in the end," she commented.

"Yes. Just before he poisoned her," Brian remarked. "That was the only way poor Adolf could express his affection."

Rickie repressed a smile as Brian added, "What about lunch?"

"No lunch either."

"Why not? It might be good for you. I've found creativity is best stimulated by caviar and a good champagne. Einstein too. He had his best thoughts after a bottle or so. When he was sober, all he could think of was 'M=EC2.' After a bottle, however, it came out 'E=MC2' and the world became a better place, relatively speaking of course."

"The answer is no," she said repressing the urge to laugh. She was still mindful of Rose's warning, though Rose had not mentioned how amusing he was. Nor how good-looking.

"Why? No interest in science? We can discuss something else. We can discuss statistics. Did you know that there is an inverse proportion between the rates for divorce and homicides in this country? As the divorce rate goes up, the homicide rate goes down."

"How interesting. But no lunch."

"But think of Adolf. Your life could be in danger."

"No it couldn't. I'm not engaged to Adolf."

"He might be using an alias," Brian said. "Does he speak with a German accent and have a funny moustache?"

"No lunch, thank you," Rickie firmly replied while struggling to suppress any signs of her amusement.

"You're welcome, at least to my sympathy. You could have had a great career as a happy single."

On her arrival at Kennedy International Airport -- in a black veil that revealed only her eyes -- Noora was able to witness phase one of Brian's campaign for Consolidated Amoeba Corporation when she observed several magazines at a news shop featuring a large-print, bold-faced slogan, "They Did the Dirty on Me," above a photo of Al Capone and below it the words, "Consolidated Amoeba Corporation." A brief paragraph in smaller print size explained to the public that the company's hi-tech nous and commitment to the American dream were responsible

for treating the infamous Chicago gangster's sewage. In the taxi that took her to her father's hotel, she passed innumerable posters on buses, taxis and billboards in which Consolidated Amoeba Corporation did the dirty on Legs Diamond, the Birdman of Alcatraz, Son of Sam, the Boston Strangler, Charles Manson, the Unabomber, Jeffrey Dahmer, the Green River Killer and the Night Stalker. As Brian began work on the second phase of his ad campaign and the praises from colleagues and the Psycho-Adman came pouring in, his only lament was that the Marquis de Sade and Jack the Ripper were foreigners.

At his hotel on Fifth Avenue, Noora listened carefully to her father's account of his meeting with the Super-Thing Advertising Agency, learned nothing helpful and decided to visit the agency with her father and speak with Brian Berman herself.

As they sat in Brian's office opposite a newly-completed poster of a large-breasted Salome dressed in the skimpiest of camouflaged-colored bras and holding the bloody head of John the Baptist by the hair for Brian's "She Had A Pair" campaign, he explained to her the substance of his interview with her father while Sheik Ali looked first at the poster and then at Brian in grim silence.

He was hired, Brian explained, to give him a new public image, that the Sheik had expressed his intention to purchase an American hi-tech corporation and that, as miracles would have it, Brian had been commissioned that same day by a company in Muleshoe, Texas seeking an investor. He gave a brief description of the company in adman-speak in which management approached the saintly and its hot new hi-tech product the finger of Midas which a slight cash injection of several

millions could nudge the rest of the way. Brian informed her of the upcoming meeting in Muleshoe where he would introduce Sheik Ali to the company and have a tour of the facilities. "That's only a first step, of course. Once my ad campaign for him kicks in, he'll be overwhelmed with offers."

"Have you decided what his new image is going to be?" Noora asked.

Brian looked at the grim-faced Sheik and said, "Have you reconsidered the idea of plastic surgery?"

"It's out of the question," Sheik Ali replied.

"Ok. But with a face like America's public enemy number one," Brian explained turning back to Noora, "there's only one way. He's got to be closely identified with a macho American icon and this identity has to be pounded mercilessly into the American consciousness until they forget his resemblance to an international terrorist and think only of the popular icon whenever they see him."

"Have you chosen that American icon yet?" she asked.

"Yes," Brian said.

"Who is it then?" Noora pressed.

Looking at the grim-faced Sheik again and back at Noora, Brian replied, "Elvis."

"Elvis!" the Sheik repeated in alarm.

"The King himself," Brian said.

“But he’s a Rock singer,” the Sheik said.

“Yes.”

“And a womanizer,” Sheik Ali added.

“Yes, I thought it fit rather nicely,” Brian commented recalling the Sheik’s numerous wives and divorces.

“And a drug taker.”

“No one is asking you to take drugs. All you need is to be identified with America’s most popular rock n’ roller,” Brian explained. “If you love Elvis, America will love you.”

“I don’t love Elvis and I don’t like music. How can you possibly create an identity between me and him?”

Brian had never met anyone in his life who did not like music and he stared incomprehensibly for several seconds into the dark, grim face of Sheik Ali as Sheik Ali stared incomprehensibly back into the pale, puzzled face of Brian Berman.

“Trust me,” Brian finally said.

“It’s perfect,” Noora said cutting off the “no” she knew to be rising in her father’s throat. “Brian’s right. You’ve got to have an image of someone that Americans can identify with. An image like that will give you your best chance to convert America to Islam.”

Sheik Ali, however, objected and exchanged strong words with his daughter in Arabic the substance of which was that the Elvis image was out of the question.

Noora turned to Brian and asked, "What would my father be expected to do if he adopted the new image?"

"He'd have to make a few changes to his life style. Nothing mind-altering of course. He'll have to shave the beard, grease and dye his hair black and trade in his robe for an Elvis jumpsuit," Brian said.

"My father will never shave his beard, grease and dye his hair black or wear an Elvis jumpsuit," Noora replied knowing her father's limits.

"But if he is going to accept the image, he's got to play the role."

"He won't play any role. If he accepts the image, then you'll have to build it up without him."

Brian looked at the Sheik again as he stared in grim-faced silence at the Salome poster, thought of dropping him as a client, recalled the ten million dollar bonus, dropped the thought and said to Noora, "That adds a considerable handicap. It's like running the high hurdles in swim fins and a tuba."

"As one of New York's top advertising agents, you should be able to manage it," Noora challenged.

"Ah, right," Brian modestly conceded. "But at a minimum he'll have to read a biography of the King, learn the facts of his life, listen to his songs and memorize the lyrics for a press reception we'll give at the right time. Can he manage that?"

"I think so," Noora replied. "When is the meeting in Texas?" she added.

"Next week," Brian said.

"Good. I'll be going to the meeting with my father."

"Oh?" Brian said looking doubtfully at Noora.

"I'll be going everywhere with him. I'll be acting as his secretary and translator," Noora said. Noting his doubtful look, she added, "Do you have a problem with that?"

"No. But you might. Will you always be dressed like that?" he asked looking at the black veil.

"Perhaps. What's wrong with that?"

"Well, nothing, but black-veiled women hardly crowd the pavements of Shopping Mall, USA," Brian replied.

"Neither do men in white dishdashas," she replied.

"True, but with the new image I give him, every American will love him," Brian replied looking vainly at the grim-faced Sheik for any small sign of lovability and thought, "It's all up to me."

"The black veil is traditional in my country. If anything goes wrong, you can do a new image for both of us," Noora suggested.

Brian looked once again at the grim, white-robed Sheik and back at the black-veiled Noora and said to himself, "Right. I'll hold Ken and Barbie in reserve."

Turning to the Sheik again, Brian said, "Here is a copy of the timetable for the campaign I've drafted," and held out the timetable for him to take.

"Ok. What else?" Noora asked taking the timetable which the Sheik refused.

"We begin first thing with a photo shoot. We need pics of Sheik Ali sneering like the King," he replied turning back to Noora. "The campaign also includes a photo shoot at Graceland, the King's estate in Memphis, and a question and answer press reception after he's learned all about the King's life, knows all his song titles and has memorized some of the lyrics. After the campaign has built up his image, the demand for his time and interviews will be overwhelming. So he's to avoid the press at all costs until the press reception. That will increase the dramatic effect when he finally does meet them. He'll also be busy going over all the investment proposals which will come flooding in and making visits to potential targets, starting with Muleshoe, Texas," Brian said.

Noora said nothing and Brian added, "Well, are we agreed?"

"Let me see a sample of your campaign first. Then I'll let you know," Noora replied aware that it would take some concentrated effort on her part to overcome her father's opposition.

“Ok. I’ll give the people for the Texas meeting some details about your father. So they don’t panic. I hope you understand.”

“Of course,” Noora replied. "That's exactly why we're here."

As they were leaving Brian's office, he handed the Sheik a recent biography of Elvis and a CD of his Greatest Hits -- which he again refused to take -- and reminded him to memorize the lyrics to some of his songs.

Noora took the biography and the Greatest Hits CD while Sheik Ali looked dubiously at Brian, defiantly at Noora, in disgust at the Salome poster, turned around and stormed out of the office.

## Chapter Five

For the upcoming meeting with the potential investor, Angus knew that they had to provide an afternoon of entertainment for the visitor in proper style and at the next family barbecue at old John-boy's ranch with Helga Sue sitting next to old John-boy in his wheelchair and staring sternly at Angus, he asked for suggestions.

"Show him our junkyard," Wesley suggested helping himself to some ribs.

"Show him our graveyard," Wyatt offered reaching for the Buffalo wings.

"We can show him a twister if he comes at the right time of year," Clayton said cutting into a steak.

"I had something a bit more constructive in mind, boys," Angus said conscious of Helga Sue's stern stare.

"Take him to Duane's Autobody Shop. He's rebuilding a smashed-up '58 Caddy," Wyatt said.

"Take him to Bob Billy's Hardware Store. He's having a sale on chain saws," Wesley offered.

"If he's here Friday afternoon, we can take him to an Elvis impersonation contest," Clayton said as old John-boy suddenly woke up and shouted, "Icebox!" before resuming his customary pose.

“Icebox! An afternoon in an icebox? Admittedly there isn’t much to do in Muleshoe, but I hardly think an afternoon in an icebox is high on anybody’s list,” Wyatt said.

“Don’t any of you suppose a ritual tour of the sewage works holds any interest for the person who might be buying into them,” Angus queried.

“Why should it?” Wyatt asked.

Angus had no immediate answer to the question and grabbed the ketchup and shook some over his fries.

"In any case, wherever we take him, we should follow it up with a barbecue and a visit to the Pink Pussycat," Wesley said reaching for more ribs.

“There’s no way we can do the tour of the sewage works, Duane’s Autobody Shop, Bob Billy’s Hardware Store, the Elvis contest, and the barbecue all in one afternoon,” Angus commented as he finished his steak. “We’ve got to limit ourselves,” he added helping himself to another.

“We’ve already agreed he won’t be interested in a tour of the sewage works, so you can strike that off your list,” Wyatt said.

“Who is this visitor anyway?” Clayton asked.

“It doesn't matter. He can be a hairy-headed octopus for all I care, so long as he’s interested in the company and holding a bag full of gold dust in each tentacle,” Angus replied.

“Why don’t we just ask the visitor where he wants to go? Then afterwards we do the barbecue and the Pink Pussycat,” Wesley suggested.

"Ok, we can ask the visitor, but we start with a tour of the sewage works. Everyone agreed?" Angus said.

Agreement on the visitor's choice, the barbecue and the Pink Pussycat was unanimous.

For the upcoming meeting, Angus also stressed to the twins the necessity for proper corporate decorum -- "Behave yourselves and that means no mention of oldies or the Pink Pussycat!" -- , to his nephew the importance of proper dress -- "Don't you come to the meeting dressed in that Elvis jumpsuit!" -- , to his son by e-mail the urgency of his research report -- "Bring that research report or your life won't be worth a muleshoe" -- , and to them all, the necessity of punctuality.

As Angus was preparing for his meeting, Rickie O'Neal was walking into Brian's office with a laptop computer to begin work with him on phase one of his campaign for the Sheik's new image.

After their first meeting in Brian's office, Rickie had listened carefully whenever he was the subject of office gossip. When her female colleagues talked about him, she noticed it sounded rather like the opposite of condemnation by faint praise. It was praise by faint condemnation. And they condemned with frequency. They condemned his good looks, his growing reputation in the advertising world, his

large salary, his silver Porsche, his success with other women and his office nickname, “the Minister of Interior.”

“Hi Rose,” Rickie said as she entered Brian’s outer office. “My mom says hi.”

“Hi Rickie. Give her my best when you see her. Another session with the Minister?”

“Yes. And you were right," she said stopping at Rose's desk. "He’s definitely not a harasser. But you never told me how amusing he was, nor how good looking.”

“I thought I’d leave that to you. Not changing your mind about the bet, are you?”

“Oh no. That’s not the spirit of the O’Neal’s. I intend to teach him a lesson -- and win the three hundred dollars.”

Brian was at his desk reading a newspaper when Rickie entered. “Hi Brian. Reading anything interesting?” she said as she went to the long table and put down her computer.

“Hi Rickie. Yes. I’m reading the obituary of the actor, Frederic Carroll. It says he is survived by a wife, two children and five grandchildren. Don’t you find that strange?”

“How so?”

“He’s survived by everybody who isn’t dead,” he replied and put the newspaper down.

“Well, that’s true. But you’ve got to limit the reference to survivors somehow. How would you say it?” Rickie asked as she sat down, opened her laptop and switched it on.

Brian got up from his desk and joined Rickie at the long table as he replied, “I would limit it to his loved ones. I would say, ‘the famous actor, Frederic Carroll, died of a heart attack in Burbank, California yesterday at the age of sixty-four and is survived by everybody who is not dead, especially his broker, his agent and his lawyer who were at his bedside and unusually lively just before he died.’”

Rickie was unable to suppress a laugh and Brian added, “Have I left anyone out?”

“Only his family.”

“No actor in Hollywood loves his family. The old Socratic dictum of ‘Know thyself’ has been rescripted by Hollywood screenwriters to ‘Love thyself.’ Oh, and I forgot the life-support machine operator. He’d certainly be there, at least until the agent, the broker and the lawyer completed their formalities.”

“I see you have a humanitarian streak,” Rickie commented smiling despite herself.

“Yes. I number that among my many virtues. And you? Do you float across the universe on a life-aid bubble?” Brian asked.

“Of course. I have strong humanitarian impulses too.”

“I wonder. I know they unmercifully exclude free meals with unmarried advertising executives. Do they exclude any other categories?” Brian asked.

“I try not to exclude anyone on principle.”

“How about aliens? If one in a pink chiffon dress and a sombrero asked you to dinner, would your humanitarian impulses permit it?”

"Why would he be wearing a pink chiffon dress and a sombrero?" Rickie asked.

"Because that's the national dress on his planet."

"Oh, I see," Rickie said with a look of amusement at Brian.

"So, would it?"

"Most definitely."

“Why most definitely?”

“Because if aliens were able to land here on earth, then they must be more intelligent than humans. And if one of them invited me to dinner, it would also imply that he had no intent to harm me,” Rickie replied.

“Ah. They might have the edge in means of transportation, but if they chose to land on earth, I'd have very strong suspicions about their level of intelligence. And if they chose to land in New York City, I'd have very strong convictions on the subject,” Brian replied.

Rickie laughed. As she did so, Brian looked at her admiringly and said, “Do you mind if I ask you some personal questions?”

“That depends on the questions,” Rickie replied.

“How about, what does your father do? Is that too personal?” he asked.

“He owns a bar in Queens,” she replied.

“And your Mom?”

“She’s married to a bar owner in Queens.”

“Same one?”

“Correct.”

“A marriage of convenience, I see. Any brothers and sisters?”

“Yes. Two older sisters,” Rickie replied and added with emphasis, “and both married.”

“What a coincidence. I have two older sisters too -- and both divorced,” Brian replied with equal emphasis.

“I heard that you’re divorced too. It seems to run in your family.”

“It does. We’re keen fans. My father always said marriage was the breeding ground for axe murderers. He advised that if we absolutely could not resist the experiment, not to stay that way too long. Good advice, don’t you think?” Brian said.

Rickie ignored his last statement and began to search for a file on her laptop. When she had it on the screen, she turned the laptop for Brian to see.

“Quite good,” Brian said.

“Thank you. So, did your father practice what he preached and axe your mother?” Rickie said.

Brian looked up from the computer and laughed. “Very good. A graphic artist with a sense of humor,” he said. “You don't find many around here. But the answer is sadly no. He never gave himself the chance. He died young. He was a humanitarian too.”

“I see. So then you don't know if his theory is true,” she said.

“Yes, I do,” Brian replied as he looked through the rest of the file on the Sheik's campaign. “Where's the photo of the Sheik with the King's sneer?”

"He refused."

"He refused! It's a slander on the King's memory to refuse."

“He refused to come for the photo shoot, but his daughter sent us a copy of his passport photo. That's all we have.”

Brian looked at the photo of the Sheik on the computer screen in his traditional headgear, spotty gray and uneven beard and said, “Good lord. This will never do. We've got to find a way to get him in for a photo with the sneer. He's rejected dressing and looking like the King. The sneer is the only thing left. It's the least he can do for his image and my bonus," he said and turned the computer aside.

"I know my father's theory is true because when the first axe-murdering urge came over him after less than three years of marriage, he divorced my mother. It was his dying wish that we follow in his footsteps and, as dutiful children devoted to family values, we tearfully promised. Bit of a shame really. I hate ruling anything out.

You never know who might need it. You might warn your fiancé, by the way,"

Brian said and, leaning close to her, he added, "Do you know who my father moved in with after his divorce?"

"No idea," Rickie said.

"No guesses?"

"No guesses," Rickie replied though she was certain she knew what he was going to say.

"His twenty-two year old, hazel-eyed, red headed graphic artist," Brian said.

Rickie said nothing and Brian asked, "Where did you meet your fiancé?"

"At my father's bar. I help out there sometimes."

"What does he do?"

"Now you're getting too personal. I don't want to talk about him," Rickie said.

"Why not? Up to no good, is he?"

Rickie ignored the question and, looking at the samples of his ads on the wall once more, spotted the poster of Adolf Hitler in the boxer shorts and commented, “So you're the one who did the ‘He Had A Pair’ ad campaigns.”

“Yes. Did you like them?” he asked.

“Yes. I thought they were funny,” she replied.

“They were more than funny. They were effective too. I made the manufacturer a bundle.”

“I’m sure he was grateful. Do you wear them yourself?” she mischievously asked.

“If you have dinner with me tonight, come back to my apartment afterwards and cancel your engagement, I’ll let you see for yourself,” Brian replied.

Rickie smiled and asked, “Don’t you believe in marital fidelity?”

"You're not married."

"But as a matter of principle."

“It’s good for priests and eunuchs, but I wouldn’t recommend it for you.”

“Why not? You were married.”

“I married a priest.”

Rickie couldn’t repress a laugh. “But you’re Jewish, aren’t you?”

“I have some Jewish ancestry. My great grandfather came to the United States from England and confirmed the old adage that travel does funny things to people by promptly converting to Catholicism.”

Rickie smiled again and said, “So you’re a Catholic then?”

“No. I’m a believer in the doctrine of the ancient Greek philosopher, Arcesilaus, who said he was not certain that he was not certain about anything,” and, lowering his head towards her in a confidential manner, he added, “That’s an important doctrine to remember for people considering marriage.”

“What else do you believe in?” Rickie asked ignoring his manner.

“The teachings of Epicurus. I’ve pledged myself to the good life. And he was very sound on bonuses.”

Rickie was amused and said, “Do you have any other heroes?”

“Well, the Mad Hatter and Daffy Duck feature prominently in my pantheon.”

Rickie smiled again and asked, “Don't you believe in anything serious?”

“Never being serious for one.”

“Then what do you unseriously believe in?”

“Marriage at twenty-two for graphic artists.”

“Anything else?”

“Mom’s apple pie. Well, not actually. That is a serious matter. My mother’s a dreadful cook. She could burn water,” Brian said.

Rickie laughed. “So there are serious matters for you,” she said. “Any others?”

“The pursuit of happiness.”

“I was certain you would say money.”

“No need. I’ll have twenty million dollars plus fees by the end of October.”

Rickie smiled. “What will you do then?”

“Pursue a more expensive form of happiness,” Brian replied.

Brian and Rickie went through the rest of her computer file for the Sheik's campaign and he explained his idea to her for phase two of his campaign for Consolidated Amoeba Corporation.

"Would you like to pose for one of the ads?" Brian proposed.

Rickie looked at Brian with teasing eyes and replied, "Maybe."