

“Twenty years ago, in an outbuilding of his Southern California estate, tycoon Robert K. Graham began a most remarkable project: the Repository for Germinal Choice, a sperm bank for Nobel Prize winners. Part altruism, part social engineering, part science experiment, the repository was supposed to help reverse the genetic decay Graham saw all around him by preserving and multiplying the best genes of his generation. By the time Graham’s repository closed in 1999, his genius sperm had been responsible for more than 200 children.”

Tuck Plotz, *Slate*,

February 2001

“Over 700,000 women are taken prisoner each year in the worldwide network of human trafficking. Approximately 50,000 of these women end up in the United States.”

Heather Leah, “America’s Modern Day Slave

Trade: Human Trafficking

in the Sex Industry,” *Yahoo! Voices*, August 2006

### **AUTHOR'S NOTE:**

Of all the reasons people give for having sex, making a baby is invariably the least frequent motivator. As a result, birth control, while broadly practiced, is a political and religious anathema.

Every State in America had anti-abortion laws on the statute books, and it wasn't until 1965 that the Supreme Court ruled it unconstitutional for the government to prohibit married couples from using birth control.

Then in 1973, the Supreme Court found in favor of Roe, over Wade, and declared that abortions were now legal.

Each of these powerful decisions had a tremendous impact on reproductive rights: pharmaceutical companies were developing new and better forms of contraception; condoms were becoming more broadly available and, importantly, the public "stigma" associated with birth control was quickly fading. Even attitudes toward single mother parenting were softening.

All of these changes produced two seemingly unintended consequences: more women, now finally in control of their childbearing decisions, were enrolling in college. And fewer babies were available for adoption.

The short supply and a growing demand pushed much of the adoption business underground, and what slowly emerged was: a “black market” in babies.

**MS**

## **CHAPTER 1**

*Alamogordo, New Mexico, 1972*

The mud-spattered Mercedes 280SL whipped up a rooster tail of fine sand as it sped south. On a map the narrow road was shown as a thin, red line. In person, it was a scarred and cracked two-lane blacktop, badly in need of repair. A restless layer of sand swirled like tiny dust devils across much of its surface blown by strong winds coming across the border from Mexico.

Inside the car, an attractive brunette in her early 40s let out a dramatic groan as her head slumped back against the soft leather headrest.

“Trying to read this damned thing is making me sick. I think I’m going to puke,” Helen Kaufman said, letting the unfolded Texaco road map slide to the carpeted floor of the car.

Mark Kaufman, balding and slightly overweight, was also in his fourth decade. He momentarily took his eyes off the road and glanced quickly at his wife. “I’ll pull over and see if I can figure out where the hell we are. Close your eyes and breath through your mouth and you’ll feel better. The queasiness will pass.”

Helen Kaufman, eyes shut, mumbled a reply: “It’s the right road. I’ll be okay. Just keep driving.”

Mark responded: “What if we missed it. This damned sand is blowing all over, and it’s hard to see shit. I’d better stop,” he said, trying not to show the irritation and frustration he was feeling. No need to upset his wife on what was such a very special and happy day.

“Please, honey, don’t stop . . . I’m sure we haven’t passed it. We shouldn’t be late. The note said not to be late. Keep driving.”

He ignored her objection and let his foot ease off the accelerator.

“I can see a crossroad up ahead. I’m stopping. It’s no big goddamned deal if we’re a couple minutes late. I’d like to see anyone make it all the way out here from New York and be exactly on time . . . fat chance. And this fucking sand isn’t helping. I wouldn’t be surprised if it eats the paint right off the car,” Mark said, only half-joking.

As he spoke, Mark Kaufman steered onto the bumpy shoulder of the road and stopped. The wind swirled dust and sand around the expensive car and added still another layer of grime to the already dirt-

caked vehicle. Even the New York license plates were barely visible beneath a coating of the thick New Mexico dust.

Once the movement of the car stopped, Mark easily found their exact location on the map. His finger traced the fine red line from the crossroad where they were now parked to the spot that had been circled with a thick, black felt-tip marker.

The map, thus marked, had been waiting for the Kaufmans in Albuquerque at the desk of the Holiday Inn, where Max Garfield had directed them to stay. The adoption lawyer's phone call had come over a week ago, just as they were preparing to leave for a long overdue Caribbean vacation. A month off for a busy vascular surgeon was not a simple thing to arrange. The call had taken them completely by surprise and it took half a day to cancel the carefully booked hotel reservations and airline tickets. They lost a few hundred dollars in hotel deposits, but it was worth it. They had waited months for the lawyer's call, and now it was actually going to happen: They were finally getting the baby they'd wanted so desperately.

Rather than fly, they made the decision to drive, not just to Albuquerque, but also to California, and up the coast to San Francisco. It would make a wonderful first vacation for a newly expanded Kaufman family. They hadn't been in San Francisco since Mark's military tour at the Letterman Army Hospital, and it would be great to see old friends again and to show off their new baby.

“Oh, yeah, we’re right on the money,” Mark said with the same confident tone of voice he used with his patients before surgery. “Another few miles should do it. Are you feeling better, sweetheart? The sign will be on the right side. You feeling okay to keep an eye out for it?”

“No, really, I’m fine now. I’m so excited, Mark, I can’t believe it’s finally happening,” she said, kissing him as hard as she could. “Aren’t you just so damned excited? We’re going to have a baby of our very own.”

Mark responded by kissing his wife several times, softly, gently, and ending with one on each eyelid and another on the tip of Helen’s nose. He could feel the curve of her full breast through his skintight driving glove.

“Of course, I am, just as much as you are—maybe more,” Mark said as he happily nosed the Mercedes onto the scarred blacktop and picked up speed, causing the trail of dust to rise once again behind them. Mark resumed his hunched position over the steering wheel, intent on the road that was visible, but barely. Helen Kaufman rested her head against the right side window, peering carefully, looking for the landmark described in the note that had accompanied the map: *‘Look for a sign depicting a charging red bull,’* it said.

During the long drive west from New York, they had discussed the detailed orders they’d been given by the lawyer, Max Garfield, especially the extreme secrecy surrounding the trip—the place where they were to stay in Albuquerque, the map with directions, the note, the specifics about

the money, and now the drive to a God-only-knows-where, looking for a bull on a damned sign board.

Mark spoke to Helen without taking his eyes off the road. “I have a theory about all this mysterious crap Garfield is putting us through.”

“Which is?”

“I think he did it on purpose. You know, to make the whole adoption process seem—I don’t know—more important. More ‘value’ for the money—a little theatrical fluff.”

Helen thought for a moment about her husband’s notion.

“You may be right, but you know what? I like it—the mystery, you know. Hey, why not? It makes it more fun, like an adventure. Think about the stories. Anybody can talk about the old ‘*middle of the night drive to the hospital*’ chestnut—but we’ll have a really unique story.”

On the other hand, the Kaufmans were not stupid. They both knew that what they were doing was probably a few degrees off the legal mark and any tales they would tell in the future would necessarily need to be selectively edited.

“*There it is!*” Helen suddenly cried, like a child seeing Disneyland for the first time! There’s the bull!”

Sure enough, a faded and storm-buffed old outdoor sign could be seen through the blowing dust. As Garfield’s directions had indicated, it showed a giant, red bull charging through the label of a huge package of Red Bull Chewing Tobacco, complete with painted smoke shooting from

each angry nostril. The advertisement was old and broken and riddled with bullet holes, made no doubt, by locals using the sign for target practice. Ironically, if not for the holes, which gave vent to wind and sand, the large surface of painted sheet metal would have acted like a spinnaker and been blown away long ago.

Fifty yards beyond the sign was their destination: an old, nondescript gasoline station. No brand names or advertising posters touting oil or tires, no fuel prices posted. Just a small, broken down, single-story adobe building, with a lone gasoline pump standing guard a few yards from the front door. It seemed every visible surface of the place was coated with a layer of fine sand, making the whole place seemed to be of one with the surrounding desert.

The Mercedes rolled slowly to a stop. Almost immediately, an ageless and weathered woman shuffled out of the building, shielding her face from the relentless wind with the tattered sleeve of her cardigan. She, too, seemed devoid of color.

The old lady carefully approached the car and squinted into the window, inspecting Mark and Helen Kaufman. Then she shuffled to the front of the car and with the edge of her long skirt, rubbed at a thick layer of dirt covering the license plate, just enough to read the numbers. She compared them with those on a small scrap of paper she took from her sweater pocket. With a single nod of her head, she indicated satisfaction and released the paper not bothering to watch as it was carried off,

fluttering like a little butterfly, out of sight. She shuffled back to the shack, opened the door, turned, and smiled. Two or three jack-o-lantern-spaced teeth, yellow from age and nicotine, broke the otherwise emptiness of her smile as she beckoned for the Kaufmans to follow.

“Hello,” Helen said as she approached, “I’m Mrs. Kaufman and this is my husband, Dr. Kaufman.”

The old woman shrugged, saying, “*Yo no hablo Ingles,*” in a rasping, smoker’s voice.

Inside, the shack was clean, neat, and pleasantly warm. An old army cot sat in one corner covered with a patchwork quilt, faded with age but spotless. An iron stove burned a fragrant smelling wood and on top of the stove a large metal coffeepot was warming. The rich aroma of strong coffee filled the tiny room. A brand new chrome payphone on the wall looked ridiculously anachronistic. A door next to the phone was partially open and revealed a tiny bathroom with a shower.

The old woman pointed to the opposite side of the room and smiled. There, against the wall stood an old Coca-Cola cooler, its top ajar. Most of the red painted finish had long ago faded, chipped, and peeled from its sides. In the summer, when the cooler was used to keep soda chilled, it stood outside the shack next to the gasoline pump. Now, washed clean, it was serving quite another purpose.

Mark and Helen, confused at first, stared at the beat-up old cooler. Helen was the first to move, slowly walking to the cooler. Her hand

reached out, haltingly, as if she might burn her fingers on the faded red lid. She lifted the top to its full open position so it rested back against the wall, then she reached down, bending from the waist, both arms going down and disappearing deep inside the cooler. When they came up again, they were filled with a soft, pink blanket. Two little arms, covered in tiny, clean, jersey sleeves waved in circles and ovals, and the gurgles of an awaking infant filled the shack. Mark leaned over to see the baby cradled in Helen's arms, but he couldn't see very well, as tears of emotion blurred his vision.

Helen Kaufman cooed: "Hello, Amy. Amy Kaufman. Oh, my God, Mark, she's beautiful!" Helen said, her own tears streaming down her face.

Right now and for all time, the money they had spent for Amy suddenly seemed irrelevant; after all, it was only money and, thank God, they had it. And the baby, *their* baby, was so beautiful, with huge black eyes, clear skin, and thick blond hair already covering her well-formed head. She was everything they had wanted. She was everything Max Garfield had promised—maybe more.

Mark finally tore himself away from looking at the baby, and removed a thick package from inside Helen's shoulder bag and presented it to the old woman. With arthritic hands, she tore open the sealed package and removed the bills. Mark had handed the old woman \$40,000 in the

form of four hundred slightly used hundred-dollar bills—a lot of money, and thankfully, the final payment for their baby.

It took the old woman, mumbling to herself in barely audible Spanish, a long time to count the money. While she did, Mark went outside, filled his car's gasoline tank, and using a hose, washed road-grime off the windows, then got rid of the accumulated trash from inside the car.

When the old woman finally finished counting and was satisfied it was all as it should be, she placed the bills in a large plastic zip-top freezer bag, took it to the refrigerator on the far side of the room, and placed the cash inside.

Moving from the refrigerator, the old woman shuffled back to the cot, reached under, and pulled out a brand new zippered carryall. She opened it and proudly showed the Kaufmans that it was filled with diapers, wipes, baby formula—all the supplies they would need for their new baby, at least for a day or two, enough, at least, to last until they could buy more.

Helen thanked her, then pivoted so the old woman could see the cooing, gurgling child cradled in her arms, and the old woman nodded knowingly, for she had spent several days with the happy baby. Mark paid the woman for the gasoline, took the bag of supplies, and thanked her.

Mark made the U-turn and headed back to the main road where they would pick up the main highway. The baby had cost the Kaufmans a lot—almost \$7,000 a pound! First, there was the check for \$10,000—a

strictly above board payment up front to Max Garfield. Conversely, the \$40,000 in cash, now sitting in a refrigerator not far from the Mexican border, would go where, or to whom, the Kaufmans had no idea, nor did they give a damn. They finally had their baby, and that was all that mattered. Helen held it in her arms, kissing the top of her little head, talking to her, stroking her. Mark tried glancing over to see his new daughter but was too nervous; convinced a moment's distraction would result in a fiery car crash. He had to be extra careful: They were three now.

The old woman watched the Kaufmans' car disappear into the distance. A tear washed a path in the fine, dry film of dust on her wrinkled cheek. She would miss the baby. It was lonely living alone, tending the station. She hoped maybe the American with the black beard would bring another baby soon. It made her days less lonely.

In the car, Helen Kaufman held the sleeping child safe in her arms while Mark squinted at the road ahead. An equally dusty Avis rental car passed, going in the other direction, its own plume of dust trailing behind it. Mark noticed the driver had a thick black beard.

Given where he was headed, the bearded man at the wheel of the car had to chuckle at the irony of the song playing on the radio, and he happily sang along with Paul Simon belting out "Mother and Child Reunion," while at the same time keeping a sharp lookout for the Red Bull Chewing Tobacco sign. A few minutes later he spotted it and pulled into

the ancient service station. His arrival was so close on the heels of the Kaufmans leaving that for a moment the old woman thought the new parents had come back.

Rick Shelby greeted the old woman, using the few words of Spanish he could remember from high school, and headed for the refrigerator.

“Can’t keep all that lettuce in the refrigerator too long, Mrs. Rodriguez—you’ll pardon the pun—or it’ll spoil,” he continued in English, “besides, I got a plane to catch,” he said, handing her a small fee for her baby sitting services. “It was only a few days but you did a great job. It was a pleasure meeting you. Thanks.”

The old woman just stared at the bearded lawyer, unable to understand much of anything Rick Shelby was saying. She just missed having the baby to keep her company. It was hard to see Shelby’s smile under his thick beard, but it was there nevertheless.

Hours later the newly expanded Kaufman family proceeded happily on their long-overdue California vacation.