Excerpt From National Cash - Dante’s

Sonny dressed and took a cab to Dante’s in SoHo, the nightclub that he created and owned with his partners in crime. Dante’s had a façade of jet-black marble with tall pillar-like-columns of darkly tinted glass that reduced the life inside to the movement of light and shadows. The towering entranceway doors were clear glass and modern, devoid of any value judgments. Above the entranceway was a tall neon sign that spelled out in bold red letters the name of the nightclub. The building itself was a ten-story, stone-faced, neo-classic office building with pilasters and pediments framing the windows. Horned cornices crowned the rooftop; and entablatures divided each story to give the impression at night of ancient catacombs layered one upon the other, the windows - dark chambers within which the past was buried.

Dante’s was not The Electric Circus with its carnival atmosphere and its carefree belief in the liberation of the spirit from the past. The 60s were dead. The Electric Circus was closed, and America was trying to find a way to warm itself in the cold world of friendly fascism. Dante’s was that new hot spot and that hot spot was Hell. It was early in the evening; so there was nobody outside the club; but later limousines would be double parked all along the street; and there would be a line of customers four blocks long eager to bare witness to the decline and fall of the American Republic, eager to play their part in the collective madness that was a composite of their individual greed that took on a life of its own and became a being that some people called the Devil.

Outside the club, two of the bouncers lounged near the entranceway waiting for the masses to descend upon the demilitarized zone that they would be patrolling. Joe was a black ex-middleweight boxer with a shaved head who was wearing a short well-tailored black leather jacket, a black silk T-shirt, black leather pants and black cowboy boots tipped with silver. Joe’s standard look for the customers at Dante’s was the look of a black panther at the zoo, completely bored because it wasn’t his feeding time. Jim, the other bouncer, was a two hundred and eighty four pound bear of a man with a blond beard and a shock of blond curly hair that stuck out of his John Deere cap. His eyes were sky blue; and like the sky they seemed to envelop you, yet had no single focus. Jim wore a red and white plaid hunting shirt, blue jeans, suspenders, and tan Timberland work boots. They both wore all the right labels to conjure up all the racist fears of a class B movie. The white kids were afraid of Joe, the stereotypical black bad ass from Harlem; and the black kids were afraid of Jim, the stereotypical red neck shit-kicker from Bonnie Town U.S.A.

Actually, they were pretty nice guys. Joe was an ex-middleweight fighter with a record of fifty-four and four, but he never got a title shoot because Joe would never throw a fight. He retired from boxing, and now he worked construction during the day and then worked at Dante’s as a bouncer during the night. He had three children, and he was a religious man. Jim, on the other hand, was a farm boy from Alabama. He played defensive line at the University of Alabama and came to New York to become an actor. From time to time, when there was trouble, Jim would wade into it like a grizzle bear while reciting the lines from a Shakespeare play that he was working on at the Actor’s Studio. Sonny found it amusing to watch Joe and Jim interact. Jim never stopped talking and Joe never talked, but every once in a while Jim would get Joe to smile and sometimes he’d actually laugh, but then he would realize where he was, and he would retreat back into his bad ass Black Panther role.

Sonny walked into the main floor of Dante’s, and the first person he saw was Tom behind the bar. Tom, who was six foot four and weighed well over two hundred pounds, had a face that looked like it had been formed out of the rugged mountains of Greece and the steep waterfalls that flowed over jagged rocks down into deep pools of Ancient Greek mysteries, the New Jersey Turnpike, Seaside Heights, hoagies, and Bucknell University where he was a political science major and a star basketball player who came to the Rome of the World, New York City to make his mark. Tom was a revolutionary turned bartender/drug dealer who made enough money behind the bar and on the street to feed his appetites for good food, good wine, beautiful women, world travel, a good book, and a well turned phrase. Tom believed that he was a descendant of the Ancient Greek Gods and that his destiny was to rule the world someday. Dante’s, working for tips, travelling the world, breaking the law, studying human nature down and dirty, roaming the streets of New York and becoming a connoisseur were all training for the day when his time would come. Tonight, Tom was alone in the main room of Dante’s, a God in waiting.

 It was only nine o’clock, and the place would be dead until eleven, but then it would be mobbed wall to wall. Sonny liked this time of night at Dante’s because he could talk to the most interesting people who came into Dante’s, the people who worked there. Sonny sat down, and Tom poured him a Martel’s cognac with a back of soda then poured himself a drink. They toasted then Sonny sat back in the bar chair and took in the main floor of Dante’s that was called The Turf Exchange. Dante’s had been a speakeasy during probation, and then it became quite popular in the forties and early fifties as an upscale bar and restaurant, but in the sixties it fell on bad times and closed down after years of serving fifty-cent shots and cheap meals. However, despite all the changes it went through, the original design and décor of the bar had been well preserved; and with some restoration and embellishments, the dark mahogany bar now looked like an altar to Dionysus with hand carved garlands of flowers and columns of fennel stalks entwined with grape vines and crowned with pinecones. The front bar was over a hundred feet long, and the back bar was so vast that you could stock a liquor store with all the bottles that were on its shelves. The background lights built into the shelving and the spots from the ceiling made the spirits glow like magic potions that promised to send you to another world where you could be that genie that lies within, the wish that was never fulfilled, the word that was never spoken, the dream, the giant that lurks within each of us that comes out roaring with a joy and a rage and a sorrow that has no object.

The centerpiece of the bar was a black and white engraving of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. Lucifer and all the other gods who had fallen to the one and only god gathered at a temple that they had carved out of golden veins of ore found deep in the earth to form massive archways and golden Doric pillars, architraves, cornices, and freezes. Diamond and crystal and ruby lanterns were aflame with the reflected light coming from the molten core of the earth. Sulfurous smoke bellowed around Lucifer who stood at the top of the stairway to Hell where the many gods and goddesses, satyrs and nymphs, stories and myths had fallen, cast out by the one single author, the one book, the word made flesh in black and white, all their colorful glory reduced to shades and shadows receding into the darkness of oblivion.

Large black and white linoleum tiles gave the floor a touch of art deco as did the 50’s Retro booths upholstered in black vinyl with red piping that gave the softly rounded edges a sensuous sheen. The tabletops were black onyx with chrome trim; and the two rows of double booths ran parallel to the bar, separated by a mahogany and glass partition and etched flowers. On the back wall above the booths were three large paintings in gold gilded frames bathed in a magical liquid of light.

The painting on the left side of the wall is a painting of Dionysus and Selinus riding in a chariot surround by satyrs, nymphs, and naked men and women who are in a riotous frenzy brought on by wine and the coming of Selene, the goddess of the moon. The chariot is being pulled by two-bull-like-chimeras that are the color of the dark brown earth. Selinus, Dionysus’s fat and debauched teacher, is seated like a baby in lion’s fur, his stomach distended from gluttony; and a naked nymph is pressing her breasts against his leg while another is pouring him wine from a womb like jug. He is blind drunk like a snake that can only see heat and feel his skin against another.

Dionysus, who is driving the chariot, is the son of Semele, who, like the Virgin Mary, was a mortal who mated with Zeus in an immaculate conception. Dionysus is naked except for a crown of grape leaves; and his naked body is the perfect male figure as conceived by a woman, muscular but feline in repose. His face is a perfect balance of gentleness and strength, beauty and danger like a big cat with soft paws and sharp claws who purrs, enchanted by the appearance of the goddess who has come to tuck in the sun. The reins of the chariot are slipping from Dionysus’s hands as a satyr with the hindquarters, hooves, and the horns of a goat, is pulling Dionysus from the chariot into a feast of hands grabbing everywhere for flesh – lips consuming the immortal seed, men and women wallowing in the furrows. Dionysus roars with laughter; and with one massive sweep of his arm, he wipes away a soiree of flutes and mathematical harmonies coming from the white light of an Apollonian temple of Platonic logic.

The painting on the right side of the wall is once again a painting of Dionysus. He has the same subtle features and form, and he is wearing the same crown of grape vines, but now he is wearing a dark red cape over his bare chest and a lion skin loin cloth that trails off like a tail. In his right hand he holds a crown of thorns made out of stars over the head of Ariane who radiates in a pure white light, a blue silken watery robe falling off her shoulders revealing her naked breasts the color of milk. Ariane has reached out and given Dionysus the thread that she had given Theseus to find his way out of the labyrinth of lies that we create to hide from the truth that the Minotaur eventually gores us with, killing us with our own deceit. The thread leads to her womb as it did then, but Dionysus will not betray her as Theseus did. He holds up the thread to the heavens; and it is like a sliver of lightning in his hand, immortalizing her love in the stars forever.

The centerpiece of the three painting is a painting of Beauty and Life naked and helpless in the arms of nymphs dressed in the black habits of nuns. The radiant light of Beauty and Life in human form is being devoured by the darkness and is so finely done that the pose blurs gender and caused Sonny to see three figures in one – Nature in the form of a beautiful woman raped and dead, Dionysus helpless and weak under the Tree of Life, and Jesus Christ being taken down from the cross. This is the true holy trinity, the secret coda woven through classical Western religion and erotic art.

Beyond the bar and the rows of booths and the paintings was the dance floor, and above the dance floor was a giant video screen upon which millions of sperm were racing for one egg. Superimposed over the sperm race was a horserace that came in and out of focus, two horses nose to nose at the finish line. Like America, only one sperm won the race while millions of others smashed into the wall like atoms in a cyclotron creating bursts of light across the dance floor.

“Sonny, I saw an ad on TV today. It was really interesting,” Tom said. “In the ad you see a picture of what seems to be a college campus. It’s a pastoral scene with modern towers in the background. The voice-over says something like this, ‘Many people feel that American corporations are ivory towers, cut off and removed from the reality; but here at Money Corporation we’re down to earth and in touch.’ ”

Tom laughed and said, “What I find incredible about this ad is that an American corporation could suggest that American corporations have become ivory towers; for in fact, it's true. They have become insulated from reality." Tom leaned forward and whispered in a conspiratorial manner, “What’s the lesson?”

“They have feet of clay?”

“That’s right,” Tom said. “All we have to do is control the streets; and we can take over this country block by block, neighborhood by neighborhood.” Tom spread his arms and looked up at the ceiling. “As the bricks fall from above, we'll catch them and build from below; and when the final brick has fallen, the final brick will be laid.”

The door opened, and Sonny could hear the composite sound of millions upon millions of voices and the nervous system of the Leviathan buzzing like billions of electronic insects, a metamorphous of protons filling the air with images, words, and sounds, stereos and TVs and radios all playing simultaneously in a symphony of Babel. Horns blared and engines roared to the constant drone of tires against asphalt and trillions of mini-explosions of gas and air compressed into a cylinder head, thrusting up and down like a steel penis, coming over and over again in a chemical mechanical orgasm, its heart pumping pulsars.

Sonny looked up when he heard the door open, and he saw Ken White, the floor manager, walking towards him like a soldier reporting for duty. Ken was an ex-marine and playwright from the Beat Generation who had been thrown in the brig and wrote an award winning off-Broadway play based on his experiences. He looked at Sonny and Tom, tilted his head to the side, and gave them his Cheshire cat smile then reached over and squeezed both their shoulders like he was about to give them a loan of knowledge that had to be paid back. "How are the generalissimos doing tonight? Are you preparing yourselves for the hordes from Brooklyn, Queens, Harlem, and the Bronx that will invade us?"

He emphasized each borough as if each group would be the most formidable foe that they would ever have to face. “This you can be sure of,” Ken said as he paused and smiled again. “They will come.”

Tom poured Ken a Stolichnaya on the rocks, and Ken took his drink and the racing form, and he went to the other end of the bar where he could be alone to drink and read under one of the hanging green glass cabaret lights that lined the bar. Ken didn't write anymore. He had only one interest and that was the track. He went every day and bet everything.

Sonny watched Ken sitting under the bar light reading his racing form, sipping his drink; and every once and awhile his legs would swing like a little kid sitting at his desk waiting for the bell to ring, waiting for school to get out so he could go see the horsies run, place a bet, take a chance, win. Fate and luck were important factors in Ken’s life. He wrote a play that he had no hope of doing anything with, and it became everything to him, and everything that he had intentionally written since then had become nothing to him. No matter how much you do, fate, on any day, can win the race. That's what Ken had learned from life; so he studied his racing form looking for a winner, reading in between the lines, looking for lady luck, wondering what the weather conditions would be, will it rain or shine.

Dave Sharky, who worked with Tom behind the main bar, walked into Dante’s marching to the same old beat that Ken marched to; and he looked like he had just woken up, plunged his long brown hair into a cold shower, thrown on his rumpled blue jeans, hand-made moccasins, and a badly faded orange and green plaid shirt that looked like a relic of Christmas past and a broken marriage. His features were a cross between the molten ore that spilled out of the mold onto the floor of a Buffalo steel mill and the arid features of the Texas panhandle and too much heat and not enough water, too much booze for a tall lean cowboy without a horse whose fiery character was tempered on the frozen battlefields of North Korea. Dave, like Ken, was an ex-marine, and he had been one of The Chosen Frozen from the Chosen Reservoir who had been immortalized in Marine folklore. The Chosen Frozen were the twenty five thousand Marines who were trapped at the Chosen Reservoir when over a million Chinese crossed the border into North Korea to fight the Americans. Dave was one of those Marines who had waged a continual battle in thirty degree below zero weather; and when he peed, he had to pee in his pants - the pee frozen to his leg as he marched home in retreat with over two hundred thousand Chinese trying to cut him off. Dave, after all these years, was still marching. He marched with his broad shoulders back, and he moved as though his shoulders hung from a coat hanger, the rest of his body dangling loosely as he slid along, still afraid of the frozen waters, never letting his feet get too far off the ground.

As Dave marched down the bar he spoke like an ancient master of the oral narrative who sat at the campfire of the gathering tribes and told stories passed on from generation to generation in the Homeric tradition, his voice echoing in the empty cavernous bar. “I have seen the Titans and they are here.” He pointed to the floor, and he walked on as he said, “Shipwrecked in this graveyard for giants.”

Ken looked up from his racing form and smiled. He then grabbed Dave by his shoulders and said, “Are you ready for action, Sir?”

Dave saluted and the two marines who had marched down many roads now marched together down to where Sonny and Tom were stationed. Ken and Dave came to a halt, and they looked at Tom and Sonny as if they were new recruits. Ken confided in Dave. “They conspire to conquer the world.”

Dave looked at Sonny and Tom; his eyes were round with shock. “I have heard rumors in the street,” he said. “Organ grinders pass messages and old ladies cry.”

Ken smiled, “I told them that Brooklyn, Queens, and Harlem invade tonight.”

“And don’t forget the Bronx,” Dave said as he wagged his finger. “They come with greased back hair and razors dangling from their neck, charms to make you sleep.” He ran his finger across his neck as if to slit his throat.

Ken was pleased. This was the living theater, the real play, the real off-off-Broadway. “I went to see Robbie today,” he said. “Get this scene. Robbie is lying in his bed as fat as Claudius, shaving coke from a rock the size of your fist. We snort a couple of lines, and then he says to me, “Ken, you're not doing anything for me at the bar.”

“I say to him, ‘why should I? There’s nothing to do.’ ”

Dave laughed, and he was about to say something, but Ken raised his hand to indicate that there was more to the story; and said, “We snort a couple more lines. And Robbie says to me, ‘Sharky is too old for Dante’s.’ ”

Dave’s eyes widened. “What did you say to that?”

“I said to him,” ‘So...he ain’t no Shirley Temple.’ ”

“And what did he say to that?” Sonny asked between fits of laughter.

“He didn’t say anything. He just wouldn't give me any more coke.”

Amidst the laughter, Tom leaned over, and he asked Sonny if Robbie could really fire Sharky. Sonny, who was cradling a glass of brandy in his hand that was shaped like a woman’s breast, took a sip of the dark amber and said, “No.” He was about to take another sip of his brandy when he heard the door open and Charlie shouting, “I want more money!”

He turned to see Charlie and Ginny walking in the door. Charlie was one of the bouncers, an ex-heavyweight contender who had put Jose Torres out of business and got knocked out in the fifth round by Floyd Paterson. Now he was in Robbie’s custody facing charges of manslaughter and bank robbery. Charlie was in a huff and puff, and Ginny’s eyes were shining and her pupils were dilated. She was obviously very stoned; but it wasn’t on life; or, at least, it wasn’t life as seen through the prescribed lenses of society. Judging from the smile on her face, what Ginny saw was more like what a baby saw when it looked up at the mobile over its crib for the first time.

“This white bitch won't give me no money,” Charlie said. “I gotta have money from my women.”

Charlie gestured threateningly at Ginny. "Give me some money, Bitch.”

“Go fuck yourself, Charlie.”

Charlie laughed, “See what I meant that Jew bitch won't give me shit.”

Tom poured Ginny a drink and said, “Ginny, don’t give Charlie money.”

Ginny looked at Tom in disbelief. “I'm not going to give that Nigger any money,” she said; and then she turned away and floated off by herself knowing that they were all looking at the same thing, her ass.

Charlie turned to the boys and said, “Robbie is just like her. I told Robbie, ‘I want mo money.’ ”

“Robbie says to me, ‘Charlie, you're my friend.’ ”

“I say to him, ‘Robbie, I want money.’ ”

“So he hands me some of his stepped on shit. ‘Here, Charlie, have some coke.’ ”

“I want money,” Charlie said, pounding his hand with his fist. "I want money!"

“So, Robbie says to me, ‘Charlie, if it weren't for me, you’d be in jail.’ ”

“I told him I don't want to be no mother fuckin slave. I want money.”

Charlie then looked at everyone in disbelief. “He tells me he's going to fire me if I keep askin him for mo money.” Charlie laughed. “I told that mother fucker he can't fire me. Because if he fires me I go to jail for life; and if I'm going to jail for life, I might as well kill his mother fuckin ass. It's all the same thing, right?”

Sonny looked at Charlie and smiled to himself. Some people thought Charlie was dumb, but he wasn’t dumb; he was just hard to understand. Sonny also knew that he’d been in New York City too long because Charlie was beginning to make sense to him.

Charlie saw Ginny walking down the aisle towards him, and he said, “Those fuckin Jews are all alike. They'll give you anything but money.”

Ginny walked past Charlie completely ignoring him.

“Ginny, baby, why won't you give me some money?” It was almost a plea. When he didn’t get a response, Charlie chased after her; and when he caught up to her, he whispered something in her ear. They both laughed, and Ginny put her arm under Charlie’s arm and her hand on his bicep as they disappeared into the backroom.

Dave shook his head in disbelief and said, “Charlie Butter Knife Watkins, prize fighter, bank robbers, murderer, and bonded slave.” Dave assured everyone. “It’s true,” he said. “The judge did tell Charlie that if he lost his job he’d throw him back in jail.” Dave laughed at the implications for Charlie and Robbie. “Until death do us part.”

 As the laughter echoed through the bar, Ken retreated back into his racing form. Dave settled down to some serious drinking. All the employees came in. The hordes began to invade. Ken and one of the bouncers handled the door, and Charlie patrolled the floor. Ginny waited tables, and Tom and Dave took care of the bar. All the staff took up their positions. The music grew louder and louder. The dancers knew Ginny. They knew all her moves. She seemed incorporated into their dance. Twenty or thirty of the regulars formed a line and discoed in unison as Ginny weaved in and out, never spilling a drop, never breaking a glass. Tom and Dave choreographed their moves behind the bar featuring a sleight of hand act where money disappeared with every sweep of the bar mop and glasses tinkled in rhythm to the music as they made the drinks. Charlie walked the floor giving lectures on brute force. Charlie carried a butter knife in his pocket, and after a few blunt stabs, you'd get the point. Charlie Watkins would kill you with a butter knife, that's what kind of guy he was.

The wall of dancers grew and grew. Time and again Ginny would plunge back in and find her way through the chaos; but after a while the wall became so great, the hordes so numerous, that Ginny gave up the fight and stood back and watched the show. At some point Ginny went back into the crowd and never came back, dancing with whoever it was who stood in her way. All the floors to the club were open now, and New York poured into Dante’s full of sexual expectations and dark desires that flourished in the underground world of New York City’s subconscious mind where sperm and fertile eggs were stirred up, shaken, then poured over ice only to be stirred up again and again by the constant beat of the drummer, the fingering of keys, the guitar player hitting chords that vibrated through the dancers in a rock and roll ecstasy of one climax after another like a never ending lover.

In the background, on the giant video screen above the dance floor, amidst pulsing lights and laser beams, the history of carnal knowledge flashed in clips upon the screen – the first kiss ever filmed in 1896 followed by the first kiss to steal away a husband in *Kiss Me Fool*, the camera focusing on a touch of silk, a bra strap, hair gone wild, and a necktie like a hangman’s knot gone loose followed by the first open mouth kiss by John Gilbert who slipped his tongue into Greta Garbo’s mouth in a close-up of flesh tasting flesh that dissolved into Humphrey Bogart taking Lauren Becall into his arms as she fell back into the abyss, and he followed her into the bare décolletage.

On the dance floor, a ballerina from the Met performed one pirouette after another, dancing in and out of the lines of kids from the boroughs doing *Onward Christian Soldiers* to a disco beat. Also on the dance floor were members of a mime troupe who were each trapped in an invisible glass cage agonizing over their individuality as they tried to reach each other and the mass of humanity that was moving in and out of one another, caught up in the flow, hypnotized by the beat, the mix, the melting pot of New York.

Sonny shouted to Tom, “Have you seen Charlie’s brother?”

“No, but Josh is here.”

“Where?”

Tom shrugged.

Sonny motioned for Tom to come closer, and he shouted in his ear merely to whisper in the chaos of sound, “That deal may be on with Larry, either tomorrow or the next day. Tell Sharky.”

Tom nodded, and Sonny put down the drink that he had barely touched and gave Tom the peace sign as he turned away and began his search for Josh in the deluge.

Sonny walked down stairs to The Ballroom, the next level of Dante’s Inferno. The Ballroom floor was covered with holographic tiles that gave the impression of dancing on fire, the flames licking the dancers with passion. A tall female model was formally dressed in tails and top hat, her stark white hair slicked back like a man’s, her lips cherry red. Her tongue a flame entered the mouth of an equally tall black model with pink full lips and long jet black wavy hair, the back of her skintight black and silver sequin gown plunging to the crevice of her ass. The finger nails of her dark mahogany hands were painted pink, and they dug into the neck of her lover as she tasted the heat.

The room itself was made to look like Lucifer’s temple carved out of a diamond mine deep in the earth to form massive archways, Doric pillars, cornices and friezes made of blue kimberlite with green olivine grains, purplish red garnets, and diamond dust and gems that sparkled as a remnant of a volcanic ejaculation millions of years old. The walls were covered with glow board and then layered over with a mosaic of shattered mirrors that formed a silk, moon-lit web of images amidst strobe lights and laser beams reflecting off of the tiny mirrors of an old time giant ballroom globe light that spun slowly, hypnotically, creating a sexual collage of broken images and shattered genes.

On the dance floor, men were dancing with men; and women were dancing with women; but they all seemed to be dancing with themselves, groping wool and silk and nylon and plastic skin, tasting each other, molding each other’s lips like life-like three dimensional dolls that said everything that you wanted them to say; but they were all saying the same thing. They were saying that they wanted to fuck themselves. That was the fatal flaw of capitalism. It was a prism cell of narcissisms that no one could escape from in a society devoid of love and empathy where everyone lived in individual cells isolated from one another, trapped in the body of a Leviathan without a heart or a soul that treated them as human resources, like coal and oil to be burned up and discarded.

The bar that spanned one wall of The Ballroom was composed of sheets of colored glass that formed a green and yellow and blue mist from which a half-naked woman emerged like a bronze age Amazon warrior wearing a bra and thong that looked like inlaid armor, fluid silver and gold. Two snakes entwined themselves around her forehead and stared out at the lust with diamond eyes. Above the bar hung a lithograph of Saint Sebastian tied to the Tree of Life, like Jesus Christ, hanging limp from the crucifix of limbs, feminized, androgynous, pierced with phallic arrows.

To the right of the black and white lithograph of Saint Sebastian with his long black hair hanging down like the leaves of a weeping willow was a painting of Dionysus. Dionysus was lying in a death-like-repose, asleep in a dream whose roots reached down to the core of the earth and into its inner sun. The branches of the tree spread out over his head into a blue ocean of sky, and Dionysus’s hand seemed to be reaching out to touch a lily pond of white vaginal flowers, the water still as a mirror reflecting the forest and the naked light of the nymphs that hovered around their fallen hero like a halo. His mother, Selene, who had conceived Dionysus in her own image of a man like Zeus had conceived Athena, reached out to her son and cradled him in her arms like Jesus Christ was cradled in the arms of Mary at the tomb of her womb dreaming of when the sun would rise again.

A guitar screamed in agony and the drummer pounded the drum like someone pounding on a door trying to get out while Jimmy Page, the lead singer for Led Zeppelin, shouted, “Love;” and the word echoed and reverberated through the cavernous temple and fell into the abyss to ignite the flames that danced under Sonny’s feet.

Above the paining of Saint Sebastian, Dionysus, and Christ; lurked a massive relief of the Minotaur with his human like body emerging from the granite and the diamonds and its hard volcanic core. He was bulging with power, his head crowned with horns. His huge arms held up the ceiling; and his bull like visage with flaring nostrils glared down on the sinners. Sonny mused over the folly of imagining that God would ever forgive us for crucifying everything that was good and loving and caring and creative in life. The more likely story is that we are condemned to die over and over again until we realized that we crucified ourselves.

Sonny made his way across the dance floor to the portico that seemed to be carved out of solid granite. Two rows of Doric columns with diamond dust cornices formed the portico and the screen to the colonnade beyond where silhouettes of undetermined gender disappeared into one another and the carnivorous darkness, the only light coming from the paintings on the wall, a sequence of nudes in which the female form is always captured, exposed, looking somewhere else or inward at a secret place all her own, or at her own reflection in the beauty of nature, the crystal clear water pouring over granite worn away, smooth like a woman’s legs opening up to sunlight reflecting off of the mist like gold, naked in her dreams, vulnerable to the predatory eye of rock hard objectivity that sadistically enjoyed binding her by her panties as she made the hardness soft and turned the rock into shifting sands pulled down into the undertow of an ocean of passion, the white light of her purity folding into a silk fabric revealing her breasts.

Naked women were immersed in sweets of all kinds, desserts and cakes, frosting smeared over their faces and legs, their breast, their lingerie looking like cellophane and colorful wrapping paper and fine woven cotton candy that you could eat, nipples like pure brown chocolate Kisses. A woman stripped bare stood with her arms behind her head like a prisoner of war exposing her breasts.

Sonny saw kind and gentle souls, who in another culture would have been monks and priests and priestesses who had evolved to a higher spiritual level beyond carnal and material lusts and possession being led like slaves downstairs to The Bitter End where the narcissism of capitalism degenerated into the sadomasochism of fascism.

At the entranceway to The Bitter End, Sonny observed Tommy, a young buffed up gay African American bouncer who monitored The Ballroom and The Bitter End to make sure everything remained fun and games. Tommy was wearing a skintight black T-shirt, old fashion Levis that you folded up to a desired length, and old fashion black and white high-top Converse sneakers. “Glitter” was spelled out across his chest in silver sparkles; and he wore a silver ring in his nose and a ring of thorns tattooed around both biceps. Sonny felt that Tommy, like many of the new generation, had pierced and mutilated himself in an unconscious anticipation of the sadomasochism that they would have to endure in the New World Order.

When Tommy saw Sonny, he smiled and said, “Hi, Sonny. Want to dance?”

Sonny laughed and said, “No, I’m looking for Josh. Have you seen him?”

“I think he’s downstairs.”

Sonny frowned and then walked down the cavernous stairway to the labyrinth of dungeons and web like mirrors and streams of molten lava and pulsing lights that gave only a glimpse of the men and women who were being tied up with brightly colored ribbons, submitting to bondage and humiliation, striking poses that mirrored the poses of a crucified Jesus, the pierced body of Saint Sebastian, the fallen Dionysus, and the sexual pornography that revealed the true nature of hard core capitalism that identifies everything that is good, kind, and empathetic as feminine and therefore weak.

Near the exit to The Bitter End, a long line of people waited to be punished for crimes unknown. One woman was lying over the Devil’s knee; her skirt was up; her panties were down; and, as she was being spanked like a little child, she whimpered through her tears, “I was bad. I was bad.”

As soon as she got up another woman was grabbed and pulled down over the Devil’s knee, and she passively let him pull down her silk pants as she moaned in the ecstasy of innocence in search of sin. In the light she looked red hot and on fire.

Sonny looked down the line. There was Josh waiting his turn. Sonny walked up to him and said, “Have you seen Charlie’s brother? Has anyone talked to you about tomorrow?”

“No.”

Sonny looked at the line and then at Josh and said, “What the fuck are you doing here?”

Josh smiled. “I’m going to confession.”

Sonny shook his head in disbelief and said, “I’m getting out of here. I’m going up to The Executive Suite; and if I don’t see him there, or I don’t see anyone else who knows what going on, I’m going home.”

Sonny left Josh to be born again and walked out of The Bitter End, passed The Ball Room, up the stairs to The Turf Exchange, and then up one more flight of stairs to The Executive Suite. The doorway to the Executive Suite was a circular steel vault door; and the room inside was a black void with what looked like poured molten gold floors and pillars that glowed green, violet, blue, and orange then disappeared high up in the ceiling-less ceiling. From the ceiling hung thin invisible holographic plates that gave the impression of hundred dollar bills floating down from the void above and then disappearing like bubbles created with a child’s plastic wand. In the four corners of the room were islands of black leather couches and chairs, cocktail tables, green and gold free standing torcheres, and paintings where all the eroticism and passion of nature and the human form were abstracted and transformed into two dimensional techno-mechanical shapes and splashes of paint that muffled the human cry for help like Andy Warhol’s can of Cambell Soup and the cubes of Picasso flesh. Above the bar floated a huge golden dollar sign, a hieroglyph of the snake in the Garden of Eden coiled around The Tree of Life.

On the dance floor murder, fraud, prostitution, and white-collar crime danced with Exxon and IT&T, movie stars and punk rockers with pierced body parts and shaved heads, half naked models wearing price tags and the children from the main floor honored for the depths of their vices. Want-to-be victims and perpetrators swarmed the entranceway waiting to get in.

Holding the masses at bay were two giant bouncers and Peter Tattoo, the floor manager and the house coke dealer. Peter, who was a Yale graduate and a Hell’s Angel, tied his long silver-white hair back in a ponytail; and he wore black eye liner, motorcycle boots with steel toes, black Levis, and a black leather vest with a winged death head insignia on the back. Barbed wire tattoos coiled around his bare arms; and on the back of one hand he had tattooed his motto, *Never Give An Inch*. In that hand, he carried a club like cane with a weighted pure gold handle that he used for crowd control. If that didn’t work, Peter had a choke wire wrapped around his head like a bandana, throwing stars in his breast pockets, and a .38 Colt in an ankle holster.

Peter spotted Sonny coming through the crown and said, “Hey, man, how you doin?”

“Great, if I could find Charlie’s brother.”

“He’s not here. But how do you like my crowd?”

“When it comes to trash, Peter; you’re a fuckin poet.”

Peter nodded his head in approval and said, “I take that as a real compliment, Sonny.”

“You should.” Sonny walked away; and as he crossed the dance floor to get to the bar, the twins came up to him. The twins were beautiful, but they got off on being like “*The Two Faces of Eve*,” identical but opposite, changing identities, yet still the same woman. They were The Good Girl and The Bad Girl. Good Girl had done her blond wig up in pigtails with red bows; and she was wearing a pleated red and black tartan mini skirt, white bobby socks and black penny loafers, a white dress shirt with a matching red and black plaid tie, and a black cashmere sport jacket with a school crest on her chest with the motto, “Know Thy Self.”

Bad Girl was dressed in black spiked high heel shoes, black sheer stockings, and a black web like silk slip that posed as a mini dress and revealed her black lace bra, panties, and garter belt. Her body was sprayed with gold sparkles, and her jet-black hair was teased and frozen in a wild whirl that made her look as if she was in the middle of having sex, straddling her lover, pumping away, her hair turning into Medusa’s snakes.

Simultaneously they both said, “Hi, Sonny.”

“Hi, girls, where’s CB?”

“We tied him up in the bathroom,” Bad Girl said.

The twins each took one of Sonny’s arms. He looked from one to the other and said, “Doesn’t he get confused?”

“He likes it like that,” Good Girl said.

Bad Girl smiled, “We do too. Come on, Sonny, dance with us,”

As they danced, Good Girl and Bad Girl undulated around Sonny, coming in and out alternatively, whispering in his ear.

“I’d love to cook and sew and clean house for you, Sonny.”

“I love to be sexy. I want you to desire me, baby. I’ll take it any way you want to give it to me, Sonny. You can tie me up.”

“I want you to give me babies, Sonny. I want to be a Momma.”

“I’m a whore, Sonny. I want to be fucked by everyone. When you kiss me, you’ll be kissing your best friend.”

When Bad Girl put her hand on his crotch, and Good Girl lifted up her mini skirt to show him her pure white panties; Sonny put up his hands up and said, “Wait a minute, I give up.”

He spotted CB coming towards them, and he shouted, “CB, save me. Get me away from these witches.”

CB, who was tall and lean and in his late twenties, had styled his hair in an Afro; and he was wearing an apple green polyester suit with flaring bellbottom pants and wide lapels. Underneath his jacket he wore a flaming red dress shirt with a broad collar that was partially unbuttoned to reveal a hairy chest and a gold chain with a gold coke spoon for a medallion.

CB put his arms around the twins and said, “Come on, girls, leave Sonny alone. Go stick pins in somebody else.”

Simultaneously, the twins said, “Bye Sonny,” and they walked away weaving in and out of each other, undulating through the crowd until they disappeared.

Sonny smiled, shook his head in disbelief, and said, “How do you do it? How do you handle them?”

“I don’t. I just let them do their thing.” CB laughed and said, “They’re absolutely out of their minds. You should see my loft, Sonny. What they have done to it. It’s furnished with new wave furniture, all slanted in weird angles and painted in weird colors. We got Al Kapp and Andy Warhol originals on the walls; giant crayons, toys and games from the fifties all over the place; and the bedroom is decorated in Spanish Harlem Modern with a giant picture of Elvis painted on black velvet hanging above our bed.”

CB was going on about the girls and their schizoid sense of interior decoration when Sonny saw his Beatrice, but her name wasn’t Beatrice. Her name was Miranda Delano Hewitt, and she was the woman he loved and lost somehow near the end in a haze of alcohol and drugs, about the same time he lost everything else he cared for and believed in. Friends had told him that she was back from Kenya and the Peace Corp, and she was living in Ithaca, but he never thought he would see her here. She was so out of place. The women around Miranda were models and actresses and women wearing thousands of dollars of clothing and plumage like rare birds of Paradise in a gilded cage; but Miranda, who was without any makeup and wearing simple street clothes, actually glowed in contrast to the vampires of consumption around her.

Sonny walked up behind Miranda and recited a stanza from *The Divine Comedy*, “I am left with less than one drop of my blood that does not tremble for I recognize the signs of the old flame burning.”

“Sonny!”

Miranda spun around and hugged Sonny in a way that reminded him that Miranda was as small as his mother, and he marveled at how much love and warmth could be generated by just touching her skin that was radiating with sunshine.

Miranda looked at him searchingly. “Where have you been? I heard you were an exile in Canada. Then I heard you were sick, and then I didn’t hear anything. Why haven’t you called me? Where are you?”

Miranda searched Sonny’s dark and veiled eyes for the little boy who was hiding somewhere inside. She looked around Dante’s and said, “You created this. Didn’t you?”

Sonny smiled and asked, “How do you like the capitalist version of Dante’s Inferno?”

“It’s brilliant, but why?”

“I was stoned, and I was counting money, and I came up with a residual tale.”

Miranda laughed and said, “Are you going to the funeral for the 60s?”

“What funeral?”

“Didn’t you get an invitation? Robin organized it. It’s in Ithaca at The Sunrise Farm Cooperative. Next Saturday.”

“I haven’t opened my mail in a week.”

Miranda squeezed his hand, affectionately, “You have to come. I’m leaving New York City tomorrow. I’m living in Ithaca now. Say you’ll come.”

“Yes,” he said, “and when I come, we will meet for the first time as we have always met, over and over again, from one life time to another, always falling in love, forever.”

Miranda looked at him with eyes the color of green that you could only find in a Gauguin painting and said, “Yes.”

Sonny felt reborn, and he was about to say that he loved her when Charlie and Ginny came up to him. Charlie shouted in Sonny’s ear, “Come on, man. We got the meet with Larry.”

Sonny frowned and turned to Miranda, “I have to go.”

“Me too,” she said. I have friends downstairs waiting for me.” She looked at Charlie then turned and disappeared much as she had appeared, an apparition, a vision that Sonny wasn’t sure was real.

Charlie was watching Miranda as she walked away and said, “I think that chick digs me.”

Ginny laughed and said, “Charlie, that girl looked at you like a vegetarian looks at a cold bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken.”

They all laughed, and then Sonny asked, “Where?”

“At the smokehouse,” Charlie responded.

Sonny, Charlie, and Ginny left The Executive Suite and walked down the stairs and through the main floor to the exit. Sonny stopped at the bar and told Tom and Dave to be ready to go to work tomorrow. Ken was at the door collecting money as people came in. He held up his hand to a couple that was at the door and said, “Five dahllurs.”

The man looked in and said, “What do you have?”

“A lot of assholes like you. Do you want in or not?”

The man took out his wallet. Sonny waved goodnight to Ken and left with Charlie and Ginny. They picked up a cab outside the nightclub, and Charlie gave the cabby directions to Larry’s smokehouse in Harlem. Along the way, they drove past loading docks and discarded boxes and warehouses closed for the night. The dazzle of nightlife was replaced by pouring rain. A gallery of street lights created splashes of electric color against the rain of black. Shadowy figures appeared and disappeared along with the streaks and flashes of illumination created by passing cars and red tail lights, bright and bobbing on broken streets. Sonny could see his own reflection looking out the window of the cab, looking through the dark pillars and walls of New York that formed shadows of meditation in the night. Through the rain Sonny could see a beggar washed ashore in America, asleep in a pool of debris, clinging to the curb at the foot of a wall of concrete. Looking up in search of the sky, Sonny got a glimpse of the moon forming a sick halo around the torch-like-top of the Empire State Building.

The cab disappeared into the foliage, and the winding ways of Central Park then reemerged in the darkness of Harlem. They pulled up in front of an old four-story brick building with a doorman standing under a dimly lit canopy. When they got out of the cab, Charlie slapped the giant doorman on the back; and the doorman opened the door and smiled like a little boy would smile at the school bully who had just been nice to him. They walked up a flight of stairs to another entranceway where Sonny was frisked for a gun, and Charlie whispered in Sonny’s ear, "They think you’re a mob guy. That’s the only white that comes here."

When the two security guards with bald heads and a lot of tattoos and bulging muscles were certain that he wasn’t packing, they let him into the main floor of the club that was dimly lit with smoky silhouettes. A jazz quartet was playing, and the spotlight was on a soloist playing a baritone sax. He sounded like he was playing his brassy cock in the middle of a traffic jam. The crowd was sedate, well dressed, and pleasant. Everyone had left their troubles and their hardware behind. Only the music was allowed to honk. Sonny, Charlie, and Ginny sat down at a table and ordered drinks. The coke was laid out on the table for them to buy, and the waiter rolled them a joint. It was a pleasure to be in a smoke house like this where everything was open; everything was available for a price. It was all on the table for their enjoyment.

 The drinks came, and Charlie leaned over and said, “See, man. What did I tell you? No bogymen in this story, Sonny. Everything is cool.”

A man came to the table and whispered in Charlie's ear. Charlie motioned to Sonny to follow him; and they all got up from the table and walked through the after-hours nightclub past the gaming tables. Sonny could hear the roulette wheel turning, the cards being shuffled, the dice turning over and over again and again proving that Newton was wrong. There was still a chance.

Sonny entered an office that was tastefully furnished with contemporary modern furniture. The rug was a hand woven wool abstract painting of orange, green, and brown geometric patterns on a black background. One wall was covered with a bank of TV screens from which Larry could view everything that was going on in the smokehouse including the cash registers and the exchange of money, every penny.

Larry, who was sitting at a large executive style teak desk, was wearing a light chocolate colored double-breasted suit with a darker brown dress shirt and a gray brown tie. The only jewelry that he wore was a solid gold Rolex wristwatch and a simple gold wedding band. Sonny liked the fact that Larry had good taste and an aesthetic sense of how all the pieces fit together to make up the big picture. But Sonny had no illusions about Larry and the four men playing cards in the background or the three hundred pound, six foot eight bodyguard who was pouring a glass of champagne with nimble hands the size of a baseball glove. They were all killers; and everyone was packing a piece, even Ginny was probably packing a small but effective twenty-two in that little gilded purse of hers. The only one who was not carrying a gun was Sonny.

Sonny could see that Larry was watching him inspect his place; and when their eyes met Larry asked, “What do you think?”

Sonny smiled and said, “I think that nobody spills anything on your carpet, except maybe blood if they get caught stealing from you.”

Larry laughed and got up from his desk and extended his hand and said, “It’s good that you could come. Sit down, man. Relax.”

Larry gestured to his bodyguard, and the man handed Sonny a glass of champagne. He then laid out massive lines of coke for Charlie and Ginny who joined the four men sitting around the coffee table playing cards. Ginny took a sip out of the glass of champagne that had been poured for her; and then she took out her Tarot cards and began dealing her version of poker where the hearts were cups, the clubs were wands, the spades were swords, the diamonds were pentacles, the jacks were knaves, the aces were knights, and the twenty two Tarot trump cards were the prophesies.

The bodyguard finished up by laying out a line for Sonny on the silver tray and placed it on the serving table next to Sonny’s chair along with a freshly open bottle of champagne. Then all three hundred pounds of him disappeared into the lurking darkness behind Sonny. Sonny took a sip of the champagne, looked at the label, Brut Cuvee Angeline 1er Cru. He smiled in appreciation and said, “Larry, you’ve been around the Italians too long. I’ve never been so graciously intimidated in all my life.”

Larry laughed and said, “Don’t flatter yourself, Sonny. The Italians are the only people I know who grab their balls more than we do, so let’s cut the bullshit and get down to business. That sample you sold me was cool. Ginny tells me you got eight hundred pounds more of same quality that you want to unload.”

“What I have Larry is a gold business. This multi-mix you got, I send back if I can’t unload it easy at a reasonable profit.”

Larry smiled. “If the price is right, I can make it easy for you, Sonny.”

“What about the Genovese family?”

Larry shrugged and said, “What about them?”

“You work for them. If they find out that you’re buying from another supplier, we’re both fucked.”

Larry laughed. “For sure Brother.”

Charlie, who was listening to their conversation, gulped his champagne then said, “I told you, Sonny, you don’t have to worry about anything. I’ll protect you.”

Sonny laughed and turned to Larry for comic relief. “Talk to me.”

“Don’t worry about the mob, Sonny. All we’re doing is jiving between the lines a little.”

Sonny appraised the situation. He could pretty much read Larry’s mind. Larry wanted this to go down easy. He wanted Sonny to feel secure in dealing with him. Larry knew over the long run they could both make a lot of money, and he could make a hell of a lot more if he could find out where the warehouse was located with all that gold. The risks were obvious to Sonny. If he did business with Larry, he would bring the Mafia and the Harlem gangstas into play. For what? Why was he trying to read Larry’s mind, the cards, and the Jungian synchronicity of it all?

Sonny could hear Ginny calling out the cards. The symbolic archetypal imagery and numerology of the human condition was being laid out on the table – The 3 of Hearts and the Lord of Abundance, plenty, success, pleasure, sensuality, eating and drinking, pleasure and dancing, and new clothes – The 10 of Spades and The Lord of Ruin, undisciplined warring forces, ruin in all plans and projects, disdain, insolence and impertinence, yet mirth and love of overthrowing the happiness of others – The 10 of Diamonds and The Lord of Wealth, completion of material gain and fortune, but nothing beyond except old age, slothfulness, heaviness, dullness of mind and then eternal death unrelieved by any natural transcendence – The 2 of Spades and The Lord of Peace Restored, strength through suffering, pleasure after pain, sacrifice and trouble yet strength arising from the symbol of the rose as though pain itself has brought forth beauty.

As Ginny read the cards everyone in the room was being transformed into the mythological archetypal characters symbolized by the cards. The Ace of Clubs appeared as a winged warrior riding upon a black horse with a flaming mane and tail. Beneath the rushing feet of his stead were warring flames of fire. He was active, generous, fierce, sudden and impetuous; and he was being opposed by The Ace of Spades, a winged warrior who was mounted on a brown stead that was racing across dark driving clouds. He was active, clever, subtle, fierce, delicate, courageous, and skillful; but if he was ill dignified, he could be deceitful, tyrannical and crafty. They were in contention for the loyalty of The Queen of Clubs who was wearing a crown and sitting on a throne beneath which water was flowing and lotus flowers could be seen. Upon her crown was an Ibis with open wings; and though she was wearing silver chain mail armor under her aqua marine blue cape, her face was dreamy. According to the cards, she was imaginative, poetic, kind, coquettish and good-natured yet not willing to take much trouble for another. She was much affected by the influence of others and was therefore dependent and unreliable and unpredictable as she dealt

Sonny watched the Ginny as the Queen of Clubs deal out The Foolish Man who through his ideas, thoughts, and spirituality strived to rise himself above the material. He was followed by The Hanged Man, Fortitude, The Devil, The Hermit The Magus; and somewhere in the hole card lurked Death – transformation and change in search of The Wheel of Fortune and the one thing that was certain. The universe loved to gamble. It loved pure randomness, the surprised mutations, and the unlimited possibilities for creativity where cause and effect relationships were merely the table upon which to gamble.

Sonny grabbed the rolled-up-one-hundred-dollar bill lying on the silver tray and snorted a line of coke. He then brushed the coke from his nose and said, “O.K., let’s play. Two hundred and fifty dollars a pound. Non negotiable.”

“OK, Sonny. How do you want it to go down?”

"I’ll meet you on Pier 40 at 10:00 AM, tomorrow.”

Larry winced. “Why so early?”

“I know the parking lot. Nobody is there at that time of the day.”

Larry nodded in agreement and said, “OK, that’s cool, so how do you want to do this?”

 “I'll be on the top level on the far side of the parking lot in a gray 1971 Volvo station wagon. You bring the money, Charlie, and your bodyguard. I'll be there with the pot, Tom, and Dave. Charlie and your bodyguard can take the pot and me anywhere you want to go. Tom and Dave will take you and the money and hold you until everyone is satisfied. Then we all can go home.”

Larry smiled, “It's nice to know that you trust me, Sonny.”

Sonny laughed. “I don't go down no dark alleyways with nobody,” he said. Then he smiled, “Especially on our first date.”

They both laughed, and Sonny got up. “Well, I guess that’s it.”

Larry stood up as well, and they shook hands to seal the deal. Charlie started to get up, but Sonny motioned for him to stay and said, “Enjoy. I'll see my own way out.” Charlie wasn't about to leave the coke and that was good. He would be less dangerous with a hangover. They all will be less dangerous in the daylight than they are now in the dark, Sonny thought.

Sonny left the club and took a gypsy cab home. As he walked into the lobby of the Chelsea Hotel, he could see Bill, the resident poet sitting with two drag queens. Sonny walked up to the front desk and waited for the desk clerk who was on the phone. He wanted to pick up the mail that had been collecting in his box for a week. He stood there and watched the lobby scene as he waited.

Bill was dressed all in white as usual. His metal crutches hung on his arm, and his artificial leg beat time to the poetry that he was reciting.

*“Whirling weaving wandering eye*

Give back my vision of mind.

*Me her here?*

*Who am I?”*

Bill stopped. “See, it's in the vowels. Listen.” He gritted his teeth and turned red.

*“Oh wicked eyes that crystallize*

*Break through your icy pain.*

We are born on a cross of prismatic light.

*When we meet,*

*We disappear.”*

Bill stopped again and said, “See, now it's in the consonants. The vowels are female and the consonants are male. You can get your sex fucked up by messing up your vowels and consonants. You can keep your manhood like I do by building tension around your jaw when you’re beginning to feel weak. Feel your consonants.”

Bill tensed his jaw to show them how it was done. He turned fire red, and he looked aflame with his own pain as he reached into his white purse for a cigarette.

One of the drag queens laughed and said, “Bill, I think you're right. Someone is always trying to get their consonant in my vowel.”

Bill spotted Sonny at the front desk and wobbled over. “Sonny, come and join us,” he said. “I'm reciting some new poems tonight.”

“No thanks, Bill. I'm tired. I have to get some sleep.” Sonny noticed a gash on the side of Bill’s head. “What happened to your head, Bill?”

“I was mugged last night.”

“Jesus, that’s too bad. Did the police catch them?”

“Nah, it happens all the time. I’m mugged at least once a month.”

“What do you mean?”

“I’m lame and fair game.”

“Isn’t there anything you can do?”

“Yes. I'm going to remain white and pure and keep on writing poetry.” He whispered in Sonny’s ear, “I’m going to teach all the sensitive, kind, gay people how to fight back against evil. I’m going to teach them about consonants.”

“The hard line?”

Bill smiled. His face was red with pain, “Yes, the hard line, the firm set jaw of revolutionary poetry.”

Sonny grabbed his mail from the desk clerk and quickly sorted through it. There it was - the invitation to the funeral. He affectionately patted Bill’s cheek and said, “Good night, Bill.”

“Good night, Sonny.”

Sonny rode the elevator up to his room, took a hot shower, and then collapsed onto his bed with the French windows open to the sounds of chaos. All he could think about was Miranda; and when, for a moment, he touched a bit of Paradise.

It was 1969, and Sonny was driving into Berkeley from the University of Washington where he had been participating in a seminar on global corporations and the death of the nation state. He came to Berkeley to visit Eban Sinclair, a friend from Cornell University who was a graduate student at UC. Eban was a member of SDS, one of the more powerful political activist groups in the country. Sonny had met a few students at the University of Washington who he thought had potential as campus leaders, and he wanted to pass their names on to Eban as potential recruits and future organizers on campus. Sonny also wanted to talk to someone who would know about SDS and where it was going.

When Sonny stopped his Ariel motorcycle for a traffic light on Telegraph Avenue, he saw a young man with shoulder length dark brown hair crossing the street. He was carrying an aluminum framed olive green backpack; and he was wearing brown leather sandals, blue jeans with multi-colored patches, and a tie-die T-shirt with red, yellow, and purple bursts of far out colors.

“Where’s the campus?” Sonny asked.

The young man stopped in the middle of the intersection and pointed straight up Telegraph Avenue. He then smiled and said, “Welcome to The People’s Republic of Berzerkley.”