

RESPECT

a novel by Sarah Anne MacRae

CHAPTER 1

Amended 10.11.2003, 21.11.2003, 18.09.2004

It's all about respect. If a government does not have the respect of either a decent majority or its people or at least those who are keeping it in power, that government is in deep trouble. If the boss does not have the respect of most of his employees, his business is going down the drain. If a wife loses respect for her husband, that marriage is for the lawyers.

You need a lot of luck in life. Luck is not enough. You need respect from yourself and others. But even with respect you have to make a constant effort to keep the respect and stop it disappearing.

I started out lucky. I had nice parents with a secure job who didn't get divorced. I was sent to a good school. I got a university degree in business. I got a post-graduate degree in business administration.

My only complaint about my upbringing is something I did not realise until years later. Children generally accept that what their parents do is normal and proper unless it is very obviously different from what happens in any other family. My parents had a bad case of the Presbyterian disease. We were all poor sinners. Nothing we could do would save us unless God had already decided that we were among the elect. We had to proceed in all things with the highest rectitude so that if God had decided we were among the elect, and were to be saved, we wouldn't do something to lose our position on that important list. We were constantly reminded that we must work hard, and try to do better. We were not allowed to have "swelled heads". That seemed to mean that we were not allowed to be pleased with ourselves or satisfied if we did well. When I topped a class I was told my marks could have been better. Any small mistake I made, even as to the most trivial matters of etiquette was immediately corrected. Praise was always at a minimum. I developed an habitual attitude that whatever I was doing, I had to do it to the very best of my ability. Even so, my best was not good enough. I had to do better than my best. It was quite late in life before I worked out where I had got this personality defect from. Even my brother Tony, whom my parents basically idolised, was always aware that our parents thought he was the greatest, but that was never expressed in praise. The forgiveness of sin, was

more or less impossible in the Presbyterian theory. The forgiveness of quite minor mistakes was not a high Presbyterian priority. No wonder such a ridiculously high proportion of Nobel prize winners, inventors and statesmen have come from a Presbyterian background. The Presbyterian disease either drives them forward to the maximum utilisation of every skill they have, or kills them relatively early. If I was disposed to offer any apology for my life, it would be that I caught a fairly large dose of a contagious disease from my parents' religious persuasions.

By 23 I was ready to conquer the world. I had a wild brother, Tony, who also seemed to be lucky. I had a younger sister with whom I got on well. In my high school, college, and university days, I had a great boyfriend, Tim. He came from a respectable family in the same town. He was good-looking, reasonably intelligent, and I never doubted that he loved me. We lost our virginity together on the back seat of his car when we were both 18. I think now that I really loved Tim. He got a job in the local town police where his father was the senior officer. He was quickly respected by the community and by his fellow officers. As soon as he was earning a decent salary he asked me to marry him. I felt uncertain. Every time I came back from college or university we would collapse into each other's arms and usually into either his bed or mine. Every time we saw each other he reminded me of the future he saw for us both. If I had married him I would have had a happy and secure life with a respected position as the wife of a respected law officer who was obviously going to end up in a senior position, just like his father. I would have been loved. I would have been secure. And I would have been respectable.

But the respect I would have had would have been as his wife. A woman has to decide whether she is going to have her own life, and earn her own respect, or whether she is going to be an appendage of someone else's life and be lit only by the respect of her husband.

I decided I was going to be my own woman. I rejected his proposal, or at least did not give a definite affirmative answer. I still do not know whether I made the right decision. If I had decided to lead my life as Tim's wife, people would be alive who have died or never been born. I do not know how to judge what happened. Perhaps it is pointless even to try.

With my qualifications I had to move to the state capital to find a job. My first job was with some stockbrokers. I was an investment analyst. Nearly everyone in my position was a man. It was obvious within a short a time that women did not get ahead. Then one of the partners took an interest in me. He was 54. He was married with children. By sleeping with him I would not be held back. Looking back on it, it was not bad. He really liked me. He was always nice and kind and pleasant to me. He really enjoyed my young body. He gave me presents. He really delivered as to my job. I advanced quite rapidly, in fact more rapidly than any of the men. None of them liked that.

We were very discrete. I took an apartment quite near the office. When I met his wife at office functions, I never gave any indication. I wasn't trying to get him out of his marriage to her and married to me. I was trading sex for equality. If I was getting ahead of my male counterparts, I like to think that was because I was good. I was damn good at what I did.

Then came "the conversation".

"My wife has found out about us." I knew that would have been one of the men that I had been passing by in promotions.

"We have to stop seeing each other or she is going to divorce me. I couldn't afford a divorce. I couldn't stand the distress to the children. I really love you. I am terribly sorry."

He did not say it outright, but he obviously wanted me to leave the job. He wrote me a rave reference. He gave me six weeks pay in lieu of notice, half as much again as the usual four weeks. I packed up and I was out.

Every interview I went to thereafter the first question was "Why did you leave them?". At first I tried answers like, "I found the work was not sufficiently demanding." or "After doing investment analysis with them for so long, I felt I needed some new challenge." No one believed those answers. So I tried honesty. "I

got romantically involved with one of the principals and his wife found out.” That got me a job.

I started off again more or less on the bottom rung. This time I decided against sex as a career move. I was given several opportunities. One of them was quite blatant. “I can really help your career.” I knocked them all back. A number of the men working at my level asked me for a date, including some who were not even married. I knocked them all back too. I knew I was good at what I did. I thought I could get there on my own merits. I was wrong.

Just as I joined that second office, John F Kennedy was in the height of his election campaign promising a new frontier. I saw him as providing a chance for the equalisation of the position of women. My parents, of course, could not bring themselves to vote for a Catholic, but I voted for him. Of course, government policies never get very far unless they gain the support of at least a large part of the community. Between a government introducing new policies or legislation and social changes actually occurring, there is often a long gap. People have to get used to the new idea. Sometimes they never get used to the new idea, and the new idea fades away.

I got a reputation in the company fairly quickly as being “that frigid bitch”. It seems to be a general male presumption that if a woman is not interested in any of the men who do her the honour of offering to spend time in her company, then she must be a frigid bitch.

The annual assessments put me down as “not a team player”. What that seemed to mean was that I was unable to talk convincingly and cheerily to all the men about the latest football / tennis / baseball / whatever. In fact, other than the job, I had no possible subject of conversation with most of them. Out of office hours when they were drinking or eating, they did not want to talk about securities and investment.

I did not have a lot to talk to the women about either. Most of the women, of all ages, were in clerical or secretarial positions. Since I was one of the executives they left me alone. The only other women in the organisation saw me as a dangerous rival. The

only person in the office I could talk to on friendly terms without some underlying tension was a gay guy who took no interest in me sexually, did not see me as a rival, and basically had no axe to grind with me.

After three years there, I was getting nowhere. The men were passing me by. Even though I was better than them. It was driving me mad. I hated it. I should have stayed there.

My brother, Tony, occasionally met me for a cup of coffee or we both went home together to see mum and dad on birthdays, anniversaries, etc. He seemed to be doing very well. He had a flashy car. He dressed well. He always seemed to have money in his pocket. He always had nice presents for mum and dad. He was always shy of telling us what he did. He was vague about it. It did not take me long to work out that he was involved in some sort of shady or perhaps criminal activity.

Eventually he told me. “I work for an organisation. It does things that are not very nice. But if we don’t do it, someone else will. Why shouldn’t we be the ones to take the profits? We do drugs and prostitution. We have a few front businesses – restaurants, even a laundry.”

“Why are you telling me this now?”

“The boss is a very powerful guy. Totally in control. But no one in the organisation can do the bookwork or actually knows how to run a business properly. He’s looking for a financial manager. In our industry we call it the “book keeper”. We’ve got a vacancy. I told him my sister was highly qualified and had been working for stockbrokers but might be interested in a different job. He said he would like to meet you. What do you get paid at the moment?”

“I get about \$1,000 per week after tax.”

“The organisation would pay \$2,000 in cash and if you want to pay any tax, that’s up to you.”

“Is it a good idea for members of the same family to be working in the same organisation?”

“The boss prefers it. I am just about the only person in the organisation who doesn’t have some family member somewhere along the chain.”

I worked out later why the boss liked to have members of the same family. It gave him a greater hold on everybody. Each family member became a sort of guarantor for the others. “Hostage” actually describes it better.

“I don’t know. I have never been involved in anything illegal.”

“You are one of the few. The cops are on the take. Most of the politicians are on the take at least to some extent. Everybody tries a bit of tax fraud. Everyone tries to get out of parking fines. The whole system is corrupt. Why not join in for your share?”

“What would the work involve?”

“Harry will explain it all to you.”

“I suppose it can’t hurt to have a talk to him.”

How wrong I was. I arranged to meet the boss, Harry, later that week. Tony took me to the office. It was a quite building on a side street. The security was strong. Tony needed a passkey to get into the front door and to get into the lift. When we got out of the lift there was a man standing in the corridor. He was a very big man. Tony introduced him as Eddy. He introduced me as his sister, Millie. Eddy had been expecting us and opened a door in the corridor for us. We went in. It was an office with desks and filing cabinets but no one was in it. Tony knocked on the next door. There was a grunt to come in. There was a man sitting at a desk. He did not stand up to welcome us as we came in. He was ordinary looking except that his face was expressionless and he looked at us as if we were bits of rubbish that the wind had just blown in. Totally cold. Tony was bright and cheery, though he seemed a bit nervous.

“Harry, this is my sister, Millie, I told you about. She has a string of degrees in accounting and business management. She’ll be the greatest bookkeeper you have ever seen.”

Harry looked at me coldly. He didn’t say anything. He gave me the creeps. Tony didn’t say anything more. Harry didn’t invite us to sit down. Eventually I spoke.

“What would the duties entail?”

Harry did not answer at once.

“You’d keep my books. You’d pay all the legitimate bills. You’d collect the money from the boys. You’d collect the money from the restaurants and brothels. You’d assemble the cash for me for big payoffs. You’d pay the boys. You’d look after the financial side of all the businesses.”

He ran through some detail of the operation. I thought at the time that an honest police force, if there was one, would have loved a tape recording of the conversation.

There was another long pause.

“Tony’s a good boy. He knows the ropes. He will fill you in. Start on Monday. Eddy will give you a security pass. You’ll find all the previous records in the outside office.”

He turned his eyes back to what he was looking at on the desk. Tony took that as an indication that we were dismissed.

“Thanks Harry. I’ll fill Millie in. You’ll find she’ll be great.”

He took me out of the office and back into the corridor where Eddy was still waiting.

“Millie’s going to be starting on Monday. Harry said to give her a security pass.”

Eddy reached into his pocket and gave me a flat disk that could be put into security machinery to make it work. It did not look new. It was scratched. It had key ring marks on the hole. It had obviously been used. Eddy looked vaguely friendly.

“See you Monday, Millie.”

I went down in the lift and out of the building with Tony.

“I don’t think the job is really for me. I don’t think I could cope with such extensive criminal activity.”

Tony went pale and looked really shocked. “You can’t knock it back.”

He obviously meant something more than, “You would be foolish to reject an opportunity so much to your financial advantage.”

“What do you mean, I can’t knock it back?”

Tony looked really shaken. “You just can’t.”

I pulled him up. I took him firmly by the shoulders and looked straight at him and said very deliberately, “Why can’t I knock him back?”

Tony messed around for a bit and I had to keep on asking, but eventually it came out.

“Harry told me to go and get you to work for him. His old bookkeeper wasn’t around any more. He likes to have members of families involved in his business. He knew all about you. Anyone who works in this business has to tell Harry the full details of their whole family. You were highly qualified for the job. He didn’t have anybody else suitable.”

“Tony, why did you have to come and get me? Why do I have to take the job?”

“If I can’t get my sister to work for him, I will look weak and stupid. If I can’t do what he has told me to do, I’ll be in deep shit.”

“I just don’t want to get involved.”

“You are involved.”

“What do you mean? How am I involved?”

“If anyone in this organisation fucks up, they end up dead. If they fuck up badly, an example is made of them. Their family end up dead too. Wives, children, mothers, fathers, brothers, and sisters. That’s why he wants people with family. It gives him more control over them.”

It was my turn to shake and turn pale.

“You’ve taken a job that could get mum, dad, me, Suzy – killed.”

“Yes, but I didn’t know it at the time. If you don’t take the job now, Harry is going to see you as a risk. You know what line of business he is in. Obviously, I’ve filled you in. You could damage him. If you are not working for him, he’s not going to like you walking around.”

“What the hell do you mean? Would he kill me?”

“As long as he sees me as a loyal and reliable employee and as long as he is confident that I can keep you completely under wraps, probably he won’t. But he might do it anyway. He is very security conscious. If anything happened to me, he’d then get rid of you as a matter of course.”

“You mean, I just don’t have any choice?”

“It won’t be too bad. Really. You’ll make a lot of money. He’s always generous with bonuses when a good job is done.”

“What happened to the last bookkeeper?”

Tony looked a bit embarrassed. “You know, he’s not around.”

I again took hold of Tony firmly and looked him straight in the eye. “Tony, I don’t know. What happened to the previous bookkeeper?”

He took a time to answer. “He’s dead.”

“How did he die?”

“He killed himself.”

“Tony, why did he kill himself?” I had to be firm to get any sort of sensible answer. Again, Tony tried to avoid the question, but eventually came clean.

“Because Harry told him to.”

I couldn’t believe it. “Harry told him to!”

“He fucked up once too often. You can’t fire someone from that job. They know too much. If he killed himself, Harry would make an allowance to his widow and children. He is paying that now. If he hadn’t killed himself, Harry would have sent the boys to do it and his family may not have got the pension. If he ran, Harry would have tracked him down if it had taken years and would have had to kill him and his whole family just to maintain respect and to maintain discipline in his own army. The bookkeeper did the sensible thing.”

“You mean if I fuck up I get killed, or if I try to run the whole family gets killed?”

“But you are not going to fuck up. You are brilliant at what you do. You are going to be the greatest bookkeeper any boss has ever had. Everything is going to be all right. You’ll see.”

For years when I was student and when I was working in my two jobs and I needed to concentrate and think, I had a little ritual. I said to myself firmly. Think. Concentrate. This time I had to say it to myself several times before it had any effect. I couldn't see what else to do. If I ran, it would generate suspicion. I would be putting mum and dad and Suzy at risk as well as Tony. I really didn't care about putting Tony at risk. He was a fool. If I didn't run, but didn't take the job, I might get killed anyway. If I didn't take the job and was around, if Tony ever fucked up I would be killed. The chances of Tony fucking up looked very high. Anybody who could do anything as stupid as he had by involving the whole family was likely to fuck up regularly. We walked along.

“OK. I suppose I don't have any real choice. I'll do it.”

Tony was silent for a bit. “One other thing. He has never had a woman bookkeeper before. He has a strange attitude to women. It would probably be a good idea for you to talk to Laura before you turn up at the office on Monday.”

“Who's Laura?”

“She works in the main brothel. She's known Harry for years. She's sensible. She'll explain the ropes to you.”

I felt like killing Tony myself.

“What! You fucking stupid bastard. Not only am I going to be working for a crook where I might get killed at any moment, but I'm to become a prostitute as well.”

He must have seen I was very angry.

“You know perfectly well that there is always sex in the work place. You must have experienced it. You just have to live with it. Laura will give the best advice. I'll take you there.”

Think. Concentrate. Did this make it much worse? In my first job, sex with the boss hadn't been too bad. Did sex as well make it really any worse? I came up with the wrong answer.

“OK, we'd better go and meet Laura.” Tony took me there straightaway.

It was a rather run down place. It was obvious from the outside it was a brothel. Probably a cheap brothel at that. Tony took me in a side entrance. There were a couple of girls around looking stoned out of their minds. Tony took me along to the reception area. There was a reasonable looking woman there in her forties. Tony introduced me to her.

“This is my sister, Millie. She is starting with Harry as the bookkeeper. I thought I had better get you to fill her in about Harry.”

Laura looked at me with real pity. Tony took the first opportunity to run off and leave me alone with Laura.

“How did you get involved?”

“Tony dragged me in. I didn't have any choice. I understand that the job involves sex with the boss. I had that in my first job. It seems to be standard in this man's world.”

Laura looked at me carefully and critically. “Please understand that I don't know you well enough yet to trust you completely, so I just want to give you the bare facts so you will know what to do. Harry usually has one of the girls from here go around to him in the office, but with you there, he probably won't bother. You are better looking anyway than most of the girls here.”

Think. Concentrate. I really had to know what was going on and how to handle it. I waited patiently.

“He likes a regular blow job.” I winced.

“How you do it in the least painful way and not getting into trouble with Harry is to do it like this. Get down on your hands and knees between his legs. Pull his zipper down. Take his balls in one hand and cup them upwards. If he hasn’t got much of erection, give his penis a gentle suck. Run your tongue around it until you can get it reasonably firm. When it’s reasonably firm, you’ll feel that his balls also have got firm and close up where you have been holding them. You can then bring him to a climax by sucking directly on the head of the penis as hard as you can. You do actually suck it out. He won’t like you spitting it out. It tastes awful. It stinks. However, it won’t give you indigestion. It’s really quite digestible protein. The trick is not to taste it. When he starts to come, stop breathing. That way you don’t smell it. Swallow it all as quickly as you can. Always have a glass of something strong tasting nearby to have a sip of as soon as you’ve finished. You’ve got to get the taste out of your mouth. Whiskey or Brandy is best. Don’t rinse your mouth out with it, obviously. But you do have to hold it in your mouth long enough to get rid of the taste. Then you tuck his balls and penis back into his pants and pull his zipper up and carry on as if nothing had happened.”

I felt like fainting. To have to do something as intimate as that for a total stranger sounded awful, but I kept myself concentrating.

“Occasionally he wants straight sex, but he always wants to come from behind. If he pushes you over the desk, pull your skirt up or drop your pants quickly and get your panties off or he’ll hurt you and rip them. Spread your legs. He won’t give you any time. Always have some lubricant handy if you can. When he comes at you he’ll hurt unless you spread the lips of your own vagina and guide him in. He likes to do that about once a week, but with you around all the time, it may be more often.”

I was really now feeling so angry with Tony – I had to keep saying to myself – Think. Concentrate – in order to listen to what was going on and not to run out of the place and run screaming down the street.

“Is that all?”

“No. The worst is yet to come. Any of the girls here who have experienced it won’t ever go again. Most of the girls who have experienced it have stopped coming to

work. About once a month he'll want you to take all your clothes off and lie on his couch, which I think he has had specially designed for the purpose. He will have sex with you facing you. He does that because he wants to hurt you and he wants to see you cry. He will twist your nipples or twist or breast until it really hurts. My advice is start crying loudly as early as possible. That's what he likes. I suppose it gives him a sense of power because he can be fucking a woman who is crying in pain. Don't resist. One of the girls tried to resist. She scratched him. He broke her jaw. He broke her arm. He wouldn't pay for the hospital. He wouldn't pay for medical treatment. He made a mess of her. She couldn't get a job anywhere. She looked so ugly – not even the cheapest brothels would take her in. I think she is dead now.”

I must have looked white and shocked.

“How can he do things like this?”

“He just likes to exercise absolute power. Other people aren't human beings to him. They are just counters or pawns to be used and when they are no further use they can be thrown away. He doesn't really have sex. Most of the time the vagina or mouth is just a receptacle in which he can empty himself.”

She paused.

“I suggest getting a diaphragm or cap fitted. Harry won't use a rubber. The pill can be tricky, and you could find yourself away from home for a week or so at a time.”

CHAPTER 2

Amended 10.11.2003, 18.09.2004

The next day, I went back to my normal job to quit. The asshole I had to see was one of those who had passed me by in promotions, even though I was much better than him. He had also made sexual advances to me a number of times, and I had always knocked him back which really pissed him off. He was as awful as an asshole can be.

“You want to quit? You must have got the hint. I thought you were too stupid a cow to see that you weren’t wanted and that you should go, but that saves us firing you. We were going to fire you anyway, but with you quitting, we don’t have to give you pay in lieu of notice. You’ll just get your accrued holiday entitlement. I wouldn’t ask for a reference.”

One of the few benefits of the new job working for Harry was that in the early days of being there Eddy asked me if there was anything he could do for me. I told him about the total asshole and that what he loved most was his shiny red BMW. Eddy trashed it. He slashed its tyres. He scratched and dented every single panel. He put sugar in the petrol. I heard later how thorough he had been. I would have loved to have been there to see the asshole’s face.

I went to the major hospital clinic and had a full health check on everything. If I had to be overall office manager of this business, I was going to do it properly. I think it is good office practice for any new employee to have a full health report. I followed Laura’s advice and had a diaphragm fitted.

I started work in the outer office bright and early Monday morning. I could understand why the old bookkeeper had to go. Everything was a total mess. He had no idea of elementary bookkeeping. There wasn’t a ledger or a journal and the cashbook was nonsense. It took me weeks to sort it out. I started to organise separate information for each of the businesses. The size of the business amazed me. The figures were gigantic. The turnover was not millions per year, it was millions per month. The bulk of it was in drugs. Even paying the distributors and giving the vendors their cut, he was still making 500% profit.

Drug dealing is like any other business. In any business the profit margin has to be set to allow for the risks. Since the risks in drug dealing are very high, the profit margin must be very high. It is an ordinary business principal. It did not take me long to see the absurdity of outlawing the drug industry. While ever there are customers who are prepared to pay, and the profit margin can be fixed sufficiently high to compensate for the risk, there will be people embarking into drug dealing. It cannot be fully suppressed. By having strong anti-drug laws and enforcing them, the government increases the risks for the drug dealer. All that means is that he must increase his profit margin sufficient to compensate for the risk. As the risks get higher, the profit margin must rise, and the prices go up. Accordingly, ultimately, all the anti-drug laws do is to force up the prices and bring very bad people into the business. The government spends millions on a hopeless task which effectively only increases the prices to the customers. It would be far more sensible to have a system by which the drugs were available on the market to adults who were stupid enough to buy it, with substantial government taxes. The prices could be kept high, but instead of the government being millions out of pocket, they would make millions. It would also enable some quality control over the people who are actively engaged in the drug business. But political slogans will always beat common sense.

The six main people, including Tony, were employed collecting the drugs, distributing them to the middlemen and collecting the money. They were also the enforcers if any of the little people at the end didn't pay or if any of the middlemen had trouble with the street sellers. It seemed that the bookkeeper had always been the one who collected from the brothels and from the restaurants and the laundry, which was operated as a front for one of the distribution points. On the figures I had, the restaurants, brothels and the laundry all seemed to run at a loss. I took out the separate figures for each of the restaurants and each of the brothels and the laundry. I showed them to Harry. It was obviously the first time he had seen a breakdown of the cash flow and profits from the minor businesses. He obviously had no idea of the extent to which the drug business had been subsidising everything else.

When my health report came in, I gave him a copy. I told him I thought it was a good idea to have all the senior employees do a health check. He gave a grunt and a nod

that I quickly learnt was his way of saying, “Go ahead. Do it.” I did. None of the boys liked it, but they went when I told them that Harry said they had to go. What I didn’t realise at first when I gave Harry my report was that he could see that I had no sexually communicable diseases.

When I got the boys reports back, I gave each of them a copy and showed them to Harry. They were lengthy with a lot of detail.

“What do they say?”

“Eddy has high blood pressure and needs to take pills or he could drop dead with a stroke or heart attack any moment. Dave already has some emphysema and if he doesn’t stop smoking he will kill himself within a few more years. Carl has a blood sugar problem, particularly he could be prone to rages and loose control if he has too much sugar. He will probably end up a diabetic. Bud has a heart problem and should be on medication. Al has a serious digestive problem likely to lead to ulceration and needs to be on medication. He probably gets indigestion all the time. They all hated going. They won’t want to follow the advice.”

“Tell them.”

I started to leave the room.

“And Tony?”

“Drinks too much, already has liver damage. I’ve told him.”

When I had the books into a reasonable order, I spoke to Harry about the need for a back-up –

“If we have a fire or the books are accidentally lost or destroyed or if somebody spills water or coffee over them we could be in a mess. Every business has to have a back-up system for its records.”

“I don’t want copies around. It is too risky.”

“What I suggest is that I make microfiche copies. That is, a miniaturisation of the pages onto a clear sheet which can only be read with the aid of a reader. No one would even know what they were. The merit of them is that they do not occupy much space. They could be kept permanently in the safe. I would only have to add a new microfiche about every month or so. I could get one page done so that you can see what it looks like.”

There was a microfiche facility at a nearby library in circumstances where the copying could be done in privacy. I made one page. Harry was satisfied that it was really secure. He gave me the go ahead. Thereafter, regularly, I make microfiches of the records and kept them in a large envelope in the safe. Looking back on it, I am not sure why I did it. I made a second copy which I hid in my apartment.

The first sex incident was just as Laura had predicted. I had just given him some accounts and was leaving the room. He grabbed me, pushed my face down over the desk. Fortunately, I had my handbag with me. I was able to grab out some lubricant. From when I first pulled my pants down to when he was moving away and doing up his fly, was less than two minutes. He then carried on as if absolutely nothing had occurred.

The only figures I had for the drug dealing was his gross expenditure for purchase of the stock and a total figure actually received from the distributors. There was no breakdown at all. On the margins that were supposed to be applied, the receipts seemed to be about 15% short of what they should have been. I gave the figures to Harry. On one of the few occasions that it ever happened, he looked slightly impressed. I think he already knew that the returns were short somehow, but was impressed that I had managed to work it out fairly quickly.

“What I suggest I do is that I check that all of our original stock is getting repackaged to the distributors and the street people. Then, that I check precisely what quantities each of the boys is taking to each of the distributors and what money they are collecting. That way we may be able see where there is an overall problem or whether the problem comes from particular areas.”

There was the usual grunt.

All the arrangements had been primitive. They had a fairly rough set of scales for weighing stuff out. The packaging methods were sloppy. There was probably quite a quantity of the product being wasted between unpacking and re-packing. I just put out of my mind that what I was working on was killing people. I was trapped into doing a job so I was going to do it as well as I could. I suppose the SS at the Nazi Death Camps thought the same way. I got a really sensitive weighing machine that was sensitive enough to weigh the little plastic bags. We used the laundry for re-packaging and distributing. I took our new sensitive weighing machine there. With some effort I trained the boys how to use it. Carl just refused to be bothered. Bud really couldn't cope with it. Tony seemed very reluctant about it, but the fool did not tell me why. Al and Dave and Eddy got the idea how to do it. I had to do it totally for the first few times. Everone who lived through it remembers where they were when they heard of the assassination of John F Kennedy. I was in the back of the laundry weighing out white powder from a large plastic bag into little plastic bags. I then established a regime where each of the six boys had recorded the exact amount that they took to their distributors and the exact amount of money that they brought back. I analysed the figures. I didn't tell Harry at first what I had found. I first got Tony to come to my apartment one night. He was reluctant to come.

“Tony, the short fall in returns comes mainly from you. You are bringing back roughly one-third less than you should be. What's going on?”

He first gave me the run-around about the machine couldn't be accurate and how my system didn't really work. I wouldn't have any of it. Eventually it emerged. He was helping himself to the cash and spending it. He had acquired a showgirl girlfriend. He liked taking her to expensive restaurants and buying her jewellery. He had been through thousands on her. He also liked the racetrack too much. He was no better at picking winners than in making any other decision he'd ever made in his life. He was a self-destructive fool. He was going to get himself killed. From then on it seemed pretty obvious to me he was going to get me killed too and there was not much I could do about it. When I would start to think what was going to happen to us, I'd

adopt my little ritual of – Think. Concentrate. I'd carry on with the job as well as I could.

After the first week, Harry asked for the results. I told him I was still analysing them. I told him I needed at least three or four weeks before I could be sure that the system was working.

Tony came up short the next week.

“I had debts I had to pay. I would have been in real trouble if I hadn't paid them.”

I did not know whether he meant his bookie or his girlfriend. I didn't ask.

Eventually, I had to give the results to Harry.

“In the three periods I have now run, Bud was down about 10% each time. I think that is just because he cannot do simple arithmetic and he can't really read or write. His people simply cheat him to a small extent. What I am going to do is to teach him a bit of very basic writing and give him a chart so he knows what money he has to collect for multiples of packs. I'll give it to him in full detail from one pack up to twenty packs. He makes an effort. He's just not capable. Al actually on one occasion brought in more than he should. I think again he got the sums wrong and beat up one of his distributors demanding more from him. I'm going to give him the same sort of sheet of calculations so he doesn't try to do them. It's not good for business that the distributors should be treated dishonestly. Carl, Dave and Eddy were all within 2% or 3%, sometimes a little over, sometimes a little under.”

“Where is the short fall happening then?”

What the hell was I to do? The figures were there. It was obvious there was a serious shortfall. I couldn't blame it onto any of the others. I had done the figures with them in their presence. They knew what the figures were. I had warned Tony and tried to stop him but he just could not stop taking the money.

“Tony was 35% down on the first run and 32% down on the second run and 30% on the third run.”

There may have been a slight glimmer of appreciation that I was telling him the result even though it put my own brother in.

“I have drawn his attention to the irregularities.”

The next day when Tony turned up, I could hear from my outer office shouting and then the noise of several heavy blows. When Carl and Eddy helped Tony out of the inner office, he had a bleeding nose, a cut lip, and a black eye and was scarcely conscious. They sat him in a chair in the corner of my room. I got some water and a sponge and tried to clean him up a bit and sent him home to get a new shirt without blood on it. As I first started to wash the blood off his face, he said in a very sarcastic and hurt tone, “Thanks sis.”

After I had cleaned him up a bit and sent him off home, he again said, “Thanks sis.” But this time he seemed to mean it. He was too stupid to manage in an environment like that. Mum and dad had always brought him up to believe that he was the golden-haired boy who was going to have everything. He could never accept that he had to work, be sensible, and obey the rules of whatever game he got himself into. I had been so conditioned by mum and dad’s view of how brilliant Tony was that I had partly at least suppressed my own conclusions about him. If I had stuck to my own view about what a stupid idiot he was, I probably would never have got involved in Harry’s organisation.

There was no carpet cleaner in the kitchen washroom. I had to get some. I remembered to use cold water for washing Tony’s blood off Harry’s carpet.

CHAPTER 3

Amended 03.11.2003; 10.11.2003

One can learn to live with anything. Children learn to live with abusive parents – they even start to regard it as normal. Wives learn to live with violent brutal husbands. Employees learn to live with aggressive, rude and stupid bosses. I learned to live with a sadistic sexual maniac. Laura was right about what was the worst. He had a long couch – a chaise lounge – with no back to it. I had to lie naked on the couch with my legs hanging on each side. I had no trouble in bursting into tears and screams of pain as he twisted my nipples. My pain excited him. The first time it happened I applied my little ritual – Think. Concentrate. How to make it end as quickly as possible? I took his balls in my hand and pushed them upwards. It speeded up his climax. He stopped hurting me as soon as he came. I had to dry my eyes, get dressed, fix my make up and resume being a bookkeeper.

The consolations were that I was very well paid – basically three times what I had been paid before. There were bonuses whenever anything went well or when I did a particularly good job. My disclosure that Tony was the source of the shortages led to a nice bonus.

I bought an expensive unit. I was able to service the mortgage and reduce the mortgage debt rapidly. I was able to put savings aside. I did not spend money on expensive clothing as most women attached to mobsters do. I went to mid-price range stores and bought sensible office suits. However, they had to be clothing that I could get into and out of quickly.

The other consolation was a surprise. I really enjoyed running that enormous business. I was not making the ultimate decisions, but I was effectively making all the day-to-day business decisions and providing the recommendations as to the bigger decisions, most of which were accepted.

Some of them were simple. The laundry, which was a front for a distribution point, required only a little personnel management and the replacement of some antiquated ineffective machinery and the laundry started to turn a profit, even after paying the

employees rather more than they could have earned in any other laundry as the price of their silence.

The restaurants were more difficult. They had chefs and waiters who had been put in by one of the boys. They were often distant relatives. The food was generally of low quality and the prices had to be low or there would have been no customers. The tills were being robbed steadily. It was a miracle that there was any money left to pay even the rent. I decided to fix them up one at a time. I worked on the one in the best position first. The décor was run down. The chef was hopeless. He was Carl's brother-in-law's cousin. The staff was slovenly. The kitchen was totally out of date. It was only the position which kept it with the appearance of being a viable business. I got quotes and did the costings to redecorate and put in a new kitchen and worked out projected profits. I put them to Harry explaining that all of the existing staff would have to go. I analysed for him the present costs of the place and its losses and the projected profits. I could assure him that there would still be private rooms where deals could be done with crooked cops and important purchases could be arranged. He gave me the go ahead.

The only trouble was going to be the chef. He thought that as a connection of Carl's he was untouchable. I told Harry I would need to take a couple of the boys with me to fire him. He gave me Eddy and Dave.

I went to the restaurant just on closing. After the last customer left, I called all the staff into the kitchen. The chef looked at me very suspiciously. Eddy and Dave were standing behind me. The staff tended to stand behind the chef.

“The restaurant is going to be shut down for a complete refurbishment. It will take some weeks to do. So I am sorry we can't keep your jobs open. The restaurant will be closed tonight. All permanent employees will receive two weeks' pay in lieu of notice.”

I had thought in advance how I was going to handle it. I had never fired anyone before. I was firing six permanent employees and telling another half dozen casuals there was not going to be any more work for them for a time. I decided I had to be firm, decisive, confident, but not rude or condescending. I was not prepared.

The chef went red in the face with anger.

“I’m not going to have some hairy-cunted bitch tell me I’m fired. If they want to fire me, Harry or Carl can come and tell me themselves.”

Think. Concentrate. If I backed off and had to go and ask Harry or Carl to come and fire the chef, my respect in the organisation would be gone and my capacity for running the restaurants would go with the loss of respect. If I was going to do anything with the restaurants I had to act firmly and decisively now. I grabbed a large kitchen knife from a bench alongside where I was standing and slashed the chef across the cheek. I had to struggle to keep calm. There was a lot of blood. I picked up a used serviette from a tray nearby, wiped my hand, wiped the blood off the blade, and tossed the serviette to the chef.

“Your severance pays will be posted to you in the morning. I will give you all a statement as to your employment here. Please collect your things and leave.”

The rest of the staff moved rapidly taking off their jackets, grabbing their own things out of the lockers from the room alongside and leaving as quickly as possible. The chef stared at me and muttered holding the serviette to his bleeding face. If Eddy and Dave had not been there, he would have killed me on the spot. He slowly went to his locker, got his gear out and left. He was still wearing the chef’s jacket, but it was blood stained anyway. My respect went up enormously on the spot. Eddy and Dave were impressed. Any time thereafter in the organisation when I told somebody they were fired, they went.

When I got home that night I was shaking all over. I had never been violent to anybody before. Doing something I had always believed wrong was a disturbing experience but somehow exhilarating. I found myself wondering what the significance was of describing my cunt as hairy.

I had been looking around restaurants and eating out a lot. I had been putting the costs of the dinners down as research expenses in relation to the refurbishment of the

restaurant. It was more legitimate than some of the expenses the boys used to claim. I had come to the conclusion that restaurants depended upon four things: a nice décor, which the restaurant guide books for some reason or other called “ambience”; a good chef; a friendly welcoming batch of waiters and front of house staff – Italians and Greeks always seem to be best at this; and the right sort of publicity – reputation is the best form of publicity, but it can take some time to start producing profits.

The decoration of restaurants is as much subject to fashion as the length of a woman’s skirt. Restaurant and food magazines regularly give pictures of restaurants. I contacted some of the fit-out firms who specialised in restaurants and who had done some of the most popular recent ones. They quoted prices obviously designed to make them enough money to retire on while they were fashionable. I decided to go into the decorating myself. I measured the place up. I hired a carpenter after examining some of his work. I hired a team of painters. I selected the finishes, and the morning after I fired everyone my renovation team moved in. Fortunately, I was a quick learner. Even competent carpenters and painters have to be watched all the time. I tried never to leave them alone for more than 2 hours. The kitchen equipment did not need to be state of the art but it certainly had to be a lot better than what had been in the kitchen before. I had been getting into other kitchens as often as I could and seeing what sort of equipment there was. I was able to fit-out most of the kitchen with good quality second-hand ovens, grills, refrigerators, sinks and benches. Badly run restaurants lead to a lot of auctions.

A chef turned out to be my biggest problem. Most good chefs run their own restaurants. They do not necessarily run them well, but they like to be in charge of their own establishment and they attract a loyal following. I took every opportunity I could on visiting restaurants to talk to the chefs. No one was suspicious about a woman reasonably well dressed, dining alone who wanted to have a look at the kitchen or talk to the kitchen staff. They all seemed to have learned their trade by working in the kitchen of some other chef and learning what the other chef did. There were some trade courses conducted by cooking schools, but the professional chefs did not think much of them. Then one night I had luck. I had been going to bad restaurants as well as good ones to observe mistakes which I had to learn to avoid. At one of them, a really run down dump, the waiters were surly and depressed, the

receptionist bored out of her mind, and the restaurant almost empty. It was a Tuesday night when restaurant trade is generally pretty low anyway. But the food was great. Fresh ingredients, simply prepared, highlighting the flavours. I asked if I could speak to the chef. The waiter assumed I wished to complain.

“The chef is off tonight. We just have one of the assistant chefs on. She’s new. She’s just learning.”

I expressed a desire to meet her. She was a small, shy, mousy woman in her early twenties who was overwhelmed when a customer actually wished to congratulate her on her cooking. She had recently graduated from one of the professional cooking schools. She hated the restaurant she was working in. Before I left that restaurant that night, I had hired a chef. I did not tell Harry or any of the boys that the new chef was a woman.

I took a lot of trouble in hiring the front of house staff for the waiters. I was able to re-employ the two better ones from the old restaurant. As it turned out, not all of the waiters were Italians or Greeks. For the cashier’s job, I moved up the Jewish girl I had employed as cashier for the laundry. She was honest, efficient and pleasant.

For the opening I sent around invitations to the food press and various others that I had picked from the social pages. Harry agreed to come, but of course he would not be seen eating in public with me. He brought his sister. My little chef excelled herself. The wine waiter had got in quite a good list of reasonably priced wines. The reputation of the restaurant was made in one night. Harry had absolutely no sense of what was good food and what was awful. Fortunately his sister did. She loved the food. She thought the décor was “elegant”. She thought the waiters were fine. She hated me. It was the usual territorial thing. She saw me as a potential threat to her position as the woman of the family. She got it wrong. Neither Harry nor I was the slightest bit interested in the other as a partner, but she was right that I was a threat. If I could have killed that man and got away with it without endangering my family, I would have done it without hesitation.

The restaurant was also designed with private rooms which suited Harry very well. He was able to arrange many meetings there. The restaurant started to show a comfortable profit quite quickly and became a little gold mine within a year. My respect in the organisation went up considerably. The initial success was enough for me to take on the other two restaurants. By the time I had done all three of them I really understood fit-outs and dealing with tradesmen. I understood hiring staff much better and I learned how to run a restaurant.

My success with the restaurants led Harry to put the brothels under my supervision. That was another steep learning curve. There were three establishments and a call-girl service. They were all very badly run. Dave's sister ran one of the brothels. An ex-girlfriend of Al ran another one and Carl had appointed the manager of the third and the woman who ran the call-girl service. I spent hours with Laura, my original informant, discussing how they worked. A couple of the rooms had peepholes put there to enable the staff to check that the girls weren't in trouble. I used them to see how the girls performed.

The girls who were popular and had clients asking for them by name, were not the best looking or the ones with the biggest breasts. What they did was to give the customers value for money. They put on a real pretence of love. They acted affectionately towards their customers. They participated in what was going on. The customer left satisfied and asking when the girl was on the roster next.

There was one good-looking girl who always seemed to be drunk. While I watched her performance one evening, she was so drunk she passed out while the customer was still inside her.

The way it operated was wrong. The house paid the girls a flat rate for turning up for the session and an additional amount per customer. The house collected the money from the customer. There were all the usual problems with employees. Sick pay. Negotiations for paid holidays. The usual boss / worker standoff. I thought it would work better if the girls got the money from the client and paid us for the use of the facilities.

I selected premises for my first attempt in a better part of the town. It had a discrete entry from a laneway at the side. There was a large car park for a supermarket immediately behind the building at the end of the lane. All I had to do was to put a light over the door, and have a well lit, well decorated stairway leading up, nicely carpeted and all the usual credit cards signs on the door and place the usual advertisements. I had a plush waiting room where the customers could meet the girls and where they were given a free glass of wine, champagne or beer while they negotiated their business. The rooms were big enough. They all had at least a shower and some of them had a spa bath as well. There were lots of mirrors. The beds were comfortable. The towels and sheets were changed after each customer. I put Laura in as the madam. I made a rule that we would not take girls who were alcoholics or on drugs. I placed great emphasis on health. The girls had to have regular health checks and I arranged for them all to have instruction on elementary healthcare protection. Some of the customers did not like the emphasis on healthcare, but overall most of the customers appreciated the sense of security and safety that the emphasis on health gave them. I also arranged for Laura to give classes on how to please the customers and how male and female sex organs worked.

The surprise was the girls that we got for this new establishment. Most of them were really nice pleasant girls – the sort that any parents would be happy if their son brought home. There were a number of single mothers. There were several nurses who loved nursing and wanted to stay as nurses but could not live on a nurse's pay. One or two sessions a week made the difference between comfortable living and a struggle. There were students paying for their own courses who preferred two or three sessions per week with us rather than five or six nights serving chicken or hamburgers in a fast food outlet. They earned much more, the work was not as tiring and the frequency of unpleasant incidents was not much greater. We had a couple of girls from the country who wanted to earn money to help their families. They needed a cover, however, so I arranged for those girls to do a couple of shifts as waitresses in one of the restaurants where their family could see them working when the family visited town. We had one nice chatty girl in her early forties who still had quite a good figure, although her face wasn't much. She had a reasonable job and didn't really need the money, except to help pay off her car. She explained that she liked to do one or two sessions a week because it was the only sex she got.

That establishment was able to work on fairly high prices and provided a source from which call girls could be obtained when we were short on any night.

For the cheaper down market brothels, I went for simpler décor. I kept a shower in each room, but I kept only one spa bath for the establishment. I continued to insist no drug addicts and no alcoholics. The girls were generally older or less attractive. I arranged for Laura to give them lessons on the pretence of love so that fairly soon the down market brothels were doing well also.

I arranged special nights for sporting clubs where the team took over the whole establishment for the night. I found, however, that I had to limit those events to late afternoon or early evening because otherwise too many of the boys in the teams would get drunk before they arrived and we would have to spend time cleaning up their sick ups and some of them got so drunk they couldn't get any benefit out of the visit anyway.

Dave's sister was pretty hopeless so I had to move her ultimately to just doing the early morning shift at one of the down market brothels. Dave and sister did not like it. Carl hated the fact that I was doing well and succeeding. The turn over and profits from the brothels trebled within eighteen months. Harry gave a grunt of approval. My respect in the organisation went up considerably.

I knew my parents would be more shocked to think I was running a string of brothels than by my involvement in the drug trade. What is it about sex, that gets people into such moral frenzies? I did not have much choice about undertaking the job, but I soon came to the conclusion that I was performing a public service by providing good quality, health controlled, well run brothels. For married men who felt the need for some extra sexual outlet, and there seemed to be thousands of those, a brothel is in the long run cheaper, safer and less troublesome than an extra marital affair. A lot of marriages have been held together by the availability and affordability of a neighbourhood brothel. Then there are the single men, unmarried, separated or just with no present arrangement. A reasonably healthy male with no sexual outlet can be a danger to himself and others. Masturbation seems to work on the short-term but is

not a long-term solution. The availability of a brothel keeps a lid on what could otherwise be a real social problem. As to the older men who are wholly or partially impotent, a hand job from an attractive naked woman seems to do them more good than a packet of anti-depressants. Then there are the young men or older boys. Their degree of ignorance about how sex works is not just limited to knowing what goes where. A few sessions, particularly with a more experienced woman who can sympathetically help the male virgin and explain to him what the girl might like, can turn his first sexual experience with a girlfriend from a disaster into a mutually pleasant experience. So many first loves have been ruined by the boy, and for that matter the girl, having no idea what to do. I think my brothels did more social good than the average doctor, dentist or social worker.

I was working hard controlling the drug distribution and collection of money, supervising the restaurants, and supervising the brothels. I was going seven days a week for long hours but it was satisfying. I was effectively doing the hands on day-to-day management of a big organisation. I was like the managing director answerable only to the chairman of the board. It was the sort of job I had trained for. I learned a lot they don't teach you at business school. I loved doing it. If Harry had been even half a human being, I would have been happy. But to offset the professional satisfaction I had his constant hateful cruelty to cope with. Curiously, the better I did, the worse I suffered. When I brought in a routine report I was down on my knees between his legs. When I brought in a good report I was thrown across the desk. When I brought a triumph his ego swelled and I was spread-eagled on the couch. I got to the stage where I tried to bring him really good financial results in groups of two or three so that I only had to suffer once rather than two or three times.

Except where girls are being forced into prostitution, prostitution is a victimless crime. No one is ever going to get much excited about an offence that does not harm anybody and does not cut down government revenue. I always insisted that the girls should pay taxes and file their tax returns. They didn't like it, and I think all of them understated their earnings, but I explained to them repeatedly that I was not going to have tax inspectors descending on one of my establishments. I thought of them as "my establishments" because I had designed them and I was running them and I was controlling them – but of course ultimately they were Harry's.

The real problem I had was girls who were being forced into prostitution by dominant males or simple crooks who were forcing them to work for the man by threats or intimidation. At first I turned them away. That did not do the girls any good at all. The men who controlled them then merely took them to some other brothel or ran them as cheap call girls and placed them in much greater danger as to their health or protection and did not get them out of their bondage. So I started accepting those girls if they were otherwise qualified but then trying to find out from them what the hold was over them. Often it was said to be a debt. What I was able to do in a few cases was to negotiate with the controller as to the amount of the debt and then arrange to pay the debt off from the girls earnings. Where I was able to arrange this, the girls ultimately got free of the bondage, even those sometimes it involved me getting one of the boys to explain to the controller that he had been paid the agreed amount so he should drop his demands for the future. In many cases, however, the girl had simply accepted her role in life. Some women get the idea firmly entrenched in their heads that they are doormats. Their self-respect is zero or a minus quantity. They see themselves somehow as deserving their role in life as a doormat. All I was really doing for them was giving them healthy secure working conditions. Even my attempts to build up their self respect by convincing some of them that they were very good prostitutes, and some of them were, did not work. Those girls saw being a prostitute itself as being a reason for having no self-respect. A side effect of that was of course that they took no pride in their work even when they were really quite good. I took pride in doing what I could do well. My respect for myself depended on being very good at my job. I could take pride in being a successful financial controller for a drug gang and a successful manager for a string of brothels. I was good at my job. My self-respect never had any problem.

The brothels led to my first direct dealings with the corrupt cops. For the old establishments, we had had a simple arrangement that I or one of the boys delivered a packet with the agreed bribe to the local sergeant in the area of each of the brothels. In addition, all of the cops on the take were entitled to drop in any at time and have one of the girls. When I improved all the brothels the cops asked for more. This required a lot of tact. Harry depended upon a large number of crooked cops to survive in his drug business. I regularly had to count out very large sum of money for

one of the boys to deliver for the payoff. Harry's drug business could not have survived without police co-operation. No illegal enterprise can survive long without either active police co-operation or a lack of will on the part of law enforcement to stop the illegal activity.

I explained to the police that they couldn't have free services anymore since the girls kept the money but paid the house a fee for each customer for the use of the facilities. However, I negotiated a deal that police paid the full fee to the girl but then the receptionist gave them back the house's cut. The service from the girls was so much better that the police kept coming. Then I explained that the premises were much safer and there was much less point in police intervention. I hired an environment planning expert to prepare a report which I showed to all the police officers. The report showed that by reason of the placement, parking, privacy of access, distance from schools and churches and residential premises, that each of my brothels was ideally situated from a town planning point of view. I produced evidence to the police that all the girls underwent regular health checks. I couldn't get them to reduce their weekly bribe, but at least I negotiated for it to continue on the same basis. Harry was very pleased about that. I got put on the couch.

My work on the interior of the three restaurants and the interior of the brothels had given me a taste for building. Builders seemed to fall into two groups. There are those who know what they are doing. They run a sensible well-organised business and make money. Then there are the others. They are usually carpenters or bricklayers who think as tradesmen that they have learnt all the ropes and that they know how to do it. They are usually hopeless and they go broke fairly soon. Never employ a builder unless you can see two or three other jobs that he has successfully completed. One is not enough. Any idiot can fluke one.

Harry had an old warehouse in a part of the town that was beginning to move back up. He had bought it as a store and collection point for the drug business but problems had led to it being shut down and it was vacant. I found a sensible capable young architect and designed a building for the site getting him to do the preliminary plans on a speculative basis – no contract / no fee. The basic idea was apartments on the upper floors, offices on the lower floors, shops on the ground floor and parking in the

basement, but I put in a twist. We designed a private secure parking area in the basement which could be entered from the public car park through a door that was very unobtrusive and which would be missed by anybody who didn't know it was there. That private car park also had a ramp out to a back lane available only to that secure car park. From the secure car park we designed a dedicated lift going only to the second floor which we called the mezzanine floor so that I was not missing on the other lift buttons. There we designed a suite of offices with complete soundproofing from neighbouring offices and the residences above. It was as near as I could make it to a perfect headquarters for a drug-dealing crime boss. I even included a small kitchen, a bathroom, a staff toilet and wash room, and even a room which in time of need could be used for sleeping up to half a dozen people. Harry liked the design, especially of the office and car park for himself. He was sceptical about the costs I had estimated and my capacity as the builder, but he was pleased enough. He threw me across the desk. He gave me the go ahead.

I did not have to worry about finance for the project which is often a builder's worst problem. Harry provided the capital and expenses as we went along. I knew the money was coming mainly from the drug business although now the restaurants and brothels were contributing. I justified it to myself that at least something permanent and reasonably enduring was going to come out of the drug business. One should always look for some justification for what one is doing. It makes life more satisfying.

I had never guessed how stressful building a large residential and office block could be and how much time would be involved in keeping the building going constantly. Fortunately, the architect understood the building process well and we were able to work out the order of tradesmen. I had to make a lot of inquiries to find out where to find the steel fabricators, the cranes, the concreters, the bricklayers and all the other dozens of trades. I was collapsing into bed every night absolutely exhausted, but I learned a lot. One of the trade unions tried stand-over tactics. Carl enjoyed putting him in his place. The union boss and two of his assistants ended up badly injured in hospital and I had no further trouble from any unions. However, I adopted a rule that I had no objection to tradesmen who belonged to unions and I had no objection to union officials coming on site providing they actually came for a proper purpose –

especially advising on safety. I did not want the usual number of funerals as part of the building of a large office block. I insisted on protective clothing. I actually got co-operation from some of the union officials in advising on safety measures. By the end of it, the union safety officers and I were getting on perfectly well. Interestingly, the tradesmen responded to the fact that they were working for a builder who was actually concerned for their safety. I respected their rights. They came to respect me. The building went up in only a month longer than my original estimate. The costs blew out by about 20%. By the end of it, I knew how to put up a building.

Harry appeared pleased with his facilities and he moved straight in. I was left to organise the furniture and office equipment of course. I then had the problem of tenants for the rest. I moved one of the restaurants into the main ground floor premises, which was fairly simple since the restaurant I moved was nearby anyway. I visited a number of real estate agents as the building was nearing completion. Most of them impressed me as being great on words, great on talking, but basically greedy and stupid. The ones who were really good were not very interested in taking on a new customer for a new block. In one of the hopeless places, there was a girl employed in sales who had recently qualified as an agent. She was bright, intelligent and conscientious. I put her into one of the ground floor shops and Harry had a new business – as a realtor. I gave Harry one other new business. If you want to know what is going on in a town, spend a couple of hours in a woman's hairdressing salon. For some reason or other, women tell their hairstylists things they wouldn't even tell their priest in confession. I employed a couple of experienced beauticians and hairdressers, bought some equipment, and opened a salon. It also provided a cover job for some of the girls in the brothels who worked a session or so a week and wanted a cover in a legitimate job.

In the course of four years, I had proved myself as a business manager. I was running a series of successful restaurants. I was running the best brothels the town had ever seen. I was a successful builder. Or at any rate, I would be next time because I knew how the blow out of 20% had occurred. I was running a laundry, a real estate business, and a hairdressing salon. I had learned a lot. I was leading a hateful loveless tortured life.

I had the respect of everyone in the business including Al, Bud, Dave and Eddy. Whenever I arrived anywhere everyone sprang to attention, “Good morning, Millie.” – “Here is the bag, Millie.” – “Here are till tapes.” – “We had a great night last night.” I was the decision-maker. The problem solver. I decided who was in and who was out.

Carl and his family and those he patronised hated me. Carl had always seen himself as number two in the organisation because he was the principal strong arm and the principal enforcer. It was obvious to everybody that I was Harry’s main counsellor who advised him on all business activities and did the day-to-day middle management. Carl could not have organised an ice cream stand at a summer beach resort, but he saw me as usurping his rightful place. I knew that if ever I put a foot wrong Carl would be the one to try to capitalise on it. I suppose I knew that ultimately Carl would feel forced to challenge me. I did not know how or when. I tried to be constantly on guard.

As to Harry, I was nothing – but then none of his people were anything to him. We were all to be used while we were useful. After we ceased to be useful it would be merely a matter of what security required. If I had thought that Harry ever did any reading, I would have concluded that he had based his life and methods on Stalin – ruthlessness, total absence of any conscience, terror, absence of any gratitude or moral obligation. My favourite fantasy became killing Harry. My fantasies of killing him usually had a lot of blood and pain in them, but what was the use. If I killed Harry, and I was sure I could, then one of the others would feel obliged to kill me. Certainly there would then be a bloody struggle as to who took over the organisation. If I could kill both Harry and Carl and convince the others they should work for me, one of the other local crime bosses would surely have a go at getting rid of me and taking over our organisation. Killing Harry would almost certainly ultimately mean my own death. I would have accepted that at times for the satisfaction of killing him and as a way out of my misery. I knew also that if I did anything to Harry, even if I could somehow take over the organisation, the other crime bosses would feel obliged to make an example of me to make sure that none of their people tried the same thing. The usual method of making an example of such an upstart would have been to kill me, and to kill my family including mum and dad. I kept consoling myself by

throwing myself into the work. Apart from Harry, the rest was quite satisfying and exciting.

CHAPTER 4

Amended 03.11.2003; 10.11.2003

While I was learning the businesses, other things were going on. A couple of months after I had revealed to Harry that Tony was the one with the shortfall in the collection of drug money, the people delivering one of the drug shipments went badly wrong. The Drug Enforcement Agency, the overseas contractors who were delivering and our team were all involved. There was a shoot out. It was all very professional. One policeman was slightly injured. A large part of the drug delivery was seized, but not all of it. Tony was shot very neatly, dead with one bullet. Of course, I could never ascertain for sure whether he was shot by one of the Drug Enforcement Agency, or shot accidentally by one of the delivery contractors, or shot on Harry's instructions probably by Carl. What did it matter? He was dead and I was still trapped. The identification of the body presented a problem. Of course Harry and the boys denied knowing him or having any idea who he was. I had to go – otherwise mum or dad would have been called down to identify the body. I went to the morgue. It is a grim professional place. They wheeled out Tony on a slab. They had taken all his clothes off to examine the cause of death, which was obvious enough – a bullet straight through the heart. I had never seen my brother naked before. We had the same coloured pubic hair. When I did art at school I learned that most flesh tones of people of European ancestry have some green in them. We think of Orientals as having yellow tones. What that really means is that they don't have much green in their skin colour. Tony was very green. Tony had a blank slightly surprised stupid expression on his face. It seemed to me somehow appropriate.

I cried. I think I was crying more for myself. That stupid bastard on the slab had got me into a terrible mess. One day, sooner or later, I was going to be a body on a slab like that being identified.

I took a couple of days off to go up state to tell mum and dad. I gave them the version from the police reports, which had been nicely edited by one of the cops Harry owned. It gave an account of a drug raid that had successfully seized a large drug shipment in which there was an exchange of fire and that it was not known whether the one fatality had been a member of the gang involved with the drugs or had been an innocent bystander or passerby.

I told mum and dad what was certainly true up until the time I started to work in the organisation myself – that Tony had always been very vague as to what he did and who he worked for. They were devastated. Their golden-headed boy was gone. They understood that I was a successful businesswoman working in a high executive position and doing well financially. Suzy was progressing well in her university course. That did not seem to console them much. For some reason Tony was their great pride and joy.

The next time I was in the office I said to Harry:

“I see that we have always paid a pension to the family of employees who have died during their employment. I have put through an automatic payment instruction to provide a pension to Tony’s parents in the same amount as we are paying to the family of my predecessor as bookkeeper.”

I got the usual grunt of acceptance or approval. I told mum that the payments going into her and dad’s bank account was Tony’s pension plan.

Tony’s death was approximately six months after I joined the organisation. His death convinced me I needed another skill. I had to learn to shoot. I had to learn to shoot fast. I had to learn to shoot accurately. The protection I needed was just as likely to be against the organisation as against enemies of the organisation. Accordingly, I had to develop the skill without anybody in the organisation knowing about it.

I read up on guns. For me to carry a gun, it would have to be easily concealed. That means it had to be small. Small guns are generally accurate and effective only over short distances. That was all right. I did not imagine I was ever going to want to shoot somebody at a long distance or shoot my way through a door. I went to a gun shop well out of town. I bought a small lightweight automatic which carried six bullets without reloading and which was easy to reload. The salesman said:

“The perfect choice. A great lady’s gun.”

The salesman also gave me some clues on holsters for women. Most women who carried a gun put it in their handbag. Women's suits and jackets were usually too tailored to fit an underarm holster. The answer for me was a thigh holster. Some women have inner thighs that are very close together. My inner thighs were quite apart and I could fit a holster on my left thigh so that the gun was on the inside and the holster could be held up by attachments to my panties. However, unless I was wearing a fairly loose skirt it was obvious. I did that anyway because a tight skirt was awkward when Harry threw me across the desk. I could not, of course, wear my thigh holster around the office.

The next task was to learn how to use it. There were some dense trees in a woodland area about a half an hour's drive from my apartment. It was isolated but frequented by hunters so that gunshots would not attract a lot of attention even if anyone was around. I bought a large amount of ammunition at the time I bought the gun, and I used it practicing. Even a small gun has quite a reaction. I did not hold it firmly enough at first and my hands got bruised. At first, I could only hit a tree trunk if I held the gun directly in front of me using both hands. That also reduced the shock to the shoulders and the elbow. I found that I had to lean into the gun a bit in order for the second shot to go anywhere near the first one. I had seen on lots of movies how the hero could whip out a gun and fire with a bent elbow one-handed from all sorts of strange body positions. At first that was almost impossible. I trained myself regularly three or four times a week until I could fire two shots in quick succession which went broadly in the direction that I intended. One needs both eyes to aim and partially obstructed vision makes aiming very difficult.

Then I started to practice getting my gun out of my thigh holster quickly and firing it. Then I trained myself by going into a dense part of the woods facing in one direction and getting out my gun from the holster, turning and firing at two trees directly behind me. I eventually got quite quick at that. I also hit the two trees most of the time. I also practiced shooting with my left hand in case something ever happened to my right hand. With concentration I got to be pretty good with my left hand as well. I worked out that if ever I was in a jam, providing I was only being attacked by two people, I could probably get two bullets off quickly enough. If I was facing three, then the chances were that the third opponent would be able to get a bullet into me

while I was shooting the other two. I did not know when and how I was going to use this skill, but I felt absolutely certain I would need it one day.

After I had developed my skills I kept practicing regularly. I used to put earplugs in my ears. I also learned how to take the gun to pieces and to oil it. I kept a decent stock of ammunition in my apartment and found a good hiding place for the gun in my apartment.

My favourite fantasy was that I was going to use that gun one-day to kill Harry. I knew of course that if I did the rest of the organisation would feel obliged to track me down and make an example of me and to kill all my family just as a warning to others. When I was shooting in my practice sessions, the two trees I shot each time were mentally Harry and Carl.

.....

After I had been in the organisation for four years, I was 32, I owned my own nice apartment with no mortgage, I had about \$250,000 in the bank, a nice car which I owned outright, and a few investments. Apart from an occasional trip to visit my parents when I could get leave, when I always saw Tim, there was no affection or love in my life. I was working on a day-to-day basis with a cruel sadistic brute that privately subjected me to his humiliating sexual demands.

On the other hand, I had the satisfaction of using my management skills to the fullest degree. I was the chief executive officer effectively of a multi-million dollar organisation and I was running on a day-to-day basis a construction business, a tenanted building, restaurants, brothels and I was the financial controller of a drug-dealing business.

What worried me about the drugs was that the street vendors had no compunction in supplying young people, even children. Any customer was okay by them. I did not have much sympathy for fully-grown adults who were stupid enough to buy and use the drugs we were selling. Drugs were, after all, only a number of degrees worse than alcohol to excess or smoking. If people want to ruin their lives by some addiction, they will find some way to do it. Trying to outlaw drugs altogether was just as a

much a waste of time and money as the campaign urging people against smoking. At least as to cigarettes there were some regulations, which made it a bit more difficult for the under-aged to get cigarettes. The supposed complete outlawing of drugs gave children the same access to them as any adult. Anyway, there was nothing I could do about it, and supervising the finances of the drug business was the main job I was employed to do.

I had to introduce Harry to bearer bonds as the only way he could put his cash money aside at interest. He found it quite difficult to understand that when one sells bearer bonds the discount will represent the interest rate which the purchaser wants to achieve and accordingly in a time of rising interest rates, one buys bonds rather than sells them. Since I had turned all the other businesses into profit centres, the wad of bearer bonds in the safe grew nearly every month. When we paid for a drug shipment our vendors were most happy to receive payment in bearer bonds which were much easier to transport than brief cases full of cash.

By the end of the first four years, I had succeeded to a greater or lesser extent in every task I had undertaken. The whole organisation respected me. All of the managers of the individual business followed my direction without question. Eddy, Dave and Bud came to me when they weren't sure what to do. Even Al came sometimes when he realised he needed a decision to be made by somebody other than himself.

My problem was Carl. If someone got out of line it was Carl who reminded them of their obligations. Although he never had any idea of what to do about running any business, and he was never asked by anybody and never offered anyone any opinions, he saw himself as number two in the organisation. Nonetheless because he was the punisher he was always treated with great respect. He therefore saw me as a threat. Constant references to "Millie said ..." or "Millie told me to ..." drove him mad. When we were all in any meeting with Harry, Harry always wanted me to give the figures and the business conclusions and usually simply gave his grunt to indicate that what I said was what we were going to do.

I could see that Carl was reaching breaking point in his anxiety about my increasing authority and respect. He need not have worried. What he did was to enforce Harry's

orders. I was never going to be doing that. What I did was running the businesses. Carl could never have done that. However, this concern about his status in the organisation and the respect he thought he was entitled to and was losing, blurred his vision. He could not see that I was no threat to his position.

Eventually Carl snapped. He decided it was going to be him or me. He must have realised he was running a tremendous risk. But he was so obsessed about his own self-respect and his hatred of me that he risked everything to try to get rid of me.

The show down came quite out of the blue.

One morning in the office Harry was running through some details with Carl. Al, Bud and Dave were also there. The topic was that some street vendors were taking supplies from somebody else. I was present as usual to provide the figures. As we had finished that business and it looked as if we were about to break up, Carl turned to Harry.

“I’ve got a great idea how we can improve the call-girl service.”

The call-girl service had been operating successfully. We had advertisements running in tourist handouts, in the telephone directory, and I had set up a system of commission for hotel bellboys, concierges and barmen who referred clients.

“My idea is that the girls in the call-girl service should be available for inspection by the customers at the bar in our best restaurant so that they can look them over and make a choice.”

Harry said nothing and looked at me. I thought it was a stupid idea, but I was walking on eggshells.

“That sounds an interesting idea that we should take a look at.”

Carl could sense that I was not going to involve myself in an open confrontation if I could avoid it. He glared at me angrily.

“All right, what is the matter with my idea?”

Everyone was looking at me. I had to give some answer.

“Customers who want to look the girls over before buying do that at our brothels. The call-girl customers would not want to be seen in a public place looking over the girls. The whole point of the call-girl system is that the only people who know that the customer has made a purchase is the receptionist at the end of the telephone line who doesn’t see him, and the girl who actually comes. It would also be likely to damage the reputation of the restaurant. Men would not bring their girlfriends to dinner in a place where there were a group of call girls sitting at the bar. Family groups would never come. We would lose all the birthday and anniversary trade.”

I was careful to speak slowly, cautiously and politely as if I had been trying to think through what looked like a good idea. Everybody could see, however, that I was right and that Carl’s idea was stupid. Carl blew up.

“Harry, are you going to have all the decisions in this organisation made by this tunnel cunted slut? You’re a fucking laughing stock that you are having all your decisions made and the organisation run for you by this bitch. We all feel ashamed that we are taking orders from the bookkeeper.”

He went on further with great heat but without adding much. What he was saying to Harry in very clear and certain terms was that Harry had to choose between him and me.

I could see Harry was thinking hard. I worked it out afterwards. I was the most efficient bookkeeper he had ever had. I had maximised profits and reduced expenses in every aspect of the organisation, especially in legitimate front businesses. But he could probably get another bookkeeper, even if the next was not quite as good. On the other hand, the respect he received from his suppliers, distributors and street people depended upon the perception that he had a strong and effective enforcement system. Even though he could probable replace Carl more easily than he could

replace me, the departure of his principal enforcer, the recognisable strong arm on the street, was going to give him a real headache at least for a few months. Also Carl wasn't going to be all that easy to get rid of. He decided for Carl.

“Your mouth is too big, bitch. Why don't you use your mouth for what it's best at? Come and give me a blow job!”

I must have looked as if I turned pale. I felt I could faint – Think. Concentrate. He obviously wanted to humiliate me publicly. If I simply refused no matter how courteously, he might shoot me on the spot, or more likely Carl would see his opportunity, kill me on the spot, and Harry would let him do it. At the very least, refusal was likely to lead to me being out of the organisation and that would have a severe tendency to be fatal. I kept a calm appearance, but I had taken too long.

“But Harry, that is something we like to do when we are alone.”

That was not what Harry wanted. He did not want sexual relief. He wanted to humiliate me.

“Shut up bitch. Do it now, and do it properly. Take your clothes off.”

Total humiliation. Carl was barely able to restrain his laughter and delight. He had won. Al and Dave were half smiling, half laughing at my fall. Bud just did not understand what had happened and was looking quite lost. I walked over to Harry and poured myself a nip of whiskey as I usually did and stripped down to my panties and bra. I tried to do it calmly. Stripping in front of a group is not easy. I tried to pretend to myself that they were a group of doctors and nurses who were going to give me a physical examination. That didn't work. It was mortifying.

“I said take all your clothes off.”

I took my bra off and my panties off quite calmly as if it was a matter of little concern to me. At 32 I still had a very good figure. Only Harry had seen it before, and he was not that interested. Even Carl was appreciative. Bud and Al started to smile and breathe heavily. I think Dave got an erection.

I knelt down in the usual position between Harry's knees and undid his fly. He was completely flaccid. He wasn't the slightest bit interested in the sex. He was just out to humiliate me. He totally succeeded. It took me much longer than usual to get him up and to finish. While I was doing it, the bastard drank my whiskey. When I finished, I poured myself another nip of whiskey standing calmly naked in front of the lot of them and then slowly and carefully put my clothes back on. I wasn't going to leave the main office and go back to my office and leave them all there together to laugh. I looked coldly at them all. I stood my ground. Harry said to the others:

“Well, what are you waiting for.”

They all went off to do their jobs. The rooms were so soundproofed that I could not hear their laughter that I am sure was coming from them. When they had left and were out of the office suite I went back to my office. I held my tears until I got home that night. The humiliation was total and complete. Within a day everyone in the organisation had heard what had happened. Everyone everywhere laughed at me. A distributor I was regularly pulling up with wrong figures, spat at me. Within a few days, most of my managers had been replaced by sisters, cousins or girlfriends, brothers, uncles or long-term friends of Carl and the boys.

When I went to the main brothel, Laura was gone and Dave's sister was back. Carl had even put in a couple of girls who were drug addicts who owed money for their supplies. They were to work it off in the brothel. Of course, that business was going to be ruined very quickly. I got in touch with Laura. She had a lot of experience and could read the signs. Any respect for me was gone everywhere.

“Millie, you are in deep trouble. You have been too good at your job. It was inevitable that Carl or one of the other boys would take you on. You cannot now just drop back to writing up the figures in books. Now Harry knows the bookkeeper can actually do more than that and he will want to replace you. You are on the way out. Of course, he can't just fire you. You know absolutely everything there is to know about his organisation. He is going to want to see you dead. If he thinks there is any possibility that you might try to run or to find an honest cop, he is going to kill you

and kill your family just to make an example of them. He is very suspicious. He has got where he is by trusting nobody. He will assume that at some time you will either want to run or go to the cops. The only safe way of protecting your family will be suicide. At least he will probably then give some financial compensation to your folks. It has been too well known that we are on friendly terms. I am going to leave town. I have already packed. If he goes after you he will think the safe course is to get rid of me also. Millie, it is a tough break. If you had been less good and less successful, Carl wouldn't have seen you as a threat. I was a hell of a life anyway."

Laura was ready packed and was just about to leave so our conversation did not go for long.

About 10 days later I was giving Harry the usual fortnightly figures on all of the businesses. It was amazing how quickly the change of management had led to a drop in returns. The short fall on the drug accounts was the highest it had been since I had fixed it up. The restaurant where Carl had installed the call girls at the bar had dropped 20%. The other restaurants had dropped an average of 10%. The brothel where Dave's sister had gone back into management and the drug addicts were now installed working off their debt, the income was down 30%. Harry looked at the figures with his usual care. He could see what happened and why. There was no need for me to explain it. He threw me across the desk, but it wasn't for sexual relief. He was angry and expressing his anger by thrusting into me. He pulled his pants up and straightened his clothing.

"You are no use to me any more. Why don't you go home and work out what you should do?"

That was it. He fucks me and then says please go and kill yourself. Think. Concentrate. I had no chance of killing all six of them. Harry was going to be the most difficult to kill of the lot. He always had a gun at hand. If any of them was left alive, I and my parents and my sister would all be dead for sure. Probably in the most gruesome way. If I ran, I would be tracked down and my parents and sister would still be killed. If I ran, Laura would probably be killed too just to be on the safe side. It was Monday.

“I’ve got a supply of sleeping pills. That should do the job. I’ll do it on Thursday night because my cleaning woman doesn’t come again until Monday so there is no chance of me being revived.”

There was a grunt of satisfaction. I went to my office and started to pack up. As I was leaving I said to Harry:

“I have arranged for the bank transfers for payments to my parents to start on the first of next month. I have put in the same amount as you put for Tony. They will know it is my pension plan. Here is my security pass and my office key.”

I lay them on the desk in front of him. Harry looked pleased and satisfied. I was not going to be any trouble. I was efficient to the last. I was glad he had already put me across the desk. Otherwise he was so pleased with himself he might have put me on the couch.

Harry of course did not know that I had another security card and set of keys in my apartment and that also I had kept a duplicate set of records of everything in my apartment. I had duplicates of all current material at home to help with the job so that I could call in at my apartment to do the figures without interruption in the office and so I could work at night. It occurred to me that the microfiche and the current material just might be useful to protect my parents and sister even if I could not be protected.

I copied the whole lot of the current records onto the big floppy disks at my apartment using the big slow computer that was then the best available. It took three full disks. I then cleared my computer of any records of the organisation. I did not want to run the risk that somebody would come and look at the computer over the next couple of days.

I packed up the microfiche with the floppies, and personal things, my cheque book, the title deeds of my apartment, and my will. I left the pills beside the bed with a bottle of water. I spread out the dress I intended to die in on a chair beside the bed. I

left my gun under the pillow in case the pills made me nauseous, so I could just shoot myself. If somebody wanted to kill me in the next few days that would just save me the trouble. I took out that damned diaphragm. When I left, the apartment had furniture but otherwise was cleared out.

I drove up to mum and dad's. My sister had just finished a college course and was talking a trip to Europe.

“Mum and dad, why don't you go on a tour of Europe with Suzy? I'll pay all of the travelling expenses and for your hotel accommodation.”

“Oh, dear, that is so sweet. But dad's team is just starting in training. I've got the garden club annual general meeting next week and then the whole season is going to be very busy. We just couldn't go.”

What was I to do? I couldn't say to my parents: “Look, mum and dad, I'm just about to kill myself because I've got mixed up with a batch of really bad guys. If they think I've cheated on them in some way you two are going to get killed just to make an example for others. You've got to get out of the country now!” They would have just gone into panic. They couldn't have believed it. They wouldn't have gone. They'd have gone dashing to police. We would all have been killed for sure. They were leaving me with no alternative but to kill myself. I tried for hours but it got me nowhere.

Suzy on the other hand was willing to go. She wanted to go. I said I would transfer to her account and pay all her expenses provided she left the next day. She had already got a passport because her college excursions had gone into Mexico. I had to swear her to secrecy. She was amazed that I deposited \$250,000 into her account. I gave her my title deeds and a transfer of my unit – “in case anything happened to me”.

“There is just one condition. Whatever happens to me, whatever happens to mum and dad, you must not come back for at least a year. Two or three years would be safer.” She looked at me with open eyes of amazement.

“Tony got me mixed up with a really bad lot. The whole family is in real danger. At least with you well and truly out of the country you will be safe.”

Suzy had some friends who were holidaying in Paris, so she decided that was where she would start. I helped her pack. I gave her all the advice I could. I arranged finance over the telephone. I drove her to the airport the next day and put her ticket on my credit card. I had actually taken out one of those policies that if anything happened to me the amount due on my credit card would automatically be paid. Mum and dad tried to talk Suzy out of leaving so quickly. They thought it was ridiculous to go on one day's notice. They were very cross with me for talking Suzy into it. Suzy maintained her secrecy from them. She could see the problem with them. There was a very tearful farewell. At the airport Suzy and I cried all over each other.

I then went back to the hometown. I got in touch with Tim. He had not married. He was still carrying a torch for me. I spent the next two nights with him. Sex with someone you truly love and who truly loves you is one of the most wonderful experiences we can ever have. Since I didn't expect to be around for long, I did not bother about contraception.

The first night after we made love I started to cry while he was still holding me in his arms.

“Millie, it's all right. Don't cry. Everything will be all right. I love you.”

I was crying from self-pity. I was crying that all the work and effort and study I had packed into my life had produced disaster. I wished so strongly that I had just married Tim and stayed living in the hometown. The best deal most women can get out of life is to have a loving husband who looks after them and provides for their children. I had tried for something better. I had failed.

We made love again that night and again first thing in the morning.

Over breakfast, I gave Tim a sealed envelope. It had the disks that I had downloaded from my computer, with the current information and my copies of the microfiches of older material.

“I want you to look after this. It is very dangerous. Tony got me mixed up with some really bad people. I want you to keep an eye out for my parents. I think they may be in danger. If anything happens to them, you can open the envelope but be very careful with what you do with the contents. If anything happens to me, don’t open it. It is only to be opened if something happens to mum or dad.”

“Is that why Suzy went off overseas so suddenly?”

“Yes. I have told her not to come back no matter what.”

“It’s okay. Don’t worry. Your place is on one of the regular beats for the car patrol. I’ll just have to arrange for myself or one of the other men to spend a bit more time in that area and to be alert for anything suspicious.”

On the Thursday morning I said goodbye to mum and dad giving them both big hugs and kisses. I was able to stop myself crying, but only just.

CHAPTER 5

Amended 10.11.2003

I drove into my normal parking spot. I was holding back tears. It wasn't that I didn't want anyone to see me blubbing. I knew I had to get it done. I had to remain in control. It was a funny feeling getting into the lift. I was going up for the last time and I was never coming down. I mentally ran through what I had to do. I was just going to change into my blue evening dress that I had decided to die in. I had to stretch out on the bed and take all the pills. The only risk then was that the pills would make me nauseous and I would start to vomit, but I had left my pistol under the pillow so that if that happened I could just shoot myself. I thought I would probably cry as I was passing out, so I thought I should wash all the make-up off my face or otherwise I would look a mess.

As I opened the door I could smell cigarette smoke. I walked in. Al, Dave and Eddy were sitting there. I looked at them. They didn't say anything.

“Hi boys. There was no need for Harry to have sent you. I've got the pills laid out.”

Eddy was almost apologetic.

“Harry was worried about it all taking too long. He just sent us to see that it happens. Also we have to check the apartment to make sure it's clean.”

Dave was standing in the corner smoking and Al was lounging in a chair.

“I have cleaned out my computer, but when we've finished, take it with you to be sure. Come into the bedroom and watch.”

Think. Concentrate. As I walked into the bedroom I felt I had a chance. If I had a chance, I knew mum and dad would want to take it with me. I had convinced myself that if I had a chance I would let them run the risk too. If they hadn't treated Tony so stupidly, none of this might have happened.

The three of them followed me in. Dave went over into a corner, probably to avoid me making a comment about the cigarette smoke. Al lounged just inside the door.

Eddy stood in the middle of the room looking a bit sorry for himself, or maybe for me. I went across to cupboard and started to undress. I knew that with the surprise of producing a gun I could get two of them. I would have to have the third off balance to do it. I kicked off my flatties that I had been driving in. I took off my top and hung it in the cupboard. I took off my jeans and folded them up. I was standing there in my bra and panties. I moved my blue dress forward so they could see that that was going to be my dying dress. I couldn't wear a bra with that dress. I took my bra off. They all stared at my breasts. There was no reason to take my panties off for that dress, but I'd worked out what I was going to try. I took my panties off and carefully put them into the drawer. I was standing in front of them completely naked. They were looking at me quite intently.

“Boys, I just want to ask a favour before I go. I've not had one bit of decent sex since I started with Harry. I'd like to go out relaxed. It will help the pills to work if I am relaxed. Do me a favour boys, I want you all to fuck me.”

Al laughed. Dave coughed. Eddy looked like he didn't know what to say or do.

I walked up to Eddy. He couldn't take his eyes off my body. I pulled his jacket back and started to undress him.

“Come on Eddy. You've always wanted to fuck me. I've wondered what it would be like to have a fuck with you.”

He started to help me undress him. He seemed to want just to take off his pants, but I was taking off all his clothing. By the time I got him undressed he had a full-sized erection. His erect penis was built to size. I rather wondered how I was going to cope with it. I got onto the bed and spread my legs. I had a tube of lubricant on the open shelf beside the bed. I had never used it there, but it was coming in handy now. Looking at the size of Eddy, I gave myself a liberal application and I squeezed some onto my fingers and rubbed into Eddy. As I finished, I put my arms around him with my legs spread out on either side of his body, me sitting up and him still kneeling. I gave him a kiss. I actually felt some slight affection towards him, even

though I was about to try to kill him. It was like the owner of an old dog who is taking the dog to the vet to be put down.

“Don’t worry Eddy, I know you’ve got to do it. Let’s just have some decent fun before I go. And Eddy, as I am passing out, would you mind holding my hand until I’m unconscious. It will make me feel better. If you want to fuck me again after I’m unconscious – go ahead. I won’t mind.”

Eddy was very excited. He wasn’t going to last long. I didn’t have much time. I lay back and guided Eddy into me. I was glad I’d put the lubricant on. He really stretched me.

“Eddy! Slow down. I want this to last. I want a decent fuck not a quicky.”

Eddy did slow down, but it wasn’t going to make much difference. I had to do something to get one of the others off balance. Eddy was now almost covering me. I had my hands first of all onto his bum pulling him up, but I was moving my hands all over the place so that a movement to my pillow wasn’t going to draw attention.

“Dave, why don’t you get ready. Take your gear off. It will give me something to look at. I’d like to see you.”

Dave paused for a moment, but he was obviously looking forward to his turn. He kicked off his shoes, took off his jacket and undid his gun. I wished he’d hurry. Eddy was getting towards the end. Eventually, it seemed like hours but it was probably only seconds, he started to take his pants off. As he was on one foot and really off balance, I acted.

I whipped the gun out from under the pillow and put a bullet through Eddy’s head and immediately shot Al. I was probably faster than I had ever been in my exercises in the woods, but Al was fast too. Amazingly fast. As my bullet hit him, he had his gun out and he fired back. I don’t know whether it was my bullet that knocked him over or the impact of his own shot when he was already off balance. Anyway, he fell over. Meanwhile Dave had been so shocked at what had happened that he’d fallen over face

first, tripping in his own pants. I didn't wait. I put a bullet into Dave's back. I got out from under Eddy as quickly as I could. His dead weight was unbelievably heavy and I thought for a moment I might be stuck there. As I got out, Eddy reached a climax and his semen went all over the place. I didn't know a man could do that after he was dead. I raced over to Al who was obviously trying to get up or turn around to my way. I didn't spend a second discussing it. I put a bullet through his head. I dashed back to Dave. I think he was dead, but I didn't want to take any chances. I put a bullet through his head too.

In about two minutes I'd wiped out three of the six that I would have to get rid of to have any chance. That meant I had Carl, Bud and Harry to go. I knew where Harry would be. Either Carl or Bud would be on corridor duty near the lift. The worst danger would be if I couldn't find Carl. Even if I got the other five it was inevitable that Carl would have to hunt me down and if he caught me he would want to do something particularly savage as an example to everybody else and to show what a big man he was. He would need to do that to maintain respect. It also meant that mum and dad would certainly be dead.

I cleaned myself up as quickly as I could. I strapped on my leg holster. I re-loaded my gun. I put it in the holster. I checked that it was in there freely and securely. I put on my blue dress. It was the only one I had, but I looked good in it and it may help to distract Bud, though I didn't think it would have much effect on Carl or Harry. I grabbed my purse, which still had my keys in it. I got my spare security pass to Harry's office and put them in my bag. I turned the lights out as I left and double locked the door. Unless one of the neighbours had realised that the noises were gunshots or unless the dead bodies started to smell, I was probably pretty safe that they wouldn't be discovered until my cleaning woman arrived on Monday morning.

As I went down in the lift to the car park, I had a sense of elation. I had killed three of the bastards. I was a bit sorry about Eddy, but he would have understood. They were all going to die one way or another from being in Harry's business. At least Eddy had gone out with probably the best fuck he'd ever had in his life. I think he died happy.

CHAPTER 6

Amended 10.11.2003, 18.09.2004

As I drove, I kept having to control my mind. Think. Concentrate. I knew where Harry would be. Either Carl or Bud would be in the corridor. Probably Bud since Carl thought corridor duty was beneath him. If Harry and Carl were both in the office, how was I to get rid of Bud in the corridor without making a noise that would attract their attention. What would be great would be if Carl and Bud were both in the corridor or I get them both into the corridor. With the surprise of seeing me with a gun in my hand I should be able to get both of them. But that would alert Harry. What if Harry had some other people with him? What if Carl wasn't there at all and was out somewhere and I couldn't find him. I was going to have to be lucky and I was going to have to think in top gear. I didn't feel so worried about being killed myself. At the start of the evening that was inevitable, and I was going to do it myself. It was now too late to worry about mum and dad. Unless I succeeded, they were going to be as dead as I was.

I had three things going for me. I was smarter than any of them, except possibly Harry. I had a good body that I could use to distract them. I had surprise on my side because I had a gun and knew how to use it and they had never seen me use a gun before.

I was glad I had done some amateur theatricals at school and university. I was going to need all my acting skills.

I used the security pass to drive into our own secure parking area. I couldn't see anybody. Carl's car was there. Bud's car was there. I got out of the car and started to walk towards the lift. I felt the sudden impact of being grabbed from behind, a choking arm around my neck. A very sinister voice said: "Hello Millie. What are you doing here?" It was Carl. Think. Concentrate. Advantage – I'd found Carl and he was alone. Disadvantage – he completely had the drop on me. I was in his power. I dropped my handbag. Fortunately it was zipped up so nothing came out.

"I've come to beg Harry to let me go."

"You know he's not going to do that. You are supposed to be dead or dying now."

“I know. Harry will probably shoot me on the spot. I couldn’t do it myself without at least trying once more. At least if he shoots me I won’t have to clean up the carpet.”

“Don’t worry Millie. I know where the carpet cleaner is. I remember you told me it had to be done with cold water.”

He sounded as if he was really enjoying himself. He was looking forward to seeing me dead. He still had his arm around my neck and I still couldn’t move. I could not have reached my thigh holster without alerting him.

“At least let me make it up to you before I go. I’ve had what I did to you on my conscience. I know I caused you a lot of trouble. I think at one stage I put you into a really risky situation. If Harry had ultimately chosen me, you would probably be dead now. I felt bad about that. Since I am probably going to meet St Peter within the next hour, I would like to have done something. I want to be able to say to St Peter that I tried to make it up to you in some way as best I could.”

“What could you do now? You are going to be dead too soon.”

“All I can think of is that I could give you the best blow job I can do.”

I could feel Carl’s surprise in the movements of his arm around my neck and the movements of his body against my back.

“Carl, you wouldn’t want me to die with you on my conscience without having made some effort to make it up to you. It is all I can do. I want to do it.”

Carl turned me around and as he did so pulled his gun out of his holster and had it pointing straight at my head. I didn’t want him to be looking at my face or eyes. He might have guessed. I wanted him looking somewhere else. I slipped my shoulder straps off and let the top of my dress fall to my waist. His eyes went to my breasts. He still had his gun pointing straight at my head. We were standing just near the back of another car. I pushed him back against the boot. I undid his fly and his belt. He

spread his legs a bit and let his pants drop. He still had the gun pointed straight at me. I went down on my knees. His penis was starting to swell, so I gave it a very gentle encouragement licking it and taking it into my mouth but without sucking it. When it was moist I rubbed it between my breasts. Men seem to like that. I had to keep him going until I had a chance. I took his balls in my left hand and held them down. That extends the time. I started to give a gentle suck moving my lips and mouth over him. He was getting very excited. His balls were struggling to get out of my left hand. He started to breathe heavily. He was obviously having a great time. I put my hand down towards the gun holster.

“What are you doing?”

“Since this is my last sex, I’m giving myself a finger job.”

Holding his balls down was increasing the tension for him enormously. He started to gasp. His thighs started to tremble. The minute I let go of his balls he was going to go off. They were struggling to get out of my left hand and I was struggling to hold them down. His thighs and knees were shaking. He was getting unsteady. He put both his hands down onto the boot lid to steady himself including the hand with the gun in it.

I whipped out my gun and put two bullets straight up his rib cage. Fortunately, I must have hit him so well he didn’t fire the gun at all. He just dropped to the ground. A bit of blood got onto my forehead, but I pulled my straps onto my shoulders again and found some tissues in my handbag and cleaned myself up. I checked. He was dead.

I had no remorse about killing Carl at all. I felt glad.

That meant that there was probably Bud in the corridor upstairs. I put my gun back into its holster, but I did not see how I was going to be able to use it on Bud without the risk of Harry hearing the shots.

The way Carl had fallen I could see the knife that he always carried under his jacket. It was a long sharp knife. He has boasted many times about throats he’d cut with it.

That might be my answer for Bud. My blue dress came with a belt, so I tucked the knife into the back of it, got out my security card again and pressed the lift. As I got into the lift I could see Carl's dead body lying in front of me. There was no point in getting rid of the body. There wasn't time anyway.

As the lift arrived and I stepped out, Bud was in the corridor. There was no one else. Bud was quite cold towards me. He had found the struggle between me and Carl amusing rather than threatening. He didn't care whether he worked under me or under Carl. Perhaps marginally he would have preferred to work under me.

"Hello Millie. What are you doing here? I thought you were supposed to be doing something else tonight?"

"I just couldn't do it without coming to beg Harry to let me go one last time."

"I don't like your chances. He's got someone with him at the moment. You can wait if you like. I thought Al, Dave and Eddy had gone round to your place?"

"I must have missed them. I'd been out walking trying to gather the courage to do it."

I was shaking. I don't know whether it was fear or excitement or elation at having killed four of them, or just that my adrenaline was pumping too much. Bud obviously took it that I was shaking with fear. I went up close to Bud. He was obviously looking down my front.

"Bud, I'm so afraid. I am probably about to die. Why do I kid myself? There is no probability about it. I am going to die tonight."

"You always were pretty good at working out how things were going to go Millie."

"Bud, hold me and give me a kiss. It will comfort me until it happens."

I pressed myself up against Bud and kissed him fully on the lips. A bit to my surprise he responded and enjoyed the kiss and put his arms around me. Because I put my

right arm under his and around the back of his head he didn't pin my right arm down. As I kissed him, he put his tongue into my mouth. I sucked his tongue into my mouth. He enjoyed that. It put me in a position where he couldn't see what my right hand was doing and he couldn't call out. I grabbed the knife from behind me and as hard as I could stabbed him in the neck. I had never stabbed anybody before. I didn't know how hard one had to strike. I used every bit of strength I had. The knife went right through his throat. I pulled it back out trying to cut deeper. Blood went everywhere. Blood spurted out his mouth into my mouth and around my lips. I let go of him and as I did he started to make a horrible gurgling sound so I sliced through his windpipe. That just led to a hissing noise and then everything stopped. Blood was everywhere. It was in my hair. It was all over my blue dress. It was all over my breasts. It was all over the floor. He looked like he was still alive, but he was obviously losing consciousness quickly. I didn't think there was any need for me to do any more. As he slid to the ground I could see his gun under his jacket. It was a much bigger and heavier gun than mine. The training I had done with my gun made me think that I might need a heavier gun. I took it out of his holster.

Everything was quiet. I went to the door of my office. It sounded to me like there was nobody in my office but some noises were coming from Harry's inner office. I opened the door of my office very quietly and went in. The lights were on but no one was there. Now I could hear from the inner room. It was a girl. Harry was obviously up to his favourite sexual activity. She was crying out in pain. She didn't know that she was supposed to be balling with tears running down her face. She was trying to fight him off. No one had told her the ropes. She hadn't had the sense to get advice first. But Laura wasn't around and there may not have been anyone else. She was really calling out and making a fuss. I didn't waste a moment. This was my chance. Harry would be leaning over her gloating with his penis in her causing her as much pain as he could. I knew where the couch was in relation to the door. I threw the door open and holding the gun in both hands blasted him. I hit him somewhere about the mid-spine and he began to turn. I raced forward right up close to him. He could see it was me. His face was a wonderful picture of surprise and rage. I gave him a bullet straight between the eyes. At close range it blew the back of his head off. Then I looked at the girl. My first bullet into Harry had passed right through him and hit her. She had a neat hole in the middle of her chest between her breasts. She was

dead. Her left breast was red and bruised and bleeding slightly around the nipple. He had given her a good workout. I did not recognise the girl. I was a bit sorry about her, but if she had got involved with Harry she was in for a hell of a life.

What I wanted to do was to jump up and down on Harry's corpse and dance and scream out, "I got you, you bastard. I beat you. I've done it." But I didn't. Think. Concentrate. I had a lot to do in a hurry.

CHAPTER 7

Amended 10.11.2003, 18.09.2004

I took the safe key from around Harry's neck. The chain was covered in goo from his head. I got it on my hands. I went into the bathroom to wash the chain and the key so I could use it. I saw myself in the mirror. I had blood in my hair. There was blood all over me. I looked like something out of a horror movie. I thought how great it was that I looked like that when Harry saw me at the end. I hope he felt that all his religious observances and the regular absolutions he had received from the Church had turned out to be not enough and that I was some sort of Devil's agent come to drag him to Hell. I obviously had to clean up before I could do anything.

I stripped off and took a quick shower. I had to wash my hair. I started the wash with the water as cold as I could and the blood came out fairly easily, but there was no conditioner for my hair. When I got out of the shower there was no way I was going to be able to unknot my hair. There were some scissors in the drawer. I cut my hair off short so I could comb it. What to do for clothes? The only bit of my clothing I could still wear was my panties. I had taken my spare clothing away when I left the office. The girl. I went back into Harry's office. The girl had put her clothing neatly on one side. She was smaller than me. Her clothing was a neat professional looking yellow suit. I put the skirt on. It was a bit shorter than I would usually wear but it fitted. I tried her bra. Hopeless. Nowhere near me. I tried her blouse, I could not get it to do up. It obviously didn't fit me. I tried the jacket. The shoulders were all right. It would do up, even if very tightly. But it left me with an enormous cleavage. To walk around outside without causing a riot I would have to keep my back straight and my shoulders held well back. It would have to do. There was blood on my shoes, but I washed the blood off and it didn't matter that my shoes were wet. It was not noticeable.

I took the safe key and opened the safe. I got one of the sports bags we used to use for carrying money. I packed in all the bundles of notes that I had so carefully wrapped and counted on so many occasions. There was more than usual. As I counted the bundles in, assuming that they were \$100,000 in each bundle, there was about \$2 million. I put the envelope of bonds on top. I put in the back-up microfiche of our records. I found the contacts book which had all the names and addresses and

phone numbers. With the address book, I found my passport. I thought I had left it in my office but Harry must have brought it in and put in the safe. I don't know what he planned to do with it. I put about \$20,000 from the safe into my handbag. I went to the books to see what had been happening since I left. It seemed no other entries had been made. The one thing I had not had in the microfiches was the account number and full name of the Colombian account. I wrote those details into the contact book and I copied everything else from the records but I left most records as I found them. I was nervous about how long it took, but I thought it might be worthwhile. I deleted the details of the Colombian account but I left everything else in the computer. I thought it might interest an honest cop, but none ever saw it. Anybody trying to put Harry's business back together again would have all the information they needed, if an honest cop did not get it first.

I left the building as quickly as I could. My hair was still a bit wet but it did not look too strange. I took a cab from outside the building to the back door of a downtown hotel. I walked through the downtown hotel to the front door and took another cab to the airport. I went immediately to the ticket area. There was a plane for Mexico City in about an hour.

I had brought my little gun and holster with me. I dropped it in the first big rubbish bin I found at the airport.

"We only have one ticket left for that flight. That's in first class."

"I always travel first class."

She was a bit surprised when I paid for the ticket in cash, but she did not comment. I started to walk to the security gates for the departure lounge. The x-ray machine. They will be able to see bundles of money in the bag. I looked around desperately. Think. Concentrate. What is the same size as money and would look the same on an x-ray machine. Travel brochures! I found a rack of travel brochures and shoved hands full of them into my bag on top. I walked up to the security check and as if I didn't have a care in the world, put my bag onto the runners into the x-ray machine.

As I picked my bag up off the other side of the x-ray machine, one of the guards said in a way that indicated more than casual interest, "What's in the bag?"

"My travel brochures."

I bent forward over the bag and deliberately turned to the right so as to give him a full view of my right breast. Probably he could have seen in all the way down to the nipple. That distracted him. I opened the top of the bag and showed him a couple of brochures. I gave him a winning smile as if to say, 'If I wasn't getting on a plane I would like to spend time with him.'

He was satisfied about the bag. I imagine the view he had of my right breast recurred in his mind for much of the rest of the evening. Men have a one-track mind. Well it is one track. I do not know whether it is a mind.

When I got into the plane and had settled down, the steward asked me if he could get me anything, so in a casual way I asked him whether he had one of the casual tops so that I could take my jacket off. He could see why I would need a replacement garment if I took my jacket off. He found me one of those grey casual pyjama type tops which most airlines seem to have for the first class passengers. Before we took off I went into the toilet with my handbag and my carry bag. I put the casual top on. I put on some makeup. I got out the address book. When I went to my seat, I studied the address book. What I wanted was the passport shop. I had seen some of the passports from that Mexican shop. They were real works of art. They would put on any photograph. They would fit any name.

I did not want to go to sleep on the plane because I did not want to let the money out of my hand. They brought some nice food. I didn't accept the wine. I had some coffee. I needn't have worried. I could not have gone to sleep with all the adrenaline in my body. Killing people seems to be a great stimulant to keeping awake.

Before we landed, I went back into the tight yellow jacket. My breasts and the brochures worked the same way to get me through customs. My only problem was

that most of the customs officers were women and I had to pick the right moment to get one of the men.

I took a taxi to a 4-star hotel. First job to get the money into decent security. I packed it into a number of large envelopes which the business office at the hotel were able to give me. I put one lot in the safe in the room, and the other lots in the hotel safes. I think the clerk suspected that they were bundles of money, but she was discrete.

There was a small boutique in the hotel. I was able to get quite a nice looking conservative suit and a blouse. The yellow suit I felt had served me well. I put it into a St Vincent de Paul bag not far from the hotel.

Next important job, a hair do. I found a hairdresser. I wanted my hair colour changed.

“But you have nice blond hair. We just need to tidy up that awful haircut that somebody has given you and you’ll look great.”

“Yes, I know, but I’m just tired of being blond. So many men think that because you are blond you are going to be ready to hop into bed with them. Men date blondes, but they marry brunettes or darker.”

“I know exactly what you mean.”

We selected a very dark brown, almost black, which would enable me to blend in in Colombia. I had to go to Colombia. That’s where the money was. Whether I stayed there was another question. It took about 3 hours to do the whole job, but when she finished it looked good, and more importantly, it looked different.

“You’ll have to change all your makeup to go with your new colour.”

I hadn’t thought of that, but she was obviously right.

“I shall make it my next stop.”

In fact I didn't stop. I went straight to the passport shop. It was in the central area of town or pretty close in a seedy back street and up two flights of stairs, with a sign on the door 'Apex Travel Consultants'. There was no one else in the office. A man came out from behind wearing a magnifying glass pushed upon to his forehead. He had obviously been working on his artistic creation.

“I want a Colombian passport.”

He looked at me sizing up what price he could charge. I opened my purse and counted \$3,000 onto the counter. He looked at me again.

“Prices have gone up.”

I counted out another \$500. He probably felt he was getting about as much as he could.

“When do you want it.”

“As soon as I can.”

“I've got a lot of work on. It might take me a couple of weeks. Of course, if you want it urgently, I could set the other work aside.”

I counted out another \$500. He didn't pick it up. He just looked. I counted out some more so that there was another \$1,000 on the table. He picked it up.

“Come back here so I can take a photograph.”

He showed me through to the back room. There were complicated printing presses, stacks of strange paper and a tray to one side containing a range of probably stolen passports.

“What name do you want?”

I gave him Harry's grandmother's name, which we had used for the account.

"I'll need your signature."

Hell, I have never signed that name.

"I'm a bit jet lagged. I'm a bit shaky. I have to sit down and practice."

"No need to pretend. Most people come here without having signed their false names before. My advice is write the name in ordinary handwriting, that way you will be able to reproduce it without difficulty."

"Thanks."

He passed me some paper and I wrote out in my ordinary handwriting, Anna Maria y Losada Marquez. After writing it four or five times, I could write it reasonably fluidly and I used that one for the sample for the passport. I mentally decided that when I was writing cheques I would have to shorten the signature.

"When can I pick it up?"

"Tomorrow, probably around 5 o'clock."

I spent the rest of the day acquiring some clothing, luggage, and makeup. It was only around lunchtime that I remembered that I hadn't eaten since I was on the plane. I booked a ticket, first class of course, to Colombia for the next evening. I booked out of the first hotel. I checked on what the 5-star hotels were and booked into one under my new name. The security around that hotel was intense. I did not even have to take my moneybag to the hotel safety deposit boxes. I did however eat dinner in my room, and breakfast too.

When I picked up the passport on the way to the airport he stung me for another \$500.

“I had some additional expenses. The basic passport that I had to cannibalise was very expensive.”

I didn't argue. The passport was a work of art. It did not look new. It had what was clearly a picture of me with my new hair colour. It had my new signature in it. He had invented a date of birth for me or may have carried it forward from the previous owner of the rest of the book. He had made me a bit younger. He was right of course. It would have been stupid to use my actual birthday. It had a lot of arrival and departure stamps. Whoever had previously owned those pages had obviously travelled a lot. When I arrived in Colombia later that evening, the passport presented no problem. When I produced it at the hotel, they did not even want to keep it or check it. I had a new identity which was accepted.

CHAPTER 8

Amended 26.10.2003, 17.11.2003, 18.09.2004

I went to the bank where Harry's drug money account was. It was in a respectable, discrete building with high security, but obviously not presenting itself to the public as a place where the average farmer or worker should deposit his small savings. I went to the desk. I asked to speak to the manager. I was asked my name. I did not have the faintest idea how to pronounce my new name in Spanish. I handed over my passport.

"Just a moment, Signora Marques, I will find the manager."

I tried to remember how she had pronounced my name. A few moments later a man, probably a couple of years younger than myself, came out before behind and conducted me to a desk and chairs in one corner of the banking chamber. It reminded me of the sort of table I had sat at before when opening accounts.

"Signora Marques, my name is Marc Mercanda. I am assistant to the manager. He is tied up at the moment. How can I help you?"

He was obviously polite. He wasn't good looking, but he looked respectable. He spoke English well but with a heavy Spanish accent.

"Please pardon me that I have very little Spanish. I have my grandmother's name, but I was brought up and educated in the States. My parents had the idea that it was important for me to speak English rather than Spanish so they always avoided using Spanish in the home. Foolish wasn't it?"

"I quite understand." (I thought he probably did not understand in fact.)

"I have made many business trips to Colombia before, but I always seem to be able to do business in English."

"Have you come to open an account?"

“No. I already have an account here to which I have transferred most of my inheritance. The account is in my name.”

I gave him my passport.

“The account number is ...”

And I recited the account number from memory, which he quickly wrote down on a slip. He rose.

“Pardon me for just a moment, and I will get the account details.”

He returned quite quickly. This time he had a much older man with him – pot bellied and bald – whom he introduced as the manager. The manager was very effusive in his welcome. I thought the younger man was going to be easier to handle.

“How very kind you are. When my parents passed away, I felt that I owed it to them to return to their native land and at least to try whether I could make some contribution here. But please do not let me trouble you. Mr Mercanda will be able to look after all my simple requirements I am sure.”

The manager did not look as if he wanted to hand over to the younger man at all, but thought that he should act graciously and gave the file to Mercanda and with effusive wishes that he hoped to see me again and to be of assistance to me in any way I wished, he went back to his office.

My first concern was to close that account so that an account of that number no longer existed.

“I asked my bank back home – I’m sorry, my former home – to open the account in US dollars. I trust that has been done?”

“Yes it is has.”

I could see that he was trying to make up in his mind whether he should tell me what the balance was or check yet again on my identity by asking me what the balance was.

“The initial deposit was \$7,250,000 US, but a further payment may have come through within the last few days.”

“Yes, a further payment of \$750,000 came through two days ago, so that the total now is the round \$8,000,000.”

“Since I am going to be living here now, at least for the time being, I don’t want the money just sitting there. What investments would you suggest? I would probably need about \$1,000,000 in an ordinary operating account, but I would like to have the rest working. I want to keep it all in US currency. I know you will understand.”

He gave me a list of possible investments, including interest bearing accounts, government bonds, managed funds in the stock market, trust investments run by the bank in real estate and various other ideas. I took a selection being careful always that they were securities that I could realise in a hurry if I needed to, and that they were going to be subject to the US inflation rate, not the Colombian.

“Well, that uses up all the money in the present account. I suppose we just close that account do we?”

“Yes, that would be simplest. Let me get all the paperwork for all the other investments. Would you like a cheque book?”

“Of course. Also I will need a large safety deposit box.”

I still had my sports bag between my legs. Mercanda sent a junior member of staff to get me some coffee while he went off to do all the paperwork. He impressed me as calm and efficient. When we had completed all the business he asked me if I would like a credit card on the bank. I asked him to arrange that. It wasn’t going to be ready for a few days.

“I feel very bad that my Spanish is so poor. Could you recommend a tutor to me who could help me to study Spanish?”

He was delighted to do so and gave me the name of a woman whom I later discovered he was going out with at the time – actually more usually he was staying in with her.

“Since I propose to buy a home and enter into some investments, I will need to know the name of a reliable firm of lawyers. I would prefer one of the smaller firms with a lot of general experience – property, dealing with governments, commercial work, even some work in the criminal courts.”

“The bank is always cautious not to appear to recommend any particular firm of lawyers. Let me give you three names.”

He wrote out the names and addresses of three firms of lawyers. We went to the bank security deposit boxes where I identified the size box I needed. He opened it with two keys and gave me one of them and left me discretely alone to pack my box. When I had finished and shut the box, I buzzed him and he came in with his key and we both shut the lock together.

I then went back to my hotel where I put a ‘Do Not Disturb’ sign on the door and went to sleep for the rest of that day and the whole of the night. When I woke up the next morning I felt better and I looked better.

I arranged the language lessons. She was a bright young woman who had spent many years in the States and had teaching qualifications. She was not prepared to work in the state or catholic educational system and was waiting for a job in one of the few other schools. I had always been a good student. Although I hadn’t studied for years, I worked hard on it. I made it my number one top priority. Within three or four weeks I was doing well. Although I had to change my tutor, within six months I could get around in Spanish comfortably and within a year I had almost no accent left. I took care never to speak English in public when I could avoid it, and when I did, I faked a Spanish accent.

I visited each of the three firms of lawyer and met one of the partners at each place, and talked about the sort of work they did. I ultimately selected the only firm that did some degree of criminal work and there I selected an associate who was a homosexual. His name was Sanchez, or at least that was the only part of his name I ever used. There always seems to be one or more homosexuals in any firm of lawyers. I felt safe with him. I felt I could rely on him. He was sensible, particularly being homosexual he was not totally bound by the social attitudes of the society.

The first task Sanchez did for me was to advise me on a reputable real estate agent so that I could buy a secure modern comfortable apartment for myself. He rang an agent his firm had worked with often. He arranged for the English-speaking salesman to show me around. I quite quickly found a nice apartment in an older block but well renovated and with top security. I thought the price they were asking was reasonable, but Sanchez said it was at the top of the market price and negotiated a substantially lower price for me. He was untroubled by me bringing part of the purchase price to him in cash from my safety deposit box. The balance I paid out of my operating account with Marc Mercanda's bank. I was in my own apartment within two weeks of arriving in Colombia.

Sanchez also helped me to buy a car. On his strong recommendation, I got a security car with bulletproof windows and lots of safety devices and security devices. He put me in touch with a reliable employment agency to hire a cleaner for my apartment.

Two or three days after I had been to the bank for the first time, Mercanda left a message at the hotel that my credit card was ready to be collected. I had quite rapidly discovered that in Colombia women do not go out in the evening alone, at least at that time. I was beginning to feel sufficiently confident that I did not want to hide in the hotel any more. I rang Mercanda and thanked him for letting me know that the card was ready and asked him if he would permit me to show my thanks for his efforts by taking him to dinner at some restaurant of his choice. I suggested a suburban family sort of restaurant rather than some elaborate city place. I said I wanted to get acquainted with the city. I tried to use the few Spanish phrases that I had already learnt. He hesitated, but when pressed he agreed and told me the name of a restaurant and its address. I agreed to meet him that evening. He did not offer to pick me up and take me there. Since the whole thing was my idea that was understandable.

During the dinner he was respectful and polite as was appropriate for a young bank officer to a multimillion-dollar client. He left me with the impression that he didn't like me much but that he was endeavouring to conceal it. Our financial disparity, as it appeared to him, was a real obstacle to anything approaching friendship. Friendship without more between a woman and heterosexual male in an approximately similar age group is rare. Just as rare is sexual interest where the man is not in control. Why are women always expected to be the submissive ones? Even so, it was the first calm relaxing evening in someone else's company I had had for some time. I enjoyed the evening. I thanked him. I paid the bill. He saw me to a cab back to my hotel. During the evening I learned that he was one of four children, that both his parents were alive, that his father was a member of the conservative party which was part of the national government, and had some influence in the government. He was unmarried. He was the usual unenthusiastic Catholic. At any rate he wouldn't admit to being anything else.

The next morning the English language paper had the news. President Johnson was on page one with what seemed to me to be the usual stuff about Vietnam. My seven murders figured on page three. They had already invented a name for me: "Massacre Millie". In the main Spanish language newspaper I was on page five. The article recorded the precise details of the deaths – three in my unit all with a bullet through the head, but two of them also shot in the body. They dwelt particularly on the one in the private car parking area whom the newspapers described as having been "sexually molested". I do not see how an adult male can be sexual molested. If he is not interested there is nothing much to do short of amputation.

The throat cutting in the corridor merited a photograph in the Spanish language paper. The two dead bodies in the inner office were at least correctly described as having been apparently involved in the sex act at the time they were killed. The papers said that I was being searched for and that it was suspected that I had left the country.

There were two theories being investigated by the Police. One was that I was Harry's previous lover and that I had killed him in rage at having been rejected and had

murdered his new partner in the process and that I had then wiped out the rest of his gang for self-protection.

The second theory was that I had murdered them in order to rob them or to cover up the fact that I had robbed them. One other suggestion that had been made but which was not apparently being taken seriously was that I had got into some involvement with some other group who had wanted to kill Harry and his associates for “business reasons”. Harry was described as a well-known restaurant owner. Who had ever known him as a restaurant owner was not mentioned. There was no mention of him as a drug-runner, standover man, briber of Police and politicians and multiple murderer. There was a photograph of me, which fortunately was very bad. It had been taken, by the look of it, by Police with a telephoto lens at some stake out. Fortunately, it did not look the slightest bit like me now.

I have never read a report in a newspaper of which I had first hand knowledge that was anywhere near accurate.

I was momentarily annoyed that the story being presented of me was so unfair and inaccurate. I thought I should get in touch with the newspaper and explain what it was all about. It took me three seconds to decide that that was not a good idea.

Even so, I thought it was a good idea to stay out of notice for a time, and I put my head down and worked on my studies of Spanish. Theresa, my Spanish teacher, was good at teaching. She kept me going at a stiff pace. She was able to work with me for four or five hours every day. She made me converse in Spanish, so I asked her about her boyfriend. It was no accident that Marc Mercanda had referred me to her. Over the weeks she told me everything about him that she knew. They usually spent three nights a week together, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. She thought he always had family commitments on the other nights. She thought his family would never approve a marriage, so she didn't see the relationship as likely to be permanent. She was surprised that I had learnt the words relating to sexual matters, but a good dictionary contains everything. I found out from her what his sexual likes and dislikes were. It was all fairly normal stuff.

“When he arrives in the evening, he always wants to make love straightaway, but I always make him wait until after dinner. He then eats his dinner very quickly.”

She perceived him generally as an alright guy and thought it was a pity that it was unlikely ever to be permanent.

I watched the English language and Spanish newspapers every day. Sometimes I had Theresa's assistance in translating some of the items in the Spanish language newspapers. I told her of course that I was reading them to improve my Spanish. There were many follow-up stories on Massacre Millie. It seemed to intrigue the audiences that a woman could murder seven people. Some women loved it, “Women Strike Back”, “At Last, Women's Equality has reached the area of major crime”. Men, of course, uniformly hated the whole thing. I was a monster. Especially the stories about Massacre Millie grew to its greatest height when they worked out and put in the papers that Eddy appeared to have been engaged in an act of intercourse when he was killed. That really spooked some men to think that in the situation where a man was, in their view, totally dominant, he might suddenly get killed.

Earlier reports showed how I had been traced to the downtown hotel from Harry's office. Later reports had identified me as catching a plane to Mexico City. However, the papers reported that security officers had not seen anything suspicious about my boarding that plane. Of course he hadn't, his eyes were elsewhere.

Although the stories continued to run day by day, progressively there was nothing new and the stories got smaller and moved further back in the papers.

Just when I thought it was dying down, I was back on page three, “Massacre Millie's parents killed in small town gun battle.” When I read the headline, I dropped the paper and just lay on my bed in the hotel sobbing. I had to ring Theresa and cancel my lessons for the day. I told her I was too ill. That was an understatement. When I had the strength to read the report, it told me that two gunmen had gone to my parents' home and had evaded Police officers who were keeping the house under surveillance. Tim had been as good as his word. The gunmen had then been stopped by the surveillance officers and a gun battle had broken out. Both of the gunmen had

been killed and one of the police officers had been killed. The names of the gunmen were given. They were two of Louis' men. The police were now conceding that Harry and my victims had been members of a drug-dealing gang with interests in prostitution and that the gunmen who had killed my parents were associated with rival interests. It seemed my parents had not been abused or tortured, just executed.

When I could stop crying and think again, I could see what happened. I had to say to myself – Think. Concentrate. – a number of times before I could work it out. Those groups are highly disciplined. It was a very bad example to Louis' own men that one member of Harry's team, a woman at that, had managed to wipe them out. He had become Harry's replacement. It was up to him to avenge Harry. He needed to show his own people that actions such as mine would not go unpunished. He needed to have a touch of legitimacy. He was obviously taking over Harry's territory, so he wanted to present himself as Harry's avenger. He couldn't find me. Thank god Suzy was in Europe. He had to do something quickly. My parents were the only ones around. He probably thought the investment of two of his soldiers was worthwhile. It maintained his respect from his men.

I wanted to ring Suzy, but I knew that would probably be disastrous for both of us. More, I really wanted to ring Tim, but that would have been even worse. Even though he loved me, he would have to report the call. I could do nothing. I cried for the rest of day and cried myself to sleep that night. Since I could not do anything I had to put it behind me and get on with my life. I got up the next day, had a shower, and went off to my Spanish lessons. I told Theresa, "I'm much better thank you."

I had missed a period. That did not surprise me. After all the stress I had been through it would have been surprising if everything else had been regular and normal. After I had been there for about four weeks, I thought I had better do a pregnancy test. I had by then enough Spanish to go to a suburban pharmacy and buy test gear. It showed up. I was pregnant. In the lovemaking I had with Tim after I had removed the diaphragm, I had got pregnant. I had not worried about any protection when making love to Tim since I did not expect to be alive much longer. Being pregnant was another factor in my situation that I had to deal with. At first I felt a sense of panic. I had to consciously calm myself down. Think. Concentrate. My first

question: Did I want to keep the baby? Of course I did. I was actually glad. I did not have Tim, and I never would, but I was going to have a replacement for him.

How was I going to cope as a single mother in this society? That was going to be very difficult. It was already obvious that Colombia was basically a very conservative Catholic country. Being a single mother would put me and the child outside most social groups of the middle class and wealthier class. Even most poorer families would feel superior to an unmarried mother or an illegitimate child. With the money I had behind me, I could certainly live comfortably, but I would live probably isolated from the rest of the community. My child also would have limited chances. He or she, without a father, would be severely handicapped. A single mother and an illegitimate child start off in the respect stakes well below average. I needed a husband at once.

There weren't a lot of places one could meet any eligible man. Even the sporting clubs were reluctant about accepting single women as regular members. Even the tennis club seemed to be limited to married women, daughters of members, or student or school groups. Most marriages in that city seemed to be arranged by the family. Otherwise, it was distinctly a matter of marrying the girl next door. There were nothing like the local balls that I had read about in 18th and 19th Century novels, where men and women could go without a partner in the hope of meeting someone.

Modern society seriously lacks facilities for people to meet each other. There is no village or society atmosphere. Singles bars and dating agencies are no substitute.

Anyway, meeting people and dating would take too long.

I got Theresa to introduce me to some of her other students and to some of her friends. She was eager. They were hopeless. I got Sanchez to introduce me to his partners in the legal firm and to some other young lawyers. None of them were the least bit promising.

The only one who seemed suitable that I had met was Marc Mercanda. He was acceptable looking. He had good family connections. He had a sound place in

society. He had a respectable job. The problem: he was not interested in me and didn't even seem to like me. I was also now totally alone in the world. Although I had a sister, I was never going to be able even to contact her. I was 32. If I was ever going to have anyone in my life that I could love I needed children. I was having one soon. Marc was obviously good breeding stock. He was one of four children. His parents were still both alive. He was healthy. His family seemed to be disease free. The project therefore was to seduce Marc Mercanda, and to do it quickly.

Seducing a man is usually pretty simple. One needs to dress in an attractive way, but not something so extreme as to frighten him off. Next, one needs to provide him with an opportunity. Then when he makes his move, all the woman has to do is to cooperate. Sometimes the man will be a little slow in taking up his opportunity. Usually very slight encouragement is enough.

I phoned him at the bank. It was now about two weeks since our one evening at dinner. I said I wanted to discuss a building development I had in mind with him and the extent to which the bank might participate. That was all perfectly genuine. I had decided I needed to build before I could start a decent restaurant or open a decent brothel. I suggested we meet at a restaurant near my apartment. I suggested a Wednesday night. I knew he was likely to be with Theresa on Tuesday or Thursday. He took a bit of persuading, but eventually agreed. Over dinner I did discuss with him the broad outline of the development project which Sanchez had helped me to put together. I had enough cash to do the whole development myself but with bank participation I could probably do better and I would have cash for the next project.

I was wearing a respectable but attractive garment with cleavage that wasn't modest, but wasn't embarrassing. I gave him lots of encouraging smiles during the course of the evening. I had not brought my basic figures with me, but was discussing it in general terms. He continued to be very polite. He complimented me on my Spanish. Almost the whole evening I was able to use Spanish only. I only went to English when I got really stuck and he helped me by telling me the appropriate Spanish words. At the end of the dinner I paid and asked him if he would mind coming up to my apartment so I could give him my detailed figures so he could consider them at the bank the next day. It sounded innocent and he agreed. We went up to my apartment where we sat on a couch and I produced my figures for him. He was

actually impressed. Of course, he assumed someone male had helped me to put them together and he asked discretely who my accountant was and who my business consultant was and whether my lawyer had helped me compile them all. I was able to answer him truthfully that it was all my own work and that I had some considerable business experience. I did not tell him what. As he went through the figures he made several comments which indicated that he actually understood what he was talking about. It was my turn to be impressed. I asked him whether he had done some financial training, and it turned out that he had done a broadly similar course to my own before joining the bank. Of course I did not tell him that. He said he would take the file to the bank the next day.

He did not seem to be about to make any move. We were beginning to run out of conversation. It was time to give him a little encouragement. I lent forward brightly thanking him for all his help and saying that I expected it to be a pleasure to work with him and gave him a simple friendly kiss. It was capable of being interpreted as no more than a friendly way of saying thanks for some small assistance. It did however mean that there had been physical contact. It was all the encouragement he needed. I kept my face quite near to him. He lent forward and kissed me again. He put his left arm around my back. A man and a woman sitting alongside each other on a couch in an embrace places the woman's breast in a convenient position for the man's other hand. As soon as he found that his kiss was not rejected, he placed his right hand on my breast. I put my free hand over it and pressed his hand onto my breast. A good education and a post-graduate degree in business administration is a fine thing in its way but a good pair of tits are often more helpful.

He was now distinctly interested. I had selected a dress that was going to be easy to undo at the back, I undid it and at the same time undid my bra. I slipped my shoulder out of the dress and bra. He took the invitation and his hand was soon holding my bare breast. His kiss, his breath, and the movements of his hand on my breast all indicated that he was warming up nicely. I had kicked off my shoes. I used my feet to push his shoes off. Fortunately, he was wearing slip-ons. I rubbed my legs against his. When I felt a decent interval had passed, I undid his belt and zipper and put my hand in. He had a nice erection.

I whispered into his ear, "Let's move to my bedroom."

I stood up taking him by one hand to pull him up. As I stood up the rest of my dress slid off so that I was standing in front of him naked, apart from a pair of fairly sheer panties. Most of his clothes came off as I stood him up taking off his coat, undoing his tie and taking off his shirt. By the time we got to the bed we were both quite naked. I looked at him carefully as he was looking at me. He had a fair average body. He obviously didn't exercise enough. If he wasn't careful he'd start to get fat too soon.

I looked at his penis sticking out at me. A penis always says something. Tim's penis had said to me, "Love, devotion, commitment, solidarity." Harry's penis had said to me, "Domination, control, humiliation, pain." Marc's penis said to me, "This is my chance to get the necessary husband." As we got into bed he said, "Should I use a rubber?" I told him not to worry. He understood that to mean that I was on the contraceptive pill. What I in fact meant was that I wanted to have Tim's baby and I had selected him as a suitable replacement father and husband. Moral: Don't make assumptions and get the facts clear.

The sex was good. He was obviously very experienced. It was all physical on his part. No affection. As he got dressed and was leaving he agreed he'd come round to dinner with me on Friday night.

If you know something, use the information. Information is power. I knew from Theresa what he liked. As he walked in I threw my arms around him and gave him a big kiss.

"How about we have sex before dinner so that we won't be eyeing each other off all night."

He did not need any further encouragement. Dinner was in fact then much more relaxed. He liked my cooking. He liked the bottle of wine I had got. We had sex again before he left. Except for the fact that he didn't particularly seem to like me, we were getting on famously.

That went on for about three to four weeks. He preferred to have dinner in my apartment. After a while I was beginning to run out of ideas for things that I knew how to cook, but I had learned when I was working for Harry in the restaurants that all you need to do is to present the same meal in a different way. Presentation is a large part of food. He did not seem to want to take me out to restaurants. He seemed to think that being seen in public with me might indicate some degree of commitment. Maybe he just feared that some of his other girlfriends would find out about it. It was obvious that as far as Marc was concerned, the relationship had gone as far it was ever going to go. Two or sometimes three nights a week he would have some good sex and a good dinner with no strings and no complications. I was never likely to be making any financial demands on him.

Then came the big night. He arrived as usual. We had sex as usual. I cooked dinner and presented it as attractively as I could and I produced a very nice bottle of wine which he enjoyed. I had given thought about how to present my proposal. He was a banker used to hearing proposals day in and day out. I thought it best to present it in simple clear direct terms.

There is a deeply ingrained social idea that men not women should always do the proposing and select the spouse. There is no logic or sense in that. However, men expect it so much that it shocks them if some woman asks them. In my student days, I had read Pushkin's Eugene Onegin where the heroine proposes to the boy, he is so shocked he rejects it out of hand, and later after she has married someone else, he deeply regrets it. They both end up miserable.

I did not feel all that strongly about him, but he was certainly the best available candidate for father of the child I was about to have. It was going to be awkward if he declined, but I wasn't going to break my heart.

"Marc, I have a proposition for you. The deal is this. We get married. I buy \$2 million worth of shares in the bank which gives me the entitlement to nominate a seat on the board and you would be my nominee. I buy the home that we live in. I maintain the home. I support our family. You can keep all your earnings for

yourself. I'll do my best to get you a seat in Congress. I won't complain about you having other women. If ever you really want to get out there will be no fuss. I would like an answer fairly soon because I am pregnant."

It took him a few moments to absorb all that.

"I thought you were on the pill."

"I never told you that. I told you not to worry. I didn't want you to worry."

"What would my parents' think?"

"Parents always approve of their son's marrying a rich woman. I know how to behave in polite society. My Spanish is getting pretty good. I am as well educated as any of them. Perhaps better than most of your family."

"Where were you educated?"

"I'm not going to tell you that. In fact, I'm not going to tell you anything about my past. As far as you are ever going to know, I materialised out of nothing on the day I first met you at the bank. That is also part of the deal. You must never inquire. One thing I can tell you, however, is that I have never been married and in deed I have never been pregnant before. This is my first pregnancy."

"I'll have to think about it."

I thought I had him. Although his father had good political connections and a bit of money, he had four children and he certainly would never have been able to afford to buy Marc a seat on the board of his bank, and the way Marc liked to live it was going to take him a long time to save it up himself.

Marc phoned me a couple of days later. He said nothing about my proposal.

"Could you come to have lunch with my family tomorrow?"

I agreed. I bought a new outfit. The sort of thing conservative parents would like to see their son's girlfriend wearing. Thereafter I always thought of it as Marc's parents' outfit.

I do not know what Marc had told them, but obviously they were extremely interested in a young woman that Marc would bring home with him.

The father was an astute old politician. He had never got to the top in politics. He had never been in the right place at the right time. He was never going to get any further, but he knew all the ropes. A number of times he'd held minor party hosts where he had fulfilled his duties without distinction and without disaster. Most political parties cannot ask for more. He liked politics and was I think a bit surprised to find that the girl that his son, Marc, had brought home had a much better understanding of politics than Marc did, and indeed appeared to be very well informed. I had taken the trouble to understand the local political scene. Just at that time there was a very complex new constitution coming in for Colombia which made the two party system part of the constitution and established power sharing. I was able to discuss how it would work in practice.

If you live in a community without finding out how it works, you are seriously disadvantaging yourself.

The mother on the other hand wanted to see if I knew "women's work" and particularly she asked me about cooking. Having worked with a top chef and been familiar with a large and successful restaurant's kitchen, I knew much more about cooking than she did. I surprised her by giving her a few suggestions and hints. She thought she would test me by asking me to prepare the desert for lunch.

Both the father and mother really grilled me on my background so I stuck to my simple cover story. My grandmother had come from Colombia, I was an only child. My parents had both died in an accident, and I was so distressed I felt I needed a new start, so I chose my grandmother's country. They didn't get much more out of me than that. I placed some emphasis without being too obvious on the large inheritance I had had from my grandmother.

The only other members of the family who were home for that Sunday lunch were one of Marc's younger brothers, who was not interested in what was going on and was taking the first opportunity to leave. Presumably he was going off to some girl. The other was Marc's sister, the youngest of the family. She was about 12. She was a nice little girl. She was very bright. I liked her. During lunch she said to me very brightly: "Are you going to marry Marc?"

That brought conversation around the table to an end and everybody looked at me.

"I hope so. Marc is a handsome and lovely man, and if he will marry me I will be very lucky."

From that moment on, as far as Marc's sister was concerned, I was a member of the family. Marc's mother and father thought that that was a nice answer. Marc just looked embarrassed. After the main course, I went to the kitchen with Marc's mother. She had some nice fruit and plenty of eggs and other fresh ingredients. I found some ramekins suitable for soufflé and whipped up a soufflé mix with some berries which I chopped small. If you put a full berry into a soufflé, it always sinks right to the bottom. While they were cooking, I diced some other fruit as garnish on the plates. I was glad that I kept my eyes open in the kitchen in Harry's restaurant. It all worked. Everybody was most impressed. Marc's mother decided that I was the best cook that Marc had ever been known to take an interest in. When I left, I felt sure Marc's parents would approve. It was now just up to Marc.

On the next night, Monday, Marc came around as usual and after we'd had sex and were eating dinner:

"I've thought about your proposition. It's very fair. I accept."

Very fair! What was he talking about? I was buying him a career. I was going to provide him with financial security for life. I was going to give him the best wife he had any chance of possibly ever getting. I was going to give him children. All he was providing was the social status of a respectable husband and a donation of sperm.

Very fair! He was getting the greatest bargain of his life! But I didn't show any of that. I put my hand on his hand.

“Marc, darling, I will always try to be a good wife to you. I will always try to make you happy.”

He just gave me a nod and forced a small smile. How about:

“Anna, my love, I will try to be a good husband.”

How about any expression of affection or interest, or hope for the future. No. He was a man. Any woman should be grateful that he would do her the extraordinary honour of calling her his wife. Well at least I knew what I was getting. I had not had any doubts, but now it was quite clear. I was getting a typical male. He would want to control everything. He would want me to defer to him. He would have to be the centre of my life. That wasn't going to happen, but I would have to manage it carefully.

Marc's mother selected the church. The only guests I invited were Sanchez and his male partner, which shocked some of the other guests, and my language teacher. She had taken the announcement rather badly. She worked out that I was the woman who was having sex with three nights a week while she was still having sex with him three nights a week. She sent me a rather bitter and offensive note and refused to come. I really did not understand what she was on about. She knew Marc was never going to end up with her. She also knew that I was not getting any great bargain. She ought to have given me sympathy and wished me luck. Instead she was angry, jealous and frustrated.

Marc and his father, however, filled the church with various political figures, family, friends, etc. I provided the reception after the wedding ceremony. Because of the number I had to hire one of those wedding reception places. The food was mediocre. The band was quite good. The wedding gifts overall were a bit disappointing. **A wedding present ought to be worth at least the per capita cost of the wedding**

reception. We came in well under that. The wedding reception cost me about 50% more than the total value of the wedding gifts.

I had hired a wedding dress. What is the point of spending a lot of money, having a wedding dress made to wear only once. Marc's young sister was my only bridesmaid. She loved it. She was more nervous walking down the aisle than I was. The only man I had to give me away was Sanchez, which was all a bit of a laugh.

I had acquired a respectable place in the local society. I had acquired a respectable family. I had changed my name again, which was useful. The family I had acquired were a fair average mixture.

While all this was going on and I was acquiring a husband, other things were happening.

In the papers, Massacre Millie moved back progressively from page three to page seven with more details of the small town murder of my parents. But then a new item began to appear, usually only on page five or page seven, about Tim Wilson, the whistle blower. Tim was using the information I had given him to expose some crooked cops. I do not know why he decided to do it that way or who advised him, but he started from the least important. The press reported on police being arrested and questioned on material and allegations he had made and the usual fuss about whistle blowers. Police groups were accusing Tim of all sorts of things. Government officials were all saying it would be carefully investigated. I thought it was dangerous to begin at the bottom because it would not take long for people higher up to work out what the source of the information was and what other names were likely to be on the list. It even led to an article in a weekly news magazine on the problems of whistle blowers.

After that story had been running for about a week, I had another day when I didn't get to Theresa. I had to phone Marc and ask him not to come. I said I had a bad cold. The headline was "Wilson the whistle blower gunned down". Tim had been shot by an unknown assailant in the street near his home. Police were said to be investigating. There were no clues as to who had done it.

I knew of course. It was some of the other crooked cops higher up the list who could see their names about to come up. One of the more detailed reports also recorded that his home had been broken into and apparently searched, but nothing was found to be missing. I knew what was missing. The microfiches I had given him. After that, I gave the copy I still had to Sanchez telling him to put them in his safe and only to read them in the event of my death. He did. He still had them there when I needed them 10 years later.

The death of Tim affected me more even than the death of my parents. I was totally incapable for days. Theresa wanted to come and see me to see if she could help because I was so ill. Marc made no such offer. I spent days crying in a depressed heap. Apart from the seven I had killed, I was now responsible for the death of another six. I didn't mind about the two of Louis' hoodlums who had been shot. I didn't feel so bad about the policeman who had died in the course of his duty. I had never known him. I felt devastated by the death of my parents. All light and love seemed to have gone out of my life by the death of Tim. I had known I was never going to see him again, but the fact that he was still alive left me with the knowledge that there was love and decency still in the world. Carefully considering the matter, I knew that it was my doing. Having made the terrible mistake of getting involved with Harry, I should have done what I was supposed to have done. If I had just taken the pills and died as I was supposed to my parents would still be alive. My sister would still be living with them. Tim would still be alive.

After three days, I forced myself to think. I couldn't, now, kill myself. That actually appealed to me the most. It would mean, however, that nothing would come from the risks I had taken. I had Tim's baby to think of. There was no particular benefit in having wiped out Harry and his mob. A completely ruthless desire to dominate, control and achieve their own personal ends is so built into most human males that Harry and his mob were going to be replaced by a fresh lot just as bad. Human aggression is like some giant bush. If one branch is cut off, it grows again. Killing criminals is like pruning roses. The blooms are even better next year.

Police action against drug dealers is also essentially a waste of time. Where there is a market for goods that can be sold at a high price with a high profit margin, someone will supply that market. The only way to get rid of drug dealers is to get rid of the customers, but it is politically impossible to lock the customers up when they are only buying for their own use. All the drug enforcement agency does is keep the police off the streets, by giving them work to do.

The next possibility I considered was joining another group. God knows there were enough of them where I was. But the thought of getting mixed up with another Harry, it took me only minutes to reject that possibility.

I wasn't going to beat them. I wasn't going to join them. I had two choices for independence. I could live as a discrete dutiful wife keeping my head down and hoping that nobody would ever see me. That was not going to work. So I decided I had to suppress the past and get on with life. I couldn't change the past. I didn't have much confidence that I could control the future either.

I still had some things going for me. Because of my education and training, I could run most businesses. Because of my experience with Harry, I knew how to deal with ruthless criminals. Because of what I had seen working for Harry, I knew how to deal with corrupt police and corrupt politicians. I had also got reasonably good at seeing what was going on around me.

First step, I had to get my Spanish in order. I resumed intensive study. For the next few weeks however, there were lots of occasions when I had to force myself – Think. Concentrate. I did force myself. Spanish and a husband were my pressing projects.

CHAPTER 9

Amended 17.11.2003, 18.09.2004

Marc and I at first moved into my apartment while we looked for our home. The home he selected was in the right street, in the right suburb and was going to be ridiculously large unless we had quite a large number of children. The capital cost I could have managed, but the continued outgoings were going to be quite high. I was going to need domestic staff, gardeners, and security men. Even at a generous interest rate, the investment of the rest of my assets was not going to keep on meeting the expenses of the home indefinitely. I was going to have to go into business. Marc got his seat on the board of the bank, so for a time he was very happy.

If my child was a boy, I wanted to be able to call him Timothy. That wasn't a name used in the Mercanda family. It was not a common name in the country. From my childhood days of Sunday School and Bible Study, I knew that Timothy was scattered throughout the New Testament. Luck tends to go to the observant. The maternity wing of the hospital to which I went for the birth of my first child was of course very religious and had plaster saints or wooden saints all over the place. One of the saints in my ward stuck high up on a wall was Timothy. When I knew that the child was a boy, I was successfully able to use my religious knowledge –

“I prayed to the Blessed Martyr St Timothy that he would intervene for me to ask for an easy birth of a healthy child. I prayed praising him for his protests against idolatry that led to him being clubbed to death. I promised him that if I was granted an easy birth of a healthy child, I would name the child after the saint.”

That impressed Marc's mother as an entirely sound reason and neither Marc nor his father could do much about it other than accept it. Accordingly, the source of my son's name was always taken to be the first Bishop of Ephesus without any inquiry as to any other source of the name. The priest who baptised Tim thereafter was impressed by my piety and knowledge of the saint's life.

I had allowed for the fact that the baby, if full term, was going to be born about a month short of the normal gestation period from my first sex with Marc. That turned

out to be surprisingly easy. In one of the later consultations before Tim's birth, I said to my obstetrician –

“My husband and I started our sexual relationship some time before our marriage. My husband is a director of his bank. His father is very active in politics. His mother is connected with a number of religious groups. It would be very embarrassing to them all if it was known that I was already pregnant by the time we married.”

“Don't worry Senora. About half of my patients have the same problem with their first child. It is almost as if couples these days waited until they were sure they could have a child before they get married. What I usually do is to write on the hospital records to tell the father and his family, that the child is born prematurely, but seems to be very healthy and that I expect no problems. I usually keep the child in the hospital for a couple of extra days to add credence to my diagnosis. What sort of period should it be?”

About a month would be fine since we got married very quickly after I discovered I was pregnant. The month I was concerned about, of course, was that when Marc and I first had sex, I was already about a month pregnant.

About six months after Tim's birth, I started my second pregnancy. This time the family selected the traditional family name – Paulo. About a year after Paulo's birth I became pregnant again and we had my beautiful little daughter. To me she was Lucy. To the rest of the family she was the Spanish version, and named after Marc's grandmother.

Being pregnant, having babies, and running business all at the same time, necessitates reliable, honest and hard working staff. But what I remember most is how tired I used to get in those days. I never got enough sleep. I was going in high gear for every minute of every day. I constantly had to force myself. But I was healthy and strong. I liked being a mother. But I wasn't going to let that defeat my business plans. Over the next ten years and the birth of my three children, basically Marc and I got on. Somehow he understood that when I said no firmly, I meant no, and we only had

one or two rows about money. Since he never had to pay and was able to use his entire income as he wished, he was on weak ground in any financial argument.

Even before the birth of Tim, Marc was already having sex on the side. That didn't worry me. All men did it. When I was trimming his pubic hair or having sex, I looked out for any signs of any venereal diseases, but otherwise it was usually no problem. Only twice in the next 10 years did other women present a problem. The first one was about three years into our marriage while Paulo was just a baby. By that time my sources of information were very good. I found out that one of the drug syndicates had got Marc involved with a woman in order to put pressure on him to let them use his bank for money laundering. I had always insisted to Marc that he must not let his bank become involved with any drug money. That was very hard for the bank and for him, but it was the right policy. Once people like that get a hold, they take control. I had to explain it to him a number of times.

The threat was that if Marc did not co-operate, they would make his relationship with this woman public causing, they thought, embarrassment and distress to me and to Marc's fellow bank directors. They expected that in order to avoid that Marc would yield to their pressures.

A threat is often more dangerous and more difficult to deal with than what happens if the threat is carried out. It was going to be less dangerous to Marc and me and the bank for his relationship with the girl to come out and be well known than for the threat to continue. I attacked the problem head on. I got in touch with the girl, Samelia, and asked her to come round to see me. I asked her to come about a half an hour before a group of ladies were coming for one of the religious charity committees that politics had forced me into. She agreed to come. I am not sure what she expected to happen. She was pretty. She seemed to have a nice body. She was, however, quite extraordinarily stupid. I greeted her warmly.

“Since we are both being fucked by the same guy, I thought that makes us sort of sisters. I thought we should get acquainted.”

I gave her a warm kiss and a hug. In fact, I had no problem doing that. I felt sorry for the poor girl. With very little questioning from me, she poured out the whole story of

how they had met, how Marc had taken an apartment for her, how he came to see her there several nights a week before he came home to me. They were the nights that he was supposed to be having late night bank directors meetings.

“I bet he loves having sex as soon as walks in the door.”

“Yes, he does.”

It sounded almost as if she wondered how I knew that. We both laughed. We chatted about him as if he was some sort of pet dog that we shared. That was actually close to the mark. As the ladies arrived I introduced her and when they were all there I said brightly to the assembled company, as if it was the most natural thing in the world –

“I invited Samelia to come to today in the hope that she might like to support our work. She is my husband’s mistress. Since we are both sleeping with him we are sort of sisters. I know she will share our interests.”

All the ladies looked a little shocked. They all looked at Samelia. She was too stupid to be embarrassed.

“We don’t sleep with him at the same time you know. If he ever wanted to sleep with us both at the one time, I don’t think I would know what to do.”

She giggled. Everyone else gasped and looked shocked. I laughed. Fairly quickly I got rid of Samelia.

“Samelia darling. Thank you so much for coming. We must see more of each other. Do keep Marc happy. Now I know you have somewhere else to go.”

She didn’t have to go at all, but she went gracefully. When I got back one of the other ladies of the committee said to me –

“Anna, I really don’t think it would be suitable to have that young lady on our committee.”

“Well, perhaps you’re right. I will give further thought to it.”

In fact I never mentioned her to that committee again.

But it worked. Within days, everyone in town, except his mother, knew of the extraordinary revelation of Marc’s mistress in public. His fellow directors lectured him on his lack of discretion. I don’t think any of them lectured him to the effect that it was not a good idea for a husband to be unfaithful. The drug syndicate’s lever against Marc was totally gone. The problem was past. However, Marc had got the poor girl pregnant, and she went on to have a son, Marc junior. I insisted that Marc should provide for the child and give Samelia an allowance so she could look after the child, at least until she got some other source of support.

“Marc, that child is my children’s half brother. I am not going to have my children’s brother brought up in poverty as a street child. He is to have a good education. He is to have a chance in life. You will just have to pay for it. I really insist.”

In fact, thereafter I did insist. I contacted Samelia every now and then to make sure that he was keeping his payments up. I passed on some clothing for the child. I saw Marc junior from time to time. He was an obvious brother of my Paulo. When the children were all old enough to understand, I got their half brother to come over and play.

The other woman was more serious. Marc actually fell in love. It was obvious. The girl was beautiful, intelligent and charming. She was much younger than Marc and myself. She was a daughter of one of the other directors of the bank. I had met her on occasions at bank functions. What was worse, she seemed to love Marc. The whole thing happened just after the birth of our third child, Lucy. I rang her and asked her if she would come and see me. She came. While she was there, I actually breast fed our little baby Lucy. She thought the baby was beautiful and I think she enjoyed watching me breast feed. Here was the fearsome famous lady dragon doing a simple domestic motherly thing like breast feeding. I came straight to the point.

“You and Marc love each other. I think you are the first woman that Marc has truly loved. I am not going to stand in your way. I will retain my shares in the bank so that he can stay as a director. He won’t have to pay anything for the support of me and the children. The property and investments are all mine anyway. He hasn’t got much assets behind him, but he has a good salary and his only commitment is for the support of his illegitimate son, Marc junior. He should be able to provide you with a decent home. I hope you’ll be happy.”

I thought afterwards I had probably been a bit brutal, because she probably did not know that I owned the shares in the bank, and that I owned the home and the developments and the businesses. She certainly did not know about Marc junior. When Marc found out where she was, he hurried home so that he came very early that night. I’d been chatting to her for more than an hour by the time he got there. I didn’t tell her any of Marc’s bad features. There is no point in telling a woman in love about the problems they are letting themselves in for. They never believe the “ex”, although the previous wife should be the best referee. Love never checks the references. She would find that out soon enough. All women do. It would be a matter for her how she would cope with it. When Marc arrived he looked flustered and anxious, so I put him straight at once.

“Marc, I’ve told this beautiful young lady that I am not going to stand in your way. I am going to keep you as my nominee on the board of the bank. You won’t have to pay anything for me and the children. I’ll give you the car and the yacht as a farewell gift. I’ll co-operate in the divorce. We will probably be able to find a ground for annulling our marriage somehow so that you can re-marry in church.”

I thought I knew how I could do that. I had been baptised in the Presbyterian Church and I don’t think that counts as a Catholic baptism. I probably did not count as a Christian.

“All I want you two to do is to make sure about it before my children have a non-resident father. How about, Marc, you take leave from the bank for a month and you two go away together and make sure that this is what you want to do. When you come back if it is still what you want to do, I’ll get Sanchez to organise everything. It

will be easy to put around public relations stuff. I'll make a statement if you like that I let my business interests and political and charity activities dominate my life so that I neglected my husband. That will be generally believed and you will be seen as the good guy. I don't mind."

They took up that suggestion, and a week later went off for a month. I told the children of course that daddy was away on an important business trip. I always emphasised to them how important he was. **It is important for children's own self respect that they should feel that their father is at least as important as all the other children's fathers. Mothers don't seem to matter anywhere near as much.**

I don't know what happened. At the end of the four weeks Marc just arrived home as if he had been on a business trip. I welcomed him. That night I tried to give him the best sex workout I could. He was a bit down for a few weeks but then carried on much as before. A year or so later that beautiful young woman married another man. He also worked in the bank but he had not been married before. He never realised what a treasure he had and he did not treat her very well. I remained in touch and became something of an advisor and person to whom she could turn. Once when her husband was really getting out of line, I had one of my men go and reason with him. She was grateful. He treated her with more respect after that.

But Marc still liked to put his penis in an occasional passing vagina.

Even before Marc and I married, I had started my first project – a large multi-purpose city building similar to the one I had built for Harry. I visited a number of architects in the city and ultimately found one who was not totally conservative, was very practical, and seemed to be able to make a city building look good. Functional hideousness was all the rage at the time and I did not like it. I found a suitable site which was just over the border from a respectable area into a largely derelict area. Buying the whole block was surprisingly cheap and easy. I had been around a number of land agents. Remembering my experience while working for Harry, I started to look at the bright assistants rather than the heads of these various agencies. I found a really bright young woman Felicita who did not seem to have much of an education but really understood real estate. I do not know why women generally make so much better real estate agents and realtors. It is probably that they are

generally more patient and make a better effort to try to understand what the customer wants. Anyway, she was delighted to work for me. I promised her that she would become the manager of my real estate agency as soon as the building was going. Her first job was to buy up the block for me.

Why is the building industry everywhere so corrupt? The public officials want bribes. The building inspectors seem to live on their gratuities. The tradesmen want to take everybody down. But worst of all are the union officials. Probably they have to deal with such tough people as building contractors and tradesmen that if they are not ruthlessly aggressively violent they do not have much future.

Accordingly, before I started to hire tradesmen, I had to hire security staff. That was a long job. Most of the applicants were obviously totally dishonest and unreliable. One could almost feel in their eyes that they saw me as a golden goose whose eggs they were going to have no trouble stealing. Some of them looked as if they saw me as a pig that they would in due course be able to profit from by slitting my throat and selling the carcass. Having worked with really bad men in my years with Harry, I did not have much trouble working most of them out.

Eventually I found a very suitable candidate – Leon Cavados. He had started out as a policeman – as so many people in the security industry have done. He had been an honest cop in another town. He had descended on the wrong patch of criminals – namely those who had his immediate superiors in their pay. That was the end of his career in the police force. He hated the drug trade – some bad personal experiences. But he had come to accept that in a totally corrupt world complete law-abiding honesty was likely to have disadvantages. After we had talked for some time, I decided I could trust him. I told him that my intention was building, leasing, running restaurants and a few other minor businesses and probably brothels. He was quite unperturbed about brothels. He was in his thirties and was unmarried, so I imagined he was an occasional customer. I told him I would not in any circumstances deal in drugs but I expected I would have some business dealings with drug gangs. As we talked he gained confidence in me and I gained confidence in him. I appointed him as the head of my security department. I gave him a starting salary which was more than he had ever had in a regular job before, and assured him that I would want to keep him in employment for the long term. His first job was to recruit some more men.

Most of the people he brought to see me were ex-policemen. The next one we employed was a close friend of his, I think younger than he was but perhaps some distant relative: Max. He ultimately became very much my number two in the security department.

As my business and respect grew, so did Leon's. Ultimately, he became very respected in the community as my head of security. "You don't need to pay for a drink in this bar, Signor Cavados." Police officers would greet him on the street with more respect than he ever had when he was police officer himself. Within a few years he had achieved a position of general respect. He married a respectable middle-class girl whose family was pleased to have the well-known and much respected Leon Cavados as a son-in-law.

I found him very reliable and he was always able to stay calm in a crisis. He preferred a heavier gun which meant that he wasn't quite as fast with it. He had to get his suits re-made so that he could carry it concealed.

Being fast with a gun and reasonably accurate with it over a short distance, had saved my life and killed a lot of people. I was not going to let that skill slip. I felt I was going to need it more than ever. I always liked reading statistics. In Colombia more people died each year from gunshot wounds than from cancer or heart disease. I had Felicita go and find me a plot of fairly rough country with plenty of trees where I could go discretely and practice. She found me quite a large tract of timbered uncleared and undeveloped land within about forty minutes drive. The farmer who owned it wanted to unload it because it was going to be too expensive to clear and develop. Even so, we had to bribe some local officials to get approval for him to sell off a part of his farm. I always referred to that land thereafter as "The Farm". As soon as I could; I went back to regular practice. I still, however, could not get more than two shots off quickly that were reasonably accurate.

The first time I needed my security department and my gun skills arose in the early stages of the building of my first development. It was of course with a union official. I had been warned by my architect and also by Sanchez of the sort of standover tactics and financial demands I was likely to get from the union boss. They also gave me the

usual scale of payoffs that the unions generally agreed to. Sanchez warned me that since I was both new and a woman, the union official would see me as easy plucking.

He was a big ugly man with obvious facial signs of having been through many fights. He came into the shed we were using as the site office. He was accompanied by two others who looked as ugly and pugnacious as he did. Fortunately, I had been keeping Leon and Max around and as they walked in both Leon and Max were there. Knowing who it was who was likely to turn up, I had got Leon and Max to make a lot of inquiries for me about the man.

By the time they arrived I was already obviously pregnant so the brutes probably thought I was going to be even easier than they expected. Accordingly he did not waste any words on courtesies.

“You are new here. You do not know how the building industry works in this town. The way it works is you pay the union and we see that the building goes ahead. You don’t pay us, you don’t get any building work done. Your tradesmen are moving from job to job and they depend on us for the work.”

“How much?”

He looked surprised that I had come so directly and immediately to the point. He answered with a figure which was approximately double the usual rate for a building of this size.

“I am not paying that much.”

The firmness of my tone obviously made him think he needed to show his strength. He added to his threats a bit. He abused me quite a lot. Leon and Max took their cue from me. I did not react to the abuse. I remained firm.

He got angry.

“Look lady, you do not have a choice.”

At that, his two henchmen started to go for their guns. I did not wait for Leon or Max to react. I whipped out my gun from my thigh holster and put a bullet through the arms of each of his two henchmen and then pointed the gun straight at his head. It was a tricky shot. One of the henchmen was left handed. However it worked. The brute found himself staring down the barrel of a gun which had just disabled his two henchmen. I don't think he had ever experienced anything like that. He certainly looked astonished. I thought he also looked a bit afraid but his face was such a mess it was hard to tell.

“Now I will tell you what the deal is. First of all, I am going to let you gain the respect and applause of your members. You can tell them that you have insisted on the establishment of proper safety measures and the maintenance of a first aid station on the site at all times.”

(I had intended to do that anyway and I already had the first aid nurse setting it up.)

“Nextly, you can tell them that I am going to be permanently in the building industry in this town and that good tradesmen who do an honest day's work will be made permanent employees and will not have time off between jobs.”

That seemed to me a good idea anyway and it seemed to be part of his hold over his union members.

“Also, I will co-operate in you enlisting union members so long as you play it by the rules. I will pay the union a facilitation fee openly so everybody knows.”

I named a figure which was in the range for this building.

“In subsequent jobs, an appropriate facilitation fee will be paid so long as co-operation remains. I do not want a war with you. You do not want a war with me. I have been in the building industry in a much tougher town than this. So let me tell you what my rules are. If anything happens to me or my men, there will be full

retaliation. You will die. Your wife will die. She will probably die in that furniture shop she works in, in Constitution Avenue.”

He turned pale when I revealed that I knew where his wife worked.

“Retaliation must be full and effective to ensure that it is an example to anyone else who might attempt to do the same. Your pretty little daughter will be killed as she enters St Bridgett’s Convent in the morning, or as she leaves it in the evening. One of my men will drive into the country to visit your parents’ village to see that they are relieved from the distress of mourning the departure of you, your wife and your daughter.”

I named the village in which they lived.

“I have found over the years that there is no use in simple retaliation. An eye for an eye or a tooth for a tooth takes too long. The only sensible retaliation is total destruction and that is what I will do. Do you understand me?”

The two men behind him were whimpering and holding their arms and looking genuinely scared. Fortunately, my hand holding my pistol straight at his head was not shaking. He wasn’t answering. He needed a little more encouragement.

“If of course you want to end it here, the trenches we are digging for the foundations can be dug a little deeper.”

Eventually he went through the whole details of the proposal again. He could see it was basically a good deal and he would come out of it with respect from the union members and probably would come out looking like he had done a great deal for them. I stepped back a bit so that I could see out of the corners of my eyes that Max and Leon both had their guns out – even though they were holding them downwards in a fairly relaxed way. I put my gun away. I held out my hand –

“Then it’s a deal.”

We shook hands. He tried to squash my hand, but I remembered the rule about shaking hands. The crease between the thumb and forefinger must go right up to the crease between his thumb and forefinger and if it is there and the hand is grasped firmly, no damage can be done. The two palms are against each other and the fingers are not in a vulnerable position.

“We had better fix your boys up.”

One of them had a quite minor wound through the muscle and did not look very damaged. I had Max take him to be our first client at our new first aid station. The other one had a broken arm and the bullet was still in the bone. Leon volunteered –

“I will take him around to Dr da Silva.”

The union official and the injured man both recognised the name. He was a highly skilled surgeon and physician. He had got de-registered and into trouble with the police and the church by helping patients who were dying of incurable diseases in great pain to end their pain and by helping young girls who had got themselves pregnant without the customary consequences of being able to force the man into marriage. He did selective abortions. He was continuing his work and now aiding with an occasional piece of orthopaedic work or repairs to facial damage for people who did not want to go to normal hospitals. When I met him later I was impressed with him.

I was careful to stick to the deal. About a week after, I had all the men on the site in full-time work assembled, I had the union official announce publicly to them that he had achieved the great result for the workers of ensuring that safety precautions were taken on the site and that there was first aid on site at all times and that he was going to work to ensure that first aid went with every building site in the city. That got him a cheer. Nextly, he announced with great pride that he and the union were trying to overcome the terrible gaps in employment that skilled good tradesmen had to endure between jobs and that he had negotiated with me to ensure that good quality tradesmen who did a loyal and honest day's work would be given full-time employment. That brought a bigger cheer. He did not mention that the union was to

be paid a facilitation fee but he did a pitch for membership of the union and much to his gratification, half a dozen men actually signed up joining the union for the first time in thanks for the brilliant deal that he had negotiated. His respect had gone up greatly. I had respected him. He respected me. Thereafter on subsequent sites I could always count on him to at least make an effort to solve problems for a reasonable fee. One of his henchmen who I shot later came to work for my security department. That was after my general respect had grown.

A day or so after the shooting of the two henchmen, Leon said to me –

“The only woman I have ever heard of who could shoot like that was Massacre Millie.”

I stopped myself from snapping back. Instead, calmly I said to Leon –

“Never mention that name in connection with me ever again, even in gest.”

Later I came to the view that Leon had put two and two together and come to the right answer. Fortunately, no one else around did.

CHAPTER 10

Amended 17.11.2003, 18.09.2004

In drawing up the plans for my first development, I included a secure office with separate secure parking with a dedicated lift to the second floor along the lines of what I had built for Harry. It was a purpose-designed space for the local gangsters. I sent Felicita to visit the local potential tenants. The two potentials were local drug syndicates run by Carbonez and his archrival and basic enemy, Blackavo. A sketch of the facilities had Carbonez highly interested right from the beginning. As it was nearing completion he came to inspect and signed up for a handsome rental. He also employed my men for the fitout, including soundproofing and a large safe.

The problem with putting tradesmen permanently on staff was that I had to have the next project ready to go as tradesmen finished on my first project. Fortunately, there were so many dead areas around the city that Felicita had no problem finding the next suitable site so that the concreters were able to move from the first development as soon as they finished onto the second.

A new modern security building was easy to sell. I was able to get good prices for the upper storey apartments. I used the street fronts and lower floors myself. I put in a large restaurant facing the most respectable of the streets. I put a beauty salon alongside it. Even though the beauty salon was intended primarily as a source of information, since I took some care to hire good people, within a short time it was returning a reasonable profit. Running a restaurant makes a laundry a desirable business, so I put one in along the side street. I built a secure comfortable brothel premises in the first basement with parking areas around it. I used the town planning principles I had learnt in my previous experiences to provide a very discrete entrance in the back lane near the entrance and exit to the parking area. I got Leon and Max to find me a number of experienced women who I interviewed for the job of Madam. I found an agreeable looking woman in her fifties who had been in the sex industry for most of her adult life and who understood it well. What she did not understand was men. Each time she had put together a reasonable amount of capital, the man she had been involved with had absconded with it. She had to keep working. I adhered to the rule: no drug addicts / no alcoholics. She already understood that students, nurses and country girls would often make the best recruits. She already had her country

contacts in a couple of mountain villages and recruiting became quite easy when I was able to offer them cover jobs in the restaurant, laundry, and beauty salon. It was quite easy to arrange. If a member of the family of one of the girls came into the restaurant and asked for the girl by her real name, a message went downstairs and at the first opportunity the girl came up, changed into waitress gear and looked as if she had been doing waitressing all night.

That had a few surprising consequences. For example, one of the girls took as the cover job doing the manicures and pedicures in the beauty salon. She quite liked it and got to be quite good at it. After a time she decided to retire from the brothel and took her cover job on full-time.

I put my real estate office alongside the beauty salon on the best side. I offered Dr da Silva a fully equipped surgery upstairs above the laundry entered from a door alongside the laundry. I put him on permanent retainer to check the health of the girls working in the brothel and to attend to discrete matters for me. He was well pleased. His address became one of the worst kept secrets in town. He kept busy.

One business leads automatically to another unless one can find a reliable honest operating business to look after the next requirement. There was no honest reliable garbage collection service in town. A restaurant needs a good garbage collection service. A brothel absolutely must have one. The hairdressing salon and Dr da Silva needed one. The group with the garbage collection contract from the local council in my area were unreliable, frequently drunk, often split garbage and had to be bribed to turn up even reasonably regularly. It got to be a total pain. I made inquiries. I could put a garbage incinerator at The Farm without great cost and there were also a number of holes and valleys on The Farm where I could put heavier garbage and ash. Since it was surrounded by woodlands, the smoke presented no problem. But to do it and to have a decent garbage truck, I had to have more customers than just my building. Inquiries in the neighbourhood satisfied me that if I had a decent garbage truck employing reliable people, I had a ready made business. Learning to drive a garbage truck is not particularly difficult. Hiring strong men who can pick up garbage cans and empty them into the truck is easy. What is difficult is to find ones who are reliable, honest and don't get drunk until after they had finished their shift. I was able

to assemble a team for the first truck. The business boomed. Every business which could transferred their garbage collection contract to me rather than the previous contractors. Soon I had three trucks running and it had become a significant business. The original garbage contractor did not like it at all. He hired a bully, Sabastian. They had picked a very unsuitable man. They did not really know what they were doing. He was a psychopath. He was just as dangerous to them as to anybody else. He embarked upon a campaign of beating up my collectors and within three or four days of him starting, he had beaten up two men on one truck and another man from another. I put security guards on all the trucks. About a week later, he shot one of my guards. Shooting a guard in a well-organised security service is like shooting a policeman. It makes it certain that on any reasonable opportunity the killer will be removed from the scene. However, this fool was such a psychopath he could not believe that anybody could stand up to him. Many psychological studies of serial killers have established it. To a psychopath, killing someone gives them a sense of absolute power and invulnerability. Fortunately, I never had that reaction but Sebastian did.

The police were sympathetic about the death of my guard. They said they would carry out a full investigation. We told them who had done it, but of course they wanted “evidence”. I paid for the funeral and I continued a proportion of the dead guard’s salary as a pension for the widow to support her and the children. That improved my respect with everybody I employed.

It is obvious that if one has killed someone, one should try to maintain a low profile at least for a while. Not the psychopath Sebastian.

About a week after he had shot my guard, I was in the restaurant upstairs when I got a message that there was trouble downstairs in the brothel. I usually had at least one security man downstairs, but he was not there at that moment. I sent an urgent message that I wanted Leon or Max with back-up downstairs at once and raced down. Sebastian had engaged one of the girls and had then beaten her up. She had done something he didn’t like or perhaps refused to do something she didn’t like. She had a black eye and was crying in the corner. One of her breasts was badly bruised. He was standing naked in the middle of the room threatening my Madam who had dashed

in to try to rescue the girl. All he had to do before I arrived was to apologise, give the girl a big tip, and leave, and I probably would not have been called down. Instead, the fool started to wave his partially flaccid penis at me saying –

“Do you want some of this?”

It was accompanied by a string of obscenities about me, the girl, the Madam, with pointed references to garbage. He should have realised he was in a dangerous position but he didn't. As Max and a young new recruit arrived panting, I calmly went and picked up Sebastian's clothing. He made a grab for me, but Max and the new recruit got him one on each side. The technique is simple. Leon had trained everybody. The person being seized is lifted by the shoulders which significantly disables their arms and also gets the feet just off the ground so that they are totally off balance. I led the way to our part of the garage where I had a private section.

As we walked, Sebastian continued with a string of obscenities and threats –

“You guys will be looking over your shoulder for the rest of your short lives. I am going to enjoy dealing with you two.”

The boys took their lead from me and made no reply but just marched on.

What did the fool expect me to do? If I gave him back his clothes and escorted him from the premises perhaps thanking him for coming and hoping he had a pleasant night, it would be all over the town within minutes that Sebastian had conquered the proprietor of the new garbage business. If he we threw him into the street it would be almost certain that the humiliation and loss of respect that he would suffer would demand that he take action and somebody else would get killed. He did not really leave me much alternative.

I walked forward to the station wagon. I let down the tailgate and indicated to the boys to take him forward to the car. As they moved forward I stepped behind and shot Sebastian through the back of the head. He never knew what happened to him. The new recruit was bit surprised and shocked, but he and Max kept up their stride

and threw him into the back. I threw his shoes, undergarments and trousers in after him having checked the pockets. In his jacket there was a wallet with a deal of money in it and I felt in one of the side pockets a gun. The fool had come into my establishment with a gun and let me get possession of it. I took the wallet out being careful not to leave fingerprints and removed the money. I divided it in three. I put a third in the pockets of each of the boys and later gave the other third share to the unfortunate girl.

I don't think Max had ever seen somebody shot before, but I was quite sure the new recruit hadn't. He was obviously shaken. However they both remained calm and in control and in deed the respect both of them showed me thereafter went up.

“I am sorry to interrupt your evening. As soon as convenient would you mind covering him up and driving him out to The Farm and put him in the incinerator? I would like him to go through before the morning garbage collection arrives.”

I was surprised later thinking about, how calm and matter of fact I had sounded. It was as if I was asking some of the aids in the kitchen to clean up a split soup. I had evidently got used to shooting people.

“Before you go out to The Farm, however, I would like you to find Sebastian's car.”

His key ring had a key for an expensive imported car that was probably going to be easy to find nearby –

“Don't leave fingerprints on it. When you have found it, put this coat in the back otherwise untouched and park the car somewhere near one of the police stations, preferably one a fair distance from here. Then telephone the police station and say you found something in the back of a car that you didn't like and tell them where you have left the car. They will assume you have stolen the car and will be curious as to what you found, and pick it up fairly quickly. If they were serious about investigating Sebastian's victim, they might be able to put the gun and the bullet together.”

They did as directed and a few days later the police announced that they had identified Sebastian as the murderer of my guard from ballistic examination of the

gun which had his fingerprints on it. They were looking for him. Of course they did not find him. But they took a lot of credit for solving the case and gave no credit to the unknown informant who had delivered the car and the gun.

There was general agreement around that the disappearance of Sebastian had improved the neighbourhood.

Everything has unexpected consequences. One can never fully predict what the outcome of any action is going to be. My action against Sebastian had just such an effect. It fairly soon got out that Sebastian had been at my establishment and had created a scene and had been carted off. I assume either the injured girl or one of the other girls had said something indiscrete about that. It was also noted that he was then not seen again and that his car and gun had been surprisingly found by the police. It did not take a vast detective skill to come to the conclusion that I or my organisation had had something to do with his total disappearance. It was known that I had a large commercial incinerator. That provided an obvious explanation as to what had happened to him. I even learned much later that there was a theory around that I had punished Sebastian more severely by actually having him thrown into the incinerator still alive. People love grim stories.

The consequence was that I got involved in the body disposal business. My first customers were the police. I had already made contact with local police officers in dealing with the appropriate payoffs in relation the brothel for which the town planning facilities and convenience of the establishment had enabled me to negotiate a satisfactory deal. One of the police officers I had dealt with, the most senior one, came to me. I never got clear whether the police had messed up or whether it was some part of police corruption or was political assassination or what it was but they had two bodies they urgently needed to get rid of. The officer had first of all sworn me to secrecy before telling me what he wanted. The general rule is if you are bribing police, you try to stay on good terms with them. Essentially, you cannot buy policemen. You can only rent them by the hour. A good relationship can be more enduring than the recollection of the amount of the last bribe. I agreed to do it. Max became my chief cremation officer.

After the police, I had other customers. Eventually I had to establish a standard charge, which I made quite steep. I did, however, adopt some firm rules. I would not dispose of the bodies of wives killed by husbands. I would not dispose of children, or youths who had died from drug overdose. I would not dispose of the bodies of police officers. My service nonetheless became an important element of the local scene. The merit was a total burning and that the ash was then mixed with garbage ash. In effect, the remains of the body were undetectable. The trouble about burying a body is that there is always somebody who knows where the body is buried. Also digging a deep enough grave is quite hard work and takes longer to do than there is time available to do it in many cases.

The station wagon came to be referred to as the hearse.

CHAPTER 11

Amended 17.11.2003, 18.09.2004

General respect for me had started to rise as from the time I had solved the problem with the union on my first building. Progressively as I was more successful, respect grew. Apart from the way I was treated, it also began to be noticeable in the way I was addressed. Initially, I was Senora Mercanda. As it was realised that respect was due to me rather than to my husband, I was for a time Senora Anna. Then I began to be Dama Anna, the Dama being said in a respectful way. Then some junior staff began to refer to me as Senoria or if speaking to me directly, Su Senoria.

But what perhaps showed the respect the most were that my people began to refer to the themselves not as hairdresser or chef or waiter or property manager or carpenter or brick layer, but by saying, "I work for Dama Anna.". Wives identified their husbands not by their calling but by the fact that they worked for me. Progressively as the years passed I took on a status not just for my employees but for their whole families. At first I found it gratifying. As time went by I found it worrying that so many people saw themselves as depending on me. The responsibility to all of them began to be a big factor in what I did. Respect carries obligations. Respect somehow forces one into maintaining the respect. I began to understand kings and rulers who saw their obligations to their country and their people as overriding all their personal relationships, even love. I became a sort of ruler of a state within a state, where the obligations of statehood began to dominate my life. I became conscious that I could never get off the top other than by dying or totally disappearing. I even began to work out how I could disappear. Australia looked a good bet. Socially it was just like the USA, but it only got into the newspaper headlines in the sporting pages.

In my second building, I decided on a Chinese restaurant on the ground floor at one end and a Tapas bar at the other end. I think the great chefs of the world are Italian and Chinese, but unfortunately any Italian Momma thinks she can open a restaurant, and any failed Chinese furniture shop proprietor or Chinese student dropout thinks they can open a Chinese restaurant. It is hard to mess up simple Italian recipes, but an inexperienced Chinese chef can give Chinese food a bad reputation. Accordingly, I wanted a really good Chinese chef. They were not available locally. I advertised and made inquiries in Hong Kong. I checked the references on the few applicants I got. I

ran up a large telephone bill. Fortunately, I could cope with Cantonese accented English.

There was only one who got consistently good references as to the quality of his cooking. It turned out he had tried his own restaurant and had failed. Cooks are no better at running restaurants than carpenters are at running building companies. In my conversations with him directly, it also seemed that he wanted to try a new start in a new country. As far as I could work out, he had had a series of unsuccessful relationships and had despaired of ever finding the right woman in Hong Kong. At the time that surprised me a little. When I quizzed him about his dishes and his experience of running a kitchen, he came up with all the right answers. I hired him and sent him a plane ticket. As part of the deal I was also to provide him with an apartment upstairs in the building in which he restaurant was to be.

When he arrived I sent a couple of the boys to pick him up at the airport and bring him straight to my office. When he arrived I could immediately understand his difficulties in the romance Department. Many Chinese men are very good looking. Wong was not one of them. He had a round flat face where nothing seemed to be in quite the right position or quite the right shape. We got straight down to business as to the equipment of his kitchen, what he wanted and how he wanted it laid out. He impressed me as capable and sensible. However, he did distinctly want the best. He also had views on the layout of the seating, where the bar should be, what staff he needed and what the liquor supply should be. I accepted his views up to the door of the kitchen. He spent substantial time at the markets working out what food he would be using and assessing the quality. He tried out many of the local ingredients himself in his own apartment. By the time we opened, he had a real grip of what was good for Chinese cooking on the local market and his early menus were a great success. Within two or three weeks the word had spread that there was a first class Chinese restaurant available and business thrived.

He also played a role in the Tapas bar. A really good chef can think up good things to do even in a variety of cuisine with which he is totally unfamiliar. One dish he developed became very popular in the Tapas bar. It was a light small pancake which he filled with a mildly spicy lamb dish and finely chopped vegetables. The staff had

difficulty keeping up supplies of that dish at lunchtime and in the early evening. He also gave some of the Tapas chefs hints that they actually found useful on the preparation and treatment of some of the vegetable dishes. He introduced them to a couple of new herbs.

Within the first six months, he had asked every woman in the restaurant, every woman in the Tapas bar, every office worker I had who was female, for a date. He had been uniformly rejected. He was getting depressed. Even on his visits to the brothel we had built downstairs in the second building on much the same plan as the first one, none of the girls were interested in seeing him outside the establishment.

After about six months he told me he would have to go back to Hong Kong. When I quizzed him as to why, it was evident that really what he wanted to do was to try his luck again to see if he could find a woman to share his life. He was somewhere in his late thirties. If he was ever going to have a wife and children, he probably needed to start soon. The idea of family seemed to be very important to him.

I did not want him to go back to Hong Kong. Firstly, he may not come back and I may have difficulty replacing him with a chef anywhere near as good. Secondly, if he did find a Chinese wife and did come back to me, I saw trouble. Chinese women had discovered the equality of the sexes. Not as fully as some of the feminists propagandists but certainly a Chinese wife was likely to want to start her own business. She was likely to want him to leave me and set up his own restaurant with her as the manager. At the very least, she would want to start a shop somewhere. Chinese women are very enterprising. I could see I was going to lose him one way or the other unless I could solve his problem –

“Wong, you should marry a local country girl. The only interests of women from the country villages are their husband and their children. They have been brought up to believe, and they do believe strongly, that the only respectable role for a woman is to be married and have many children.”

Wong’s interest was stimulated.

“They accept that the husband is the master of the household. They are loyal and obedient. They are also very religious, but that is partly how they are trained to be loyal and obedient and to have lots of children. I would like to introduce you to one or two good country girls from a good family.”

Wong indicated that he was interested.

I then made inquiries from the girls who came from the country villages where we had contacts. One of them suggested a woman who had been desperately looking for a husband, but now at twenty-seven had accepted that all opportunities of a normal life had passed her by and that she was going to be spending the rest of her days looking after her parents and her younger siblings, and perhaps be a nurse maid for her brothers and sister’s children. She had already been classified as *doncella jamona*, for which the nearest English equivalent is “old maid”. She seemed to be an excellent candidate. She was unlikely to be particularly choosy about a husband if she had the opportunity of getting one. I arranged for her to be picked up and brought to see me, but not taken anywhere near Wong’s restaurant until I had had a look at her.

She was a disaster. She had a particularly plain face. I think she had seen the Wizard of Oz in her childhood and decided to model herself on the Wicked Witch of the West.

I sent her to our beauty salon to have her hair done and to have a forest removed from her legs, arms and armpits. I arranged for her to be given basic instruction on makeup and hair care. With a decent hair styling and discrete makeup, she did not look too bad.

What to do about clothing? She was fortunately a fairly standard size, and I borrowed some clothing for her. She put on one dress with a fair amount of cleavage. She looked shocked –

“I look like a prostitute.”

I did not tell where I had borrowed the dress. She had quite a good figure. The dress showed her breasts to advantage. But she was obviously embarrassed and had never worn a dress like that before in her life –

“The man will want to see that your breasts will be able to feed his children.”

It was all I could think of. But she bought it. I then had to encourage her to walk standing up and with her shoulders back a bit so that her breasts could be presented in the most favourable way. After she got used to it, she was actually pleased at her appearance.

I then arranged the meeting one morning. Wong still had almost no Spanish. She had no English. Wong could not take his eyes off her breasts. She was a little taken aback by his appearance, but calmed down after a few minutes.

“Wong, this is Maria. She comes from a good family. She is a very religious girl. Her father owns his own farm.”

Wong was impressed that she came from a land owning family. I did not mention that her father’s farm was not enough to support the family and that he took labouring jobs wherever he could get them. Then speaking in Spanish, I told Maria that Wong had a senior job. I told her of his present salary. Since it had been negotiated in US dollars, it came out to be a very handsome salary indeed in the local currency. It was a bigger income than any of her family or the husband’s of her sisters and friends. He was by far the best-paid chef in town. I explained that he also had his own apartment as part of the terms of his employment and that if he was married and had children, we would arrange a bigger apartment for him. I told her that his employment was perfectly secure and he would have a secure job for life. Perhaps I should have said a secure job for my life. Who knows what would happen if I was not around. I explained to Maria that Chinese were traditionally very loyal to their wives and traditionally loved their children very dearly. I had no particular reason to believe that, but it certainly was part of the Chinese mythology at the time.

I explained to each of them that the other had never been married, how old each of them was, and where each of them had lived during the course of their lives to date. She asked me various questions in Spanish which he answered in English and I translated. He asked her a number of questions, again which I translated. It was all fairly innocuous stuff. He was looking at her with increasing interest. She began to be able to look at him without actually flinching. After the meeting had gone for about an hour and seemed to have stalled, I took the plunge –

“Wong, would you like this woman as your wife and as the mother of your children?”

He answered surprisingly quickly and firmly that he would.

“Wong, I want you to know, that I very much disapprove of husband’s mistreating their wives and you must promise me that you will always treat her well.”

He gave a confident assurance that he would always treat her well, and as far as I am aware he always did.

I then turned to Maria who had probably guessed what I had been talking about –

“Maria, Wong would like you to be his wife and the mother of his children. He promises that he will look after you and never mistreat you. He will always be able to support you and your children, and I am sure your children will have a loving father.” She burst into a smile. It was as if she could not believe her good fortune. He may look awful but he had a good reliable job, a good income, and she was not going to have to work in the fields. She would be the only woman in her family who was not living the harsh life a peasant woman.

I explained to Wong that it was not usual that a girl from a good religious family from the country would spend time alone with her finance until they were married. I thought it would be time enough for them to find out more about each other after they were married. Wong was therefore quite anxious to set an early date. I explained to him that the marriage would have to be in the church in her village and he would have to participate in a catholic ceremony, but as long as he agreed with the priest in

advance that their children would be brought up as Catholics, it would not present any problem. I also explained to him that he probably did not have much choice. A catholic upbringing was what was available in Colombia. He was untroubled by that.

The wedding was arranged for three weeks later. The church in her village was splendid. There are so many country villages where the churches are completely out of proportion to the size of the village that they are serving. The wedding was arranged for the morning. Wong insisted that he would take charge of the luncheon to follow for all the wedding guests. He was a little surprised when he was ultimately told the number who were coming – namely the whole village and distant relatives from nearby villages. Fortunately the weather at that time of year was good and it was arranged that the lunch after the wedding would be served in the Town Square outside the church under some nice old trees which lined the square. The villagers found every table they could, and set up some simple trestle tables. Wong did the initial food preparation the day before and it all came up in a truck with the rest of the kitchen staff to help the preparation.

Maria had a beautiful bridal gown which she had worked on during the years when she still had hope and which still fitted her. I suggested to Wong that he should wear his very best Chinese gear. He had brought a ceremonial silk jacket and pants with him which apparently he also had prepared for a wedding that had not taken place till then. He looked very colourful. It was a good idea. Everybody was looking at the beauty of his garments rather than at his face.

For a best man, Wong had to have someone who could translate the Spanish of the wedding ceremony to him, get his answers and translate them back to the priest. Fortunately one of the waiters in the restaurant had good English and had learned to cope with Wong's Cantonese English accent. He and Wong were not particularly close friends, but it worked. Actually they became close friends later on. Maria had the full batch of supporting ladies.

Some of the girls who worked for me who came from the village clubbed together and arranged the hire and transport for part of the cathedral choir to come up to sing at the

ceremony. All the locals were most impressed. The priest was very gratified. He had not had a reasonable choir in his church for years.

The lunch was a great success. Wong used a bit more chili than he usually would, but even so everyone comments on how flavoursome but mild Chinese food was.

I wondered how the marriage was going to go when they could not speak to each other. It turned out very well. They did not have their first row until their first child was old enough to interpret. Their children were all bilingual because Wong always spoke to them in Cantonese, and Maria always spoke to them in Spanish. The children were all very pretty. It is strange how mixed race parentage so often produces such attractive children. They were happy. Wong was very pleased with the wife and the children. She was pleased. She found that she had achieved a respectable place in society that she had never expected. She was poorly educated but now she was the wife of the head chef of a major restaurant owned by Dama Anna. Her status in society was determined it seemed, more by me than her husband.

A couple of years later, Wong told me that he wanted to bring out a distant cousin of his whom he said was an excellent chef. I checked references and it seemed that he was. By that time I could use another Chinese restaurant at another part of town. He also had had some measure of romantic disappointments. When he arrived, I had women queued up to meet him.

CHAPTER 12

Amended 17.11.2003, 18.09.2004

The next business I got dragged into was running a bus company.

The madam in my first brothel, the up-market one, complained that to me that she had a real problem in transport for the country girls who wanted to come in to work. There was only one bus available for each of the villages where she had contact. The bus was unreliable. The drivers were incompetent. The buses got filled with animals and produce coming to markets. There was no way the girls could make arrangements to be definitely on duty at definite times. The madam didn't like it. I didn't like it.

Solution: I bought a bus and hired a bus driver who I tested thoroughly and satisfied myself that he was safe and competent. My first bus just had heating for the colder weather and early mornings. It started to run a regular route twice a day from my first building to the villages and back. In my second building I actually put in a bus depot as part of the ground floor at one end.

To observe propriety and to avoid the girls being exposed in their villages, I set a fare schedule which the girls paid and which was partly reimbursed to them. Other residents of those villages wanted to use my bus. Before long I was having to adopt rules that animals and produce could not be put on my bus except where the produce could be stored in the baggage compartment. Sheep, goats and chickens were not allowed on my bus. They continued to use the totally unreliable frequently breaking down buses. Eventually the pressure got to be such that I had to establish a truck also to run on the same route to carry animals and produce.

My one bus and my truck turned out to be moderately, but satisfactorily, profitable. Before long I had a variety of other villages sending representations to ask if I could establish a bus service for them too. Within a year I had a fleet of buses and I was running a moderately successful bus business. I had no trouble recruiting drivers. I was already generally respected and had a reputation for paying salaries at an appropriate rate and, even more importantly, paying them on time.

By the time I had my third building finished, the owners of the buses that mine had replaced were badly feeling the pinch and going out of business. They formed their pool of resentment about a disreputable character who had owned the largest group of the old style buses, Jose Varcavas.

They began by attacking my buses by getting on and frightening my passengers and picking fights with my drivers. That was just as troublesome as Sebastian had been with the garbage. I had to put guards onto most of the buses. Fortunately the rumours about what had happened to Sebastian made the bus bullies cautious at first. But as my bus business grew and their income disappeared they became more aggressive.

Stupidity in one, becomes courage and enterprise when the stupidity is shared by a group of people.

I got word late one morning that Jose Varcavas was getting all the disgruntled bus drivers together and buying them drinks at lunch and inciting them to come that afternoon to wreck my bus depot. My information was that only a few of them would have guns and that most of them would come with machetes or iron pipes or some heavy implement that they could use to smash windows or buses.

I told Leon I wanted every security man we had and every staff member of every restaurant and business we had, including particularly the garbage business and the bus business, to get to the bus depot with whatever weapon they could lay their hands on.

I was pleased with the turnout. I put them all inside the bus depot as the assembly point.

When the bus bullies turned up there were about 30 of them. Jose Varcavas had a gun. One of the others had a shotgun, but as far as I could see the rest just had heavy smashing implements.

Leon really knew what he was doing. He had instructed our people to take up positions in an L-shape on two sides of the bus bullies. That way if necessary we

could establish cross fire, but there would be no risk of our people hitting our people by shooting through the middle of the bus bullies. He had also removed the buses from the parking areas and made sure there weren't any innocent by-standers waiting for a bus in the immediate vicinity, with much apologies for having to cancel a service.

I had about 60 people. I looked around them. Big Bertha, who did the heavy work at the laundry, had brought an axe. I don't know where she got it from, but it was obvious that if she went into action someone would be killed. Wong, the head chef of my Chinese restaurant had the biggest meat cleaver I had ever seen, and looked very determined about it. All the builders had turned up looking as tough as they were and carrying heavy tools. The nervous ones were generally at the back of our group. There was one young waiter from one of the restaurants who was holding a large carving knife, but he was holding it as if he was about to put it back into a drawer. Standing right along side me was Gomez, one of the garbage men. He had a double-barreled shotgun. He had an expression of absolute enjoyment and delight. It was obviously the best and proudest day of his life. He was standing alongside the boss and given an opportunity he was going to kill somebody and get away with it. He was going to be able to tell his family and friends of his triumph at the fight at the bus depot.

I wondered later why the others were so willing to turn up for what was obviously potentially a nasty fight. It was not just a matter of respect for me. It was not even so much a matter of protecting their jobs or the jobs of their fellow employees. It was a more a matter of self-respect and the respect that they had for each other and the respect their family and friends had for them. As my reputation had grown, so had theirs. The respect they had was that they worked for Dama Anna. They were each, in their own perceptions, important cogs in a very big and important and impressive wheel.

I had my gun out and pointed it directed at Varcavas. I looked calm. He looked disconcerted at the opposition he had encountered. He thought he was coming to wreck the place. Instead he found he was facing a well-armed group double his size. There was an enormous amount of noise. I said to Gomez alongside me –

“Fire a barrel to see if we can get some quiet here.”

Gomez did and it worked. Everybody shut up.

“Segnor Varcavas. There is no need for any blood to be shed here. Tell your men to lay down their weapons. I will agree to buy the buses that are serviceable from anyone who wants to sell me their bus at a proper valuation.”

I gave the name of the motor dealer who was generally regarded as the only honest one in town.

“Also, if any of your men want a job as a bus driver and can establish that they are competent and reliable bus drivers with proper experience and training and a proper understanding of safety principles, I will give them a job. All they have to do is to come into the office behind me and fill out an application form. They will have to undergo a test of their driving skills however.”

Varcavas looked uncertain but continued to put on a front –

“You have stolen the business of honest decent men. How could we possibly trust you?”

As he was speaking, he could see that a few of his men at the back of the group were discretely leaving his company and moving off rapidly. His force was melting.

“That will be a decision each of the men who want a job or want to sell their bus will have to decide for himself. I hope I have established a reputation for fair dealing.”

Most of Varcavas’ men then put down their weapons or put them in an inoffensive position. I cleared a passageway so that any one who wished could enter the office and fill out an application form. No one moved for a while. Then Varcavas put his gun down and I put my gun back into my thigh holster. Leon and Max followed my lead by putting their guns back into their holsters. A couple of men came forward apologising to Varcavas –

“Jose, we have wives and children to support. If we can get some money for our buses and get a job we have got to take it. I am sorry. I didn’t want to let you down. This hasn’t worked.”

They passed through into the office and then a number of others followed them. The rest dispersed as I sent my people back to their respective jobs. Gomez was amongst the most evil looking people I have ever seen. However, he obviously delighted in having a gun and adopting an aggressive position, so I put him into the security section which was a distinct move up from the garbage trucks.

It did not cost me much. Most of the buses that were for sale were in very bad condition and the vendors had to acknowledge the prices the valuer fixed were fair. I paid each one promptly. There were some that the only value we could offer was scrap metal value. Some of them had to take that because the buses wouldn’t work any more. One or two of them took their buses and drove out to establish a new business further out in the countryside. Some of those buses ended up as troop transports for the FARC regulars, in later years.

There were a few from the bus bullies who passed all the driving tests and joined the employ of my bus business as drivers. A couple of them turned out very well. There were quite a number, however, who were quite incapable of driving any vehicle with anything like courtesy or safety.

Accordingly, there was a small core of the bus bullies left. I do not know whether Varcavas found that he could not work for me as a matter of pride or whether he knew he would not pass a driving test. Whatever the reason, he and a hardcore stayed active in trying to make my bus business difficult.

They occasionally attacked buses, especially if there was no guard on them. A bus left standing alone might be damaged or have its tyres let down. I had to post guards on parked buses. It was all expensive and troublesome.

In order to find solutions, one needs to keep one's eyes open for an opportunity. The complete solution cropped up as a by-product of my insistence on health checks for girls who worked in the brothel.

An unfortunate woman in mid twenties sought work in one of the brothels. As usual the madam sent her first for a full health check to Dr da Silva. I always like to at least meet the girls who were applicants. She was rather thin. She looked very stressed. She had a very poor figure and her face was not attractive. Still, some men liked beanpoles and she probably would have been all right in the cheaper end of the industry.

She had been forced into a marriage to a man she didn't like. He had beaten her up and stolen what assets she had and disappeared. She was the only support for her widowed mother and her younger brother and sister. She was desperate to earn money.

A few days later I had a phone call from Dr da Silva. The poor girl had acquired another parting gift from her hated husband. She was HIV positive. Of course, she could not be thought of for any of the brothels. Dr da Silva ducked from telling her the results of the test. The madam she first approached for the job begged to be let off. I could not very well ask Leon or Max to do it. I had to tell the poor woman.

I tried to be sympathetic, but how can you tell somebody that their life is about to be over and that their immediate family are probably going to end up in the street. She took it calmly at first, but then dissolved into hysterical tears. One of the women in my office managed to help me to calm her down. I was so sad for her that I offered her a job. The only job I could put her into was as a cleaner on the buses. Of course, she took the job.

In those days, the disease progressed much more quickly in women than in men. Within a couple of months she was looking very ill. At that stage Dr da Silva could not do much for her. She came to me one day very calmly and self-possessed. She explained that Dr da Silva had told her what the likely progress of the disease was. She could not possibly ask her family to see her through the last stages. She could not face the prospect of going into a hospice for the dying and devoting herself primarily

to preparation for the next life. She wanted me to arrange for Dr da Silva to give her an injection to put her out of the misery she was already experiencing. She wanted to die quickly and cleanly in a way that would cause the minimum distress and disruption to her family. She also told me how her mother would never be able to service the small mortgage they had on their home and support her brother and her sister, and she was desperate for something to help them.

I was half inclined immediately to offer charity, but then a solution to her problem and my problem with the bus bullies presented itself. She wanted to die. I wanted the bus bullies wiped out. The bus bullies had gone into hiding. I had every resource available looking for them, but we could not find them anywhere. They would simply materialise, commonly out of the night, damage a bus and then disappear again. The only way I was going to stop them was to lay a booby trap for them and here in front of me was a walking, still at that stage, booby trap.

As a bus cleaner, from time to time, she had to move buses around. She never drove with a passenger, she wasn't qualified. However, she could start a bus and get it into a roadway and move it from one point to another. I explained my proposal to her. The deal was that I would pay off her mother's mortgage and provide a pension at least to get her brother and sister through secondary education. I said I would try to get them a bit more to have some start in life. She accepted.

I selected one of the older buses that I had bought as the result of the bus depot confrontation. It had been recently re-painted so it did not look as old and as worthless as it was. I got some dynamite and detonators and a plunger from one of the building sites. Max had some experience in using explosives in clearing building sites and rocks. He wired the bus from front to back with dynamite with the plunger at the driver's seat.

If I was going to have that poor girl blow up the bus when it was being attacked by the bus bullies, I had to have a good cover story. I could not find out where Varcavas was or where he was living. I could not find any of his remaining people. Curiously, that made it easier to frame him. I had one of the men go to a rooming house in a seedy part of town and take a room in the name of Jose Varcavas paying rent for a

month in advance. I then got him to put in some clothing and personal items. The clothing we got from the St Vincent de Paul shop and we found some used shaving gear and other items. Then I had him put in the room on top of a cupboard an empty box of dynamite from which any trace of any of my enterprises had been removed with two sticks of dynamite still in the box.

Then the poor girl started her nightly drives. I had one of my men in a car with a walkie-talkie following her at a discrete distance. The first two nights she drove past all the likely trouble spots very slowly and nothing happened. On the third day she told me she did not think she was going to last much longer and she felt she was not going to be able to drive more than a couple more nights. I encouraged her to keep going. The third night I had to arrange for Dr da Silva to give her a shot of painkillers and stimulants. He rather disapproved of it saying that it was not a treatment that could be kept up for long. I drew to his attention that she was not going to need the treatment for long. He could see that was obvious. The third night she was attacked. A group raced out with iron bars and smashed the headlights of the bus. She pulled up. They didn't wait for her to open to the door. They levered it open with a crowbar. Some of them went around the outside smashing the panels. Others were inside smashing the windows and wrecking the seats. She waited till she had four of them on board and the other two close. At least I think she waited deliberately from what the boys told me. It may be that she was just too paralysed and distressed to push the plunger until it was getting obvious that they might find the explosives at any moment. The bus went off with a splendid bang. Later the body count showed that there were six of the bus bullies as well as the unfortunate girl. As soon as the explosion occurred I was notified on the walkie-talkie. My man in the following car raced forward, appearing to want to rescue people from the wreckage but in fact to retrieve any part of the plunger. I got in touch first of all with a contact in the police suggesting that we had at last found where Varcavas was and giving him the address and saying that we believed that he was responsible for the bus atrocity. We then rang the press so that when the police arrived at our dummy address and found the box of dynamite, the press took photographs of a proud policeman standing outside with the dynamite box in one hand with the label clearly showing and with two sticks of dynamite held in the other hand like Winston Churchill's "V" symbol. The front pages of every newspaper the next day were the wreck of the bus and the rapid work

of the police in detecting the guilty. The police got a deal of praise which they gratefully accepted for their quick investigation. I made a public donation to a police charity in recognition of their good work in solving the death of one of my employees.

Of course, anybody with any sense knew that the police's story that I had so carefully given them was a pack of nonsense. Varcavas may have been many things, but he was not a fool. He would not have loaded dynamite from one end of the bus to the other. He would not have had himself and five other men on the bus when it was detonated. If he was going to blow the bus up one stick of dynamite would have been quite enough. He had never killed anybody before, at least that anyone knew. Almost certainly he would have pulled the girl out from the driver's seat before blowing the bus up. There was just no point in Varcavas being responsible for what had in fact happened. Everyone with any sense quickly worked out what had happened. I think the police did too, but since they were getting a lot of praise and satisfaction from the ridiculous cover story, they didn't want to take it any further. Ten minutes investigation would probably have satisfied them that the phony address I had set up for Varcavas had never been occupied by anybody who looked even vaguely like him.

Consistently with the police's cover story, I arranged a big funeral for the unfortunate girl. All my businesses were closed so that staff members and their families could go to the funeral. One of the big nearby churches was filled to overflowing. I don't know what they had in the coffin. It was probably a few miscellaneous body parts.

I paid off her mother's mortgage. It had gone so well that I provided a pension to her mother which was somewhat larger than I had previously arranged. Leon and Max arranged for all our staff to contribute to a fund to pay for the education of her younger brother and sister. Sanchez administered the funds for them.

No one but me and Dr da Silva knew why the poor girl had agreed to blow herself up. I was not quite sure what would be the consequences for the morale of my people. The result was astonishing.

Self-respect of all of my people went up enormously. It was as if I was the coronel of a crack regiment whose men were prepared to die on my orders. They took pride in the fact that they belonged to an elite outfit where their fellow members would, if necessary, sacrifice their lives for the organisation. Respect for me went up several notches. But importantly, all of my people's respect for themselves and the organisation they worked for went up. They took pride. They did not just have a good job. They were part of Dama Anna's organisation.

The comparison with a crack regiment turned out to be even more appropriate than I had at first thought. Not long after the bus explosion, suggestions began to come in that it might be nice if members of the organisation had a uniform. I consulted some uniform manufacturers. The problem was that there was no type of uniform which was suitable for office workers, sales representatives, builders and labourers, cooks and waiters. Certainly a uniform was not a good idea for the girls in the brothel. Eventually the consultants came up with a simple unobtrusive colour scheme that could be used for a wide variety of garments and a jacket that could be worn by office and management staff at all times if they wanted and which the rest could wear when off duty if they wanted. I discussed the logo that should go onto these garments and eventually decided simply on an embroidered label to be worn on the left shoulder that simply said Anna. I thought it was all a nice idea but that it wouldn't be very popular. I was wrong. Almost everybody wanted one. Particularly my women employees reported that if they went into a restaurant alone, other than one of our restaurants where they were recognised, it was as if they were invisible. An unaccompanied woman was treated with some reserve by any restaurant or even coffee shop. If they were wearing the jacket, however, the restaurant staff would immediately recognise them and help them to a good table. Similarly in shops if they were wearing the jacket, the shop assistants would race to serve them. The men liked it too. They were much less likely to get into fights or difficulties if they were wearing the identifiable jacket. Girls were easier to pick up.

There was some requests as to whether rank or status within the organisation could be recognised on the uniforms. Eventually I agreed that heads of sections, such as chief chefs, head waiters, the manager of the hairdressing / beauty salon, etc, had a star on top of the 'Anna' logo. I then had to agree to give Leon two stars. It also meant that

when I wore the jacket uniform to any organisation function, I had to put three stars on mine. It was all surprisingly good for morale. For those who didn't want to wear a uniform, I had no problem. But even those who at first did not want to wear it, many of them later found that the advantages were such that it was worth keeping the jacket at home in case they ever needed it.

Even Sanchez wanted one. After obtaining Leon's approval, I gave him two stars as well. Strictly speaking, he was not an employee but he was a very important part of the organisation. He told me afterwards –

“Darling, it gets me the best seats in restaurants and the opera and at sports grounds. You wouldn't believe the number of parking fines and speeding tickets it has saved me.”

Some years after the uniform had been adopted, Tim wanted one that he could wear as his sports jacket after Saturday or Sunday sports. I had one made for him and put a star on it. I noticed thereafter when I was at sporting events watching him that other parents would look very intently at his jacket and obviously ask around who he was. Even as a young boy, Tim saw himself as part of my organisation. Marc never asked for a jacket. He did not like the idea of appearing to be a part of his wife's organisation. But Tim's star produced a result I had not thought through or even intended. There began to appear within the organisation an acceptance that Tim was going to be my successor one day.

In order to keep the memory of my loyal suicide employee alive, I set up a clinic in a rather run down hospital in a run down part of the city in her name. I did not specifically direct it to HIV and AIDS, because that may have given my secret away. However, I encouraged the clinic to give special attention to HIV and AIDS, particularly in women. I could not put Dr da Silva in charge of it, though he gave me a lot of good advice. There was a medical practitioner in the area who devoted his life to care for the poor and needy instead of using his considerable skills to earn himself a reasonable income. He was Dr Ruy Lopez. From his first name I think his father must have been a chess player. He was much loved in the area and he was grateful to get a few bits of modern equipment in a clinic that he could use. He got into the habit of coming to me with special problems. Maintaining the general respect

that I had in the area, necessitating me helping him whenever I could. He was an admirable man, and I admired him.

CHAPTER 13

Amended 14.10.2003, 21.11.2003, 18.09.2004

Organisations tend to grow or to shrink. Remaining static is like trying to maintain a speed limit on a freeway. One always has to be either accelerating or slowing down. There is no cruise control on life.

My connection with Dr Ruy Lopez led me, a Presbyterian Agnostic, into such involvement with the church that I eventually had to employ an extra secretary to deal for religious, social and political affairs. He was a priest who had left the church in order to marry one of the girls he had fallen in love with in the brothel he frequented. He understood the church and politics very well.

One day when I was in the middle of a conference with an architect and my site foreman about a building I was building under contract, not for myself, I was interrupted to be told that Dr Lopez needed to speak to me privately urgently. I knew he was probably exaggerating the urgency, but if something concerned him enough to come to me personally to my office it was likely to be important –

“I have a big problem. One of the local priests has been sodomising the altar boys. He has also molested some other boys. I only found out last night when one of my patients’ broke down and told me the full story. She put me in touch with a number of other mothers who told me the same story. Apparently it’s been going on for years. There have probably been a dozen boys over the years that he has attacked. All the mothers say they have reported it to the bishop’s office, but nothing happens. Apparently the bishop’s secretary receives all the complaints with due gravity, but nothing happens. We’ve got to do something.”

I arranged for Sanchez to send his employed lawyer with the greatest experience in criminal work to interview each of the mothers and to get a detailed signed statement from each. I asked him to get supporting statements from any of the children who were now old enough to say what had happened. I asked him to work at top pressure to assemble the statements before it became public knowledge what we were doing. Sanchez was able to put two lawyers onto it and they got most of the statements

within a week or so. I arranged for Dr Lopez to examine the most recent victim and to give a report on the signs of injury that he could observe.

How to confront the bishop? If we rang and asked for an appointment, the subject matter would be discovered and we would get lost in red tape. The bishop should not have time to prepare a position. There had to be an immediate confrontation. I had never been to the bishop's palace and I had no idea how it worked. Fortunately Dr Lopez had been to interviews with the bishop with charitable groups and the St Vincent de Paul Society's representative on a number of occasions and knew the layout of the bishop's palace. We also got to know when the bishop was likely to be in his office.

I went there at ten o'clock in the morning. I went with Dr Lopez, Leon and Max, and two other experienced security men. I ran through with them beforehand what we were to do and particularly that Dr Lopez was going to lead us straight to the bishop's office.

We walked straight through the front door. There was an old priest at the desk to filter the visitors. One of the security men went up to him as the rest of walked straight up the stairs led by Dr Lopez. The old priest at the door called out after us and then started to pick up the telephone which my man merely took from his hand and put back on the receiver, politely but firmly.

At the first landing we turned right walking straight past two rather surprised looking nuns. We walked straight into the outer office. There were two priests doing secretarial things at desks. They got up and came towards us to block our progress. Our other security men firmly but politely moved them to one side and Dr Lopez strode forward and opened the door. Lopez, I, Leon and Max walked into the bishop's office. The bishop was a nice looking old man sitting behind the desk with his principal secretary, Monsignor Pandaras, leaning over him explaining a document. We strode forward across the large office to the desk. Monsignor Pandaras looked up astonished and moved around to our side of the desk saying, as I was greeting the bishop –

“You can’t just barge in here!”

Max went up to him and faced him closely. It was obvious that Max was surprised that anybody to speak to Dama Anna in such a disrespectful tone. He was very sharp with the Monsignor –

“Please do not interrupt. Dama Anna has come to speak to the bishop, not you.”

Leon got a chair from the side of the room and placed it for me immediately facing the bishop and then got another chair for Dr Lopez.

“Good morning bishop. Dr Lopez and I have come to see you about a most sensitive and difficult matter.”

I handed over copies of the statements, putting the most graphic and recent on top. Max again had to silence the Monsignor. The bishop started to read. One could see he was shocked. As he got to the third statement he was nervously adjusting his glasses all the time. It was as if he could not believe what he was reading. When the Monsignor made his third endeavour to intervene, Max simply took him out of the room.

Each of the statements recorded how the matter had been reported to the bishop’s office. Each time he got to that passage, the bishop said somewhat lamely –

“I never knew.”

I do not know whether he was telling the truth or not, but he looked genuine. When he had finished I said to him calmly –

“Dr Lopez and I have no desire to bring scandal on the church. We believe the church provides a stabilising influence in the community which would be very bad to lose. But we do insist that Father Martin be removed from any contact with the laity. You have a cloistered monastery administered by The Benedictine Order. I

would like to hear that he has left his parish and gone to the monastery before the end of today.”

The bishop looked grave and thought for a bit –

“It will be done.”

“Bishop, I do not want to seem in any way threatening, but it will be important for the parents of these children to know that action has been taken. Accordingly, I will arrange for some of my men to accompany your representatives when Father Martin is moved to the monastery. I will also thereafter ensure that the parents are reassured by a regular check that Father Martin remains in the monastery.”

The bishop nodded. He was obviously sufficiently long experienced in the diplomatic maneuvers of the church to know that I was saying in the politest possible terms that I didn’t trust him.

“I quite understand. Of course. It will be important for the families to be assured that there is no need for them to make the matter public.”

“Precisely.”

At that point I could hear some noisy movement in the outer office and the door burst open. There was the police superintendent of the district accompanied by two other policemen. I knew the superintendent and one of the other policemen reasonably well. We had a co-operative understanding. The police superintendent greeted the bishop formally and then turned to me with a nod –

“Signora Mercanda.”

The junior policeman was more respectful –

“Su Senora.”

I motioned to Max to pull up a chair for the police superintendent along side me.

“I have just been discussing with the bishop how I can assist the church at the present time.”

The bishop immediately took up the cue. He was a much wiler old bird than he looked –

“Yes, Senora Mercanda has graciously agreed to assist me by arranging women’s groups to be addressed by Father Daniela who is conducting a campaign for moral re-armorment throughout South America. He is a most charismatic missionary who will help us to re-inspire faith in good catholic families. It is very important that we have grass root contacts to ensure that the right people come to hear him.”

I took the lead which the bishop had given me. I turned to the police superintendent –

“Yes. I was also just discussing whether you yourself may be prepared to organise an occasion when Father Daniela may address police officers in order to gain their assistance in bringing a zeal for moral re-armorment to the ordinary people.”

What could the poor man do? –

“Of course.”

Dr Lopez was looking at me with astonishment that the whole subject matter of the conversation had changed so completely in so short a time. Leon gave a bit of a smile. The bishop’s secretary was standing behind looking amazed.

We all left on the best of terms. The bishop himself escorted us to the top of the stairway.

Max and one of the other boys who had been with us at the bishop’s palace went that afternoon with the Monsignor himself to collect Father Martin and escort him to the monastery. I provided the car. Thereafter, one of my men went at random times, but

roughly every two or three weeks to the monastery to make sure Father Martin was still there. After a couple of visits Father Martin asked if next time he would mind bringing cigarettes. I approved –

“Take him a carton each time. It will help him to die sooner.”

It seemed Father Martin was leading a thoroughly miserable life in the monastery.

But then I had to arrange meetings for Father Daniela to address groups of women. I told my women and spread the word amongst the wives and daughters of my men that I would like a full house. Father Daniela was pleased with the roll up that I arranged for him. I introduced him to the ladies giving a glowing account of his crusades. He then launched in an enthusiastic way into stuff that we had all heard before and which was no less irritating for being presented with such confidence and style. He indicated he would welcome questions. He first of all got a batch of questions about women’s duty to obey their husbands when their husbands were drunken brutes who beat them up and failed to support them and the children. Father Daniela gave the usual answers about the rewards that would come in heaven for a woman who bore the cross of a violent husband dutifully during her life. That led onto question as to whether the wife had to stay even though she believed that she would ultimately be beaten to death and her children left without a mother. He then urged that that should be reported to the parish priest who would intervene and stop the husband. No one in the audience had ever known a parish priest to successfully persuade a drunken violent husband to do anything whatever about anything. One of the women told Father Daniela that she had tried that, as a result of which, after the priest left, she had been severely beaten for having told the priest what had happened. Then, one of the women got onto abortion. After five children, when the woman is advised medically that she would risk her life by having any more, and when there isn’t enough income to put food on the table for the five children they have already, is it not in the interests of the whole family that the woman should loose the sixth child? Father Daniela answered that question with shock as to how anybody could think of murdering one of god’s children for economic or health or any other reason –

“If the Lord takes the mother to his heart in the course of childbirth, she will sit beside the Virgin Mary in proud splendour for having accepted the ultimate fate of motherhood.”

I had to struggle to keep expressionless. Then one of the brothel girls got onto prostitution. Father Daniela was beginning to get flustered. He had never struck an audience that was prepared to attack and confront the church’s teachings head on. When it was obvious that he was getting out of his depth and not coping very well, I took the first pause and stood up and said –

“Ladies, that is all we have time for today. I would like to thank Father Daniela for giving us such sure guidance of the true moral principles.”

I shook his hand politely and ushered him off the stage. As I left I assured him –

“The bishop did ask particularly that I should assemble a group of women most in need of moral reclamation.”

He went off somewhat shaken. I was not asked to assemble another group of women for him to address. I heard later that he did not do all that much better with the police. But the result was I was regarded as a reliable friend of the church. I even picked up a couple of building contracts from the church, but they did insist on the very best prices. God may provide but a stiff contract is how his servants assist his providence.

I was quite happy to give assistance to those orders and groups who were doing real work for the benefit of the people. I even got Dr Lopez and the Sisters of Charity talking to each other. Dr Lopez was essentially an old style anti-cleric who saw the church as part of the regime which held the people down.

A few weeks later at the opera I was there with Marc and his parents. Marc’s father prided himself on his connections with the conservative party and its share of the government. During the course of the evening, however, in the intervals, the bishop came up and spoke to me briefly – just to thank me for my assistance with the moral re-armourment crusade and my tactful handling of the meeting. Also the local police

superintendent came up to me to share a joke about the meeting with the police. Even since the confrontation at the bus depot, the police had treated me with some respect. Of course the numbers of men I had had been greatly exaggerated. On one occasion he said to me –

“I hope I never have to try to arrest you. I do not have two hundred men I could put into the field in a hurry.”

Also during the course of the second interval, the mayor came up to me to say how important the clinic was that I had set up for Dr Lopez. It had taken a deal of political heat off him about the absence of any city medical services in that area.

My father-in-law, who prided himself on his political connections, got no more than a casual nod from any of them. He could also see that although I was dressed in my most elegant best and for my late thirties, was still looking very good, the bishop, the police superintendent and the mayor had not come up to me because of my looks. He suddenly realised that his daughter-in-law was a political force.

A week later, my father-in-law invited me to meet with some executives of the Conservative Party. I had long ago decided that all governments, democracies to dictatorships, work in much the same way. They get money from wherever they can get it, and use it to buy political support. This simple principle is dressed up with lots of trimmings about the good of the state, the welfare of the people, social justice, social integrity, morality, law and order, and a host of other slogans. Some of the politicians actually believe their own slogans and somehow do not manage to notice that they do not achieve any results. This group of conservative politicians that I met were no exception –

“Senora Mercanda, the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party have formed a power sharing national government but it is important in that power sharing that the Conservative Party maintain the right number of representatives and where possible, that we have a majority over our liberal colleagues. In the coming election “(the one in 1974)” other parties can also contest the House of Representatives and the Senate. Senor Mercanda “(referring to my father-in-law)” suggests that you have a lot of

contacts in your part of the city and that you may be able to make some useful contributions to campaign strategy.”

I listened respectfully as they went on about the nobility and social purposes and triumphs of the Conservative Party and its importance to the salvation of the nation. There were four of them apart from my father-in-law. It was obvious that three of them, one of whom was a member of Congress, and one of whom was a junior minister, and the other a high party official, did not know who I was other than the daughter-in-law of a long-term party faithful. The fourth man was one of the party field officers who actually worked in the campaigns. He knew who I was and of my influence. It was obvious he had been the one who had told the others that they should try to get me on board. He probably did not explain to them much more. Often politicians only know what they want to know, or are only told what they their underlings think they ought to be told. After they had gone on for some time and paused to see my reaction, I startled them –

“I can give you two seats.”

I named the seats, both of which had been notoriously left wing seats for a long time. They were both in the parts of town where I had been most active. One of the politicians gasped disbelievingly. The field officer said calmly –

“If any body can do it, Senora Mercanda is the one.”

“There would be three conditions. Firstly, I must select the candidates.”

No one seemed to have much of a problem about that – as long they were going to join the Conservative Party and stand as Conservative Party candidates and when elected continue to be part of the conservative block.

“Secondly, there must be a firm commitment that if elected, a new public hospital must be built in one of those electorates.”

That also did not present much of a problem. Governments like major public works. It is an opportunity for corruption. It also enables politicians to present themselves to

the public as having built something enduring and significant which is going to be a future vote winner.

“Thirdly, I want there to be a commitment to establishing an Independent Contracts Review Board which will examine all government building contracts and supervise the payments so as to remove any suggestion of corruption from government contracts.”

They all knew that this was a constant matter of public concern and criticism particularly in the left wing press. They sat in stunned silence. After a time the minister said –

“That is a very complex issue. It would be very difficult to implement in the immediate future for reasons which probably you would not understand.”

“Oh no minister, you are wrong. I do understand fully.”

I then referred to one recent building contract which had not attracted much public attention. I told him who the contractor was. I told him precisely down to the cent what the kick back to the Conservative Party had been from the contractor. I told them what the kick back to the government’s contract supervisor had been. They all looked at me with astonishment – from the field officer to my father-in-law to the minister. They knew I was in the building industry, but they did not know that one of the senior accountants in the audit department of the government had been moonlighting for years as my bookkeeper / internal accountant for the restaurants. In fact, I don’t think any of them knew of the kick back to the contract supervisor.

“Because I do understand the problems precisely, all I will ask for at this stage is that the hospital should be used as an experimental project for an Independent Contracts Review Board and that we set up one just for that contract to see how it goes. At least it will be a significant gesture towards some tidying up of the building industry.”

After some discussion they agreed to that. I think at least two of them felt that I wasn’t going to win the seats, and that the hospital would never be built and the Independent Contracts Review Committee would not present a problem.

As I left the meeting it seemed to me obvious that the field officer thought there had been a real coup. The minister was obviously sceptical and appeared to think that the evening had been a waste of time. The others, including my father-in-law, were obviously uncertain.

I was certainly not doing it out of any sense of wanting to assist my father-in-law. Nor did I have any feeling that it was for the good of the country that there should be more conservative members than liberal members. Since they were all part of the one government and all in bed together, what did it matter. But, I was running a large enterprise with a lot of people depending on me. I had the church on side, more or less. The police were distinctly on side. All my own people respected me and most of the rest of the community did also. Having access to high levels of government was going to be useful.

I decided to run Marc as the candidate in one seat. He of course was happy to stand. I wanted Dr Ruy Lopez as the candidate for the other seat. He was shocked at my suggestion that he should become a Conservative candidate. The only political movement that Dr Lopez had ever supported was the unofficial illegal (until the 1984 election) National Popular Alliance formed by Rojas Pinilla. That organisation tended to work as a movement in both the Conservative and Liberal Parties. I eventually convinced him on the basis that we would put reference to the Conservative Party in small print in his advertising material and that the hospital would be built in the electorate for which he was the candidate and the hospital would be the main focus of his campaign. I did explain to him, however, that when elected, and I was sure he would be, he would find himself having to vote with a Conservative block as part of the deal to get him the hospital.

Dr Lopez was the ideal candidate. He had enormous public appeal and following. He walked around the streets campaigning, greeted with cheers everywhere he went. The sitting Liberal member was generally known to be hopelessly corrupt and had not done anything for the electorate in years. As he campaigned, Dr Lopez listened to people and put together a whole social program which would have gone down well in any moderate socialist welfare party. In fact, over time he sold quite a number of his

policies to the Liberal Party and even got some parts of the Conservative Party to tolerate them. He was certainly the extreme left wing of the Conservative candidates.

Marc was a problem. I could not let him out to make speeches to the public. He sounded so condescending and arrogant, that to listen to him for half an hour was a sure way of finding a campaigner for the other side. I had to take him off public speeches around the electorate almost at once. However, I found out that he did have one real talent. He could explain quite complex economic issues in a way that was readily understandable to anybody, usually using very simple examples. I could not have done it as well. Accordingly, I put him onto the speaking panels of the Conservative Party, not just in our own electorate, but all over the country. He would usually be the opening speaker explaining some economic problem, how the government had tackled it, how that had worked, and what else might be done. Many ministers liked to have him on the same platform because he could then field the economic and finance questions. It led to Marc getting some respect in the party generally, and greatly pleasing his father, but of course it was getting us nowhere in the electorate. I had to be the campaign manager for that. I got every friend I could, every one of my people I could, their families, their neighbours, out campaigning for Marc. I let it be known Dama Anna would be very pleased if her husband was elected. Such was my respect that the fact that I was pushing my husband as a candidate was received well. Some thought I was doing it out of loyalty to my husband, which they thought was a respectful thing for a wife to do. A more common understanding however, was that I wanted to get some control or at least voice in the government for the overall protection and benefit of the organisation. Since the members of the organisation were now so loyal and enthusiastic, they could see an advantage to them in my nominee, even my husband, being a member of congress.

On election night I was at party headquarters. I was taking a quiet back seat. As the figures came in it was obvious that Dr Lopez had had an overwhelming victory for the Conservative Party and Marc won comfortably but not by a big margin. As the result of the two seats I had picked up for the Conservative Party, they had a comfortable position in relation to the Liberals. The former sceptical minister was introducing me to leaders of the party as the great find for the party organisation. Marc's father was taking Marc around introducing him to everyone as his son, the new congressman.

Having two members of congress who owed their position to me certainly was helpful. But what I found most interesting was that Marc's own self-respect went up. He now saw himself not just as his wife's nominee in the bank, but as a member of congress in his own right. I did nothing to draw to his attention that he wouldn't have been a member of congress either without me. I very warmly congratulated him and hugged and kissed him in public in a way that seemed quite appropriate for a politician's wife.

The consequence was, however, that Marc, for the first time in our relationship, began to show affection towards me. I wasn't any more someone who was his financial backer and principal sexual partner and the mother of most of his children. He saw himself as my equal, and saw that I was disposed to him in a friendly and affectionate way. He began to reciprocate.

When I thought about it afterwards as to why it was happening, I suppose it is obvious. In so many of the marriages I saw around me, the women were in no sense the equals of their husbands. Their role in life was just to be the wife of that particular man. Any scraps of affection that were thrown from the husband were eagerly gobbled up. However, the wife's attitudes were usually that of submission and toleration and obedience rather than affection. On the other hand men who lost self-esteem because their business went bad or their career failed, tended to lose the ability to be affectionate towards their wives. When one is hating one's self, it is hard to be affectionate to those around one. I have seen many marriages go on the rocks when the husband had financial or career disasters. It was not because the wife was not loyal and devoted and would not have stuck by the husband through the troubles. It was because the husband lost the capacity to be even friendly towards the wife.

After the election, I had to keep the pressure up to get the hospital built. When it got stuck Dr Lopez made his maiden speech. He praised the Conservative Party's promise in the election to build the hospital, talking about what a great project it was and how the people would long remember this big step by the government. I wrote the speech for him. His draft had been to denounce the government for being slow in honouring their promises. I had to explain to him that if you attack a government it will go into defence mode and provide reason as to why they hadn't moved. If you

praised them for doing it then they will accept the praise. Governments love being praised and hate being condemned. The government could not back away from Dr Lopez's reasonably well-publicised speech praising the government for its promise which it was now going to carry out.

Getting the first Trial Contract Review Board took more effort. I got Marc to take the project to the relevant minister. All the politicians knew what a big issue that was in the leftist press. The corruption of public works was being used even by the beginnings of revolutionary groups that we were seeing at that time. He sold it essentially on the basis that it was a one off arrangement. It was window dressing. It wasn't going to cost the party and politicians generally all that much. It was going to get them some good press. Even so, I had to really work on it to get experienced honest people appointed and to require full disclosure of the tenders and full disclosure of the decision making process.

At that time, I wanted another large project to keep all my permanent tradesmen employed, so I decided to put in a tender myself. However, I did not want my tender to lead to any suggestion that I was making a profit out of the project that I had brought into existence. Accordingly, I worked out my quote essentially on a cost basis. I put in with my tender the detailed breakdown of how I had reached my figure. That led the Board to ask the other tenderers to do the same. None of them liked that.

Ultimately, rather to my surprise, my tender was accepted. The review panel made all of the tenders public and made a statement as to why they had selected mine. Among the things they said which led to be a big stir in the press, "The tender which has been accepted was the only tender which honestly disclosed what payments would be made to union officials to facilitate the building project. We have inferred that all the other tenders have concealed payments to the union in their other estimates." They also explained their rejection of some of the tenders on the basis that the companies tendering were notorious for shoddy building and inferior materials and another was knocked out because they said that his prices made it obvious that he would have to approach the government for an increase or extras because the building could not be built for the expenditure that that tenderer had indicated.

Even so, as we were completing the main block and the eastern wing, the government told us that they had run out of money and could not provide the funds for the other wing. I had already committed myself for the materials and prepared schedules for subsequent jobs on the basis that that wing was built and completed, so when there was a public storm about the cutting back on the hospital, I had Marc make a speech explaining why the government could not supply the funds for the rest of the hospital – it all sounded quite convincing and reasonable – and saying that he as so concerned to see that his election promises were honoured, that he himself would donate the cost of the second wing. Of course he didn't. I did. He received much public praise and when the President opened the hospital there was extensive reference to what the government named "The Marc Mercanda Wing". That meant I had to pay for a bust of Marc to be put in the lobby of that wing.

It did however increase Marc's prestige in the national press and the government. My people, of course, knew what was going on and my stepping into the gap left by the government added to the general respect that I had. Dr Lopez of course thereafter was my devoted friend and supporter. We also made him the chairman of the hospital board.

CHAPTER 14

Amended 20.11.2003, 18.09.2004

A war broke out between two of the drug gangs who had big involvements in the city. One group was controlled by Carbonez. He was a poorly educated man with little business sense. He had a lot of cunning. He was a streetwise rat. The other was led by Blackavo, who in background, education and ability could have been Carbonez's twin brother. Both of them happened to be my tenants – in different buildings widely separated. I had built fortress offices for each of them according to the specifications which I had developed for such clients. The two groups were killing each other whenever they could, including a number of street battles. In one of them, four of Carbonez's men had been killed, and one innocent bystander – well, who knows how innocent the bystander was? Of course, the press played it up that there were four innocent bystanders and only one member of a gang. Nobody in the two organisations was going to correct that. The mayor, the police chief, the law minister all came under a lot of pressure. When two of Blackavo's men were gunned down and again the press presented at least one of them as being an innocent bystander, the pressure on the authorities became very strong. The mayor's office, the government office, and the police office were all trying to hold onto what little respect they had from the public. All sorts of initiatives were announced. Of course, the problem was that the mayor's office was regularly in receipt of bribes from both groups, and at least a third of the police force in the city were directly or indirectly in the pay of one or other group. It was very likely that the ministry of justice had at least a few people in it who were sympathetic. But something had to be done to calm the press down. The police chief arranged to meet me confidentially. He did not like me coming to his office. He didn't like to be seen coming to anywhere where I was except that he, on a number of occasions, brought family groups and office groups to one or other of my restaurants. He arranged to go for a walk in a park, and I had Max drive me to a discrete position where my walk in the park crossed with his walk. He told me that I had been recommended by the senior officer who had employed my cremation service – but that was not how the police chief described him. He wanted me to do something to bring the war to an end. He didn't need to explain his problems. He did not offer anything in particular in exchange for my assistance, but the police and I had a general understanding of helping one another. At least in my relationship with senior police, money did not change hands. That way we kept respect for each other.

His suggestion was that I should be some sort of mediator. I had actually done a course on mediation in student days, so I knew basically what the technique was. The mediator listens confidentially to each side, and tries to guide each side towards some common ground or common interest – if they have one. If not, the mediator tries to guide them to compromise.

I could not simply arrive on the doorstep of Blackavo and Carbonez. That would reduce my status and the respect I had been careful to maintain with all of my tenants. My staff member who had the most to do with each of them, or at least with their principal officers, was Felicita from my realty office who dealt with them on questions of rental, building repairs and services. I sent her to each of them. I told her to be sure she wore a pants suit so that they didn't try to frisk her between her legs, it being by then well known that I carried my gun there. Her message to each of the people she was able to see in the two organisations was that as the agent who looked after the building and supervised the leases she was concerned that one of our buildings might get blown up or there might be significant damage to our buildings. She said that if each organisation was willing, she would ask Dama Anna if she would try to mediate. After about three visits to each of them, the message came back to me that Carbonez would like to meet me personally to discuss this possibility, and Blackavo sent a similar message. Both of them had a total siege mentality, and therefore asked whether I would visit them in their premises. I went to each of them with Leon and Max driving the car. Of the three of us, I was the only reasonably calm one – Leon and Max were very tense. Max stayed in the car outside each time Leon and I went inside. Leon was obviously armed, so he waited in the anteroom. I wore a very tight fitting pants suit so that it was obvious I was not carrying anything. My very active life allowed me to keep a reasonably good figure despite the three children.

I explained what the mediation process was – that I would not be imposing any decision upon either of them. I would be looking for an understanding of what had led to the problems and what each side really wanted. I would be exploring whether there was any common ground or common interest. I would help them talk to each other without having to face each other or say things directly to each other. Each of them had enough sense to see that the war was getting to be bad for business. It was

also being costly in men. It was taking men off other duties. As I arrived at Carbonez's place, it was obvious he had men patrolling the street and sitting in windows. He was also spending most of his time out of town.

I had difficulty convincing them that they should come to some common area where I could move between them quickly rather than spending half the day driving between their two offices. Each of them ultimately accepted that I would provide security and guaranteed the safety of both of them. We agreed to use my Spanish restaurant where I had a number of separate rooms including two that were some distance from each other. That restaurant had two separate entrances in different streets. Although I was providing my mediation services without fee, I explained to each of them that whatever food or drink they ordered would be charged for at the usual restaurant rates. They didn't have a problem with that. I arranged for them to arrive at different times on the first day and indeed they did not even know which one of them arrived first. Each of them came with a number of their lieutenants. I had my security people cloak the guns and weapons. By the time they were both their rooms I had a quite an arsenal.

I tried to compile from each of them what the issues were and what had led to the fight. Getting information out of either of them was a slow and painful process, but I remembered the first rule for mediators – patience. If I had not known what sort of questions to ask each of them individually, I would have ended the first day having made no progress whatever. But by the time we knocked off late at night on the first day, I at least had a general picture. Carbonez believed Blackavo had been stealing his customers by undercutting the prices and that Blackavo by unfair means was making all of the money out of the drug market and that he Carbonez was losing money and going out of business. Blackavo, on the other hand, claimed to have done nothing to steal the customers, except that he had offered better terms as to payment and more secure delivery and that Carbonez had attacked him and killed his men without any provocation. He seemed to accept that he had been doing financially very well.

I asked each of them to bring along their bookkeepers the next day. Both of them were a bit surprised about that. They saw their bookkeepers as being very minor and unimportant members of the team.

The next day, I spent most of the morning with Carbonez and his bookkeeper, and most of the afternoon with Blackavo and his bookkeeper. How the respective bookkeepers got jobs, it took me some time to work out. Each of them knew very little. Neither of them had had any sort of training in fundamental bookkeeping or accountancy. Neither of them actually knew what they were doing. On the other hand, I don't think Carbonez or Blackavo could actually add up or do simple arithmetic, except to know how much they had in their pocket and what the going prices were.

When I got Carbonez's bookkeeper to explain his accounts it became clear that he had not taken variations in stock into account in calculating what the profits had been. When we looked at the stock figures, so far as we had any figures, at the beginning of the period that Carbonez was concerned about, and looked again at the stock figures at the end, and took the increase in stock into account in working out his profit for the year, he had in fact done very well. Carbonez was very surprised when I explained this to him. He began to see that he had embarked on a war merely because of the poor information he had got from his bookkeeper. I did not like that bookkeeper's chances.

With Blackavo, the position was the reverse. They had been buying stock that they had not yet paid for, and selling it without making provision for payment for the stock and keeping almost no stock on hand. When I analysed his figures with his bookkeeper, it was fairly obvious that he had in fact had a very bad year. He was actually in debt to his suppliers and growers at the end of the year.

It was an absurd situation. Carbonez thought he had been robbed and had had a financial disaster. He had done well. Blackavo was covered with a glow of satisfaction about how much cash he had when in fact he had a very bad year. Neither of them wanted me to tell the other the truth.

While talking to them over the first two days, I had tried to compile a list of benefits for each of them from co-operation. On the third day, I got them talking about that. If they co-operated, they had more change of controlling the prices from the growers and suppliers. They would have much better facilities for transport and delivery to their customers. They would be able to present a unified front in the areas in which they operated. They could maintain the prices to their customers. They could offer better delivery to most of their customers. They would also of course approximately double the size of the operation they were controlling. Both of them liked that idea but there were problems.

Who would look after their accounts and control who got what money out of the deals? I agreed that I would find a qualified capable trained accountant / bookkeeper who could do a sensible job for them. However, I required conditions for finding them a financial controller – I should get the usual head hunter fee for finding the appropriate employee at the same rate as all the major employment agencies. They agreed to that. The safety of the person I employed for them was to be guaranteed, and if they had complaints about him or her (they did not like the idea of a her), they would complain to me and I was to be responsible for any discipline necessary or appropriate. They agreed to that. I was to fix the remuneration which was to be calculated on the scale of what I paid my bookkeepers and accountants. They had no problem with that. The new man would be under my protection. They accepted that, and accepted that I had the strength to protect him.

I had a person in mind. He was actually employed in the government treasury as one of the auditors. Since the government was totally corrupt and all his audit reports were suppressed, he did not find he had much job satisfaction. Also his pay was relatively low and when the treasury was running out of money, sometimes delayed in payment. That was why he had been working for me for some time just doing the simple bookkeeping and bank reconciliations for my restaurants. He was efficient, capable and honest. I told him of the job, changing sides and working for the drug lords. I told him the pay and particularly that I was to guarantee his safety and the payment of his wages. It took him about three minutes to accept. I think the treasury was glad when he retired because they actually gave him a retirement bonus. I think his audit work had been just a shade too efficient. He was ultimately a great success

with Carbonez and Blackavo. His job satisfaction went up enormously. His self-respect went up enormously. His wife and family found that instead of being a family of a minor civil servant, they were now the family of man widely respected. Everyone was happy. Except me. I had to get a new bookkeeper for the restaurants. But I had a nice head hunter fee.

The next problem was that Carbonez and Blackavo could see perfectly clearly that if they combined their operation each of them would probably try to eliminate the other as soon as possible and control the lot. It is not a very successful partnership arrangement when each of the partners thinks that the other is probably going to try to kill him, especially when that fear is well founded.

The deal I worked out was that my security service would guarantee the security and safety of each of them, and that there would be a rigid rule, if one of them was killed by the other, it was going to be my responsibility to kill the other one. I insisted that I was to be paid my normal fees for security and bodyguard protection. After a lot of hesitation they agreed to that because they could see it was the only way that they could get the benefits that co-operation would bring to them. As it turned out, Carbonez and Blackavo quite soon got on well and divided the responsibility and work between them in a sensible way and after only a few months they agreed to a reduction of my security service. However, they never quite told me that they did not need any more security.

The worst problem of the lot was what I had noted on my list of issues as “personnel loss equalisation”. In all, during the course of the war, Blackavo had lost seven men and Carbonez had lost only one. Blackavo explained his position to me and it made sense. What it boiled down to was this. How could he maintain the respect of his men if he did nothing to retaliate for their heavy losses and to do something in revenge? A leader cannot see his men killed without doing something about it if he wants to stay as the leader. The one they hated the most of all Carbonez’s men, was a ruthless killer known as Elephant Joe. He was a very big man – over six feet tall, but enormously fat. He walked in that swaying way that very fat people have to walk. Their whole body weight has to go onto one leg at a time. They cannot really maintain balance walking normally. Apart from anything else, their fat thighs rub

together so much that it makes rapid forward movement difficult. But Elephant Joe was a good shot and absolutely ruthless. He was widely respected in his own group as the number one hit man, and as the person who could extract information from anyone. He seemed to have made a special study of torture. He was hated and feared in the other group. Blackavo wanted as part of the deal the death of Elephant Joe. Elephant Joe at that time would have been well into his fifties, perhaps even into his early sixties, and he had been in Carbonez's service for a long time.

This was the most difficult part of the negotiations. We had reached a point where Carbonez and Blackavo could see the advantages of amalgamation and co-operation. Both of them wanted it. Both of them could see that a continuation of the war was possibly going to bring about the ruin of both of them. Eventually, on the fifth day, Carbonez said, "All right. They can have Elephant Joe." So much for loyalty and years of service. Blackavo was delighted. He immediately began to discuss how he and his men would dispatch Elephant Joe. I tried to explain to him that that would not help the relationship of the two groups in their coming partnership if those who had widely respected Elephant Joe over many years were aware of an ignominious and painful death inflicted on him by people who were to become their partners.

Carbonez offered to see to it but Blackavo would not agree to that. At the end, both of them were looking at me. I think they had both seen the movie *Laurence of Arabia* and remembered the scene where Laurence has to carry out the execution of a tribesman because neither of the tribes would permit anybody else to do it. I agreed providing my usual disposal fee was paid. They agreed to share that. But then we got down to the detail of how it was to be carried out.

I had thought it would be perfectly simple. Elephant Joe comes out to the farm. We have the appropriate witnesses present on both sides. A bullet is put into Elephant Joe's head and we put him into the incinerator. Perfectly simple? No.

Elephant Joe's life had been built on the fear of his enemies and the respect of his compatriots. It was going to be impossible for him to agree to die, unless it was something that maintained or built on his respect. On the other hand, it was going to

be impossible for Carbonez to have Elephant Joe killed or to surrender him without losing the respect of his men.

Carbonez was able ultimately to call upon Elephant Joe's loyalty and service by promising a substantial bonus for his widow and family, and Elephant Joe being able to determine the method.

It was well known that one of the services I could provide in the community and did from time to time, was that I could arrange for Dr da Silva to help elderly people who were suffering a painful terminal illness to ease their suffering by a painless death. Of course, lots of doctors did this for their regular patients, and some of them had nurses that they sent in to care for the terminally ill patient who went in with enough drugs to ensure that the patient did not suffer for long. However, most of the doctors if asked would vehemently deny that they would do any such thing. Dr da Silva was honest about it. Having been struck off the medical register, he needed help. The person providing him with employment and the opportunity of carrying on his medical career and doing worthwhile work and providing him with accommodation and protection was me. Accordingly, Elephant Joe specified his final display as being given a fatal injection by Dr da Silva in the presence of witnesses. In order to maintain his respect and add to it, he was going to voluntarily co-operate in this fatal injection.

The problem with that was that Dr da Silva had fairly high ethical standards and was not prepared and never would be prepared to administer a fatal injection unless he felt that he was really helping to relieve unnecessary suffering and that there was no way in which the patient could be saved. Nor would any of the nurses who had had sessions in the brothels depart from their ordinary principles of saving and protecting life. Leon and Max had an absolute fear of hypodermic syringes. Who was there to perform this task but me? First task, I had to learn how to do it.

I went to Dr da Silva and explained that I needed to give someone a fatal injection. He looked at me very searchingly. "Is this someone who is going to die anyway?"

I had no problem in truthfully answering that, that he was. "Is this death designed to avoid his suffering and pain?"

In view of the fact that Blackavo wanted to torture him to death, I had little problem in giving an affirmative answer to that one also. Fortunately he did not ask me why he could not do it himself. He agreed to show me how to do it and to supply his cocktail.

He produced a nice new shiny hypodermic syringe in its stainless steel case – a bit bigger than a case for glasses or cigars, but otherwise similar in shape. I had paid for it anyway. He had to show me by giving me an injection. He took a bottle out of a cupboard and filled the hypodermic syringe with it. I looked at the bottle fixedly. I tried not to look at all nervous. “It’s all right. Its just saline – water with the same amount of salt in it as your blood has. This one also has some sugar. Think of it as an intravenous chocolate.”

If I was having a real injection, I would have looked away. However, I had to see exactly what he was doing and how he was doing it. Think. Concentrate. He took my left hand and put it palm down on the table in front of him. He took a clip on an elastic belt and put it around my upper arm and pulled it tight. I had to borrow that equipment from him too. It made the veins on the back of my hand stand out a bit. Carefully explaining what he was doing, and holding the hypodermic syringe so that the plunger was at my fingertips, he carefully inserted the tip of the needle into my vein on the back of my hand. It was like a sharp sting from an insect bite. “I can give you some local anaesthetic to put onto the back of the hand if you think the patient may be sensitive. However, it doesn’t take the sensation away from the vein completely and the patient will still feel the prick. You have to be careful using the anesthetic because if you get it on you fingers, your fingers will go numb for a while and you will not be able to operate the hypodermic syringe safely.”

I took some of the anaesthetic and some gloves and cotton wool to administer it with.

“It is important to administer the syringe slowly. I will give you 30cc. I would recommend you carry out the injection looking at your watch and trying to put in 5cc about every 30 seconds. If you do more than that, the patient may go into shock and look very strange. Administer it slowly, and the patient will look very peaceful.”

He proceeded to demonstrate by slowly pushing the plunger in so that the 30 cc took an eternity – well in fact three minutes.

“You had better practice.”

He gave me the syringe and another bottle of the saline. He then handed me another bottle, which had the usual poison sign on it of a skull and cross bone. Being a careful medical practitioner, he did not want to run the risk that somebody might be given the wrong injection.

I looked at the little poison bottle, “Is this really enough?”

“It is enough to kill an elephant.”

I think he knew.

I got one of the nurses who moonlighted downstairs to let me do a practice run on her. She had administered intravenous injections on a number of occasions, so she was able to give me advice about finding the vein and how to get the needle in. I offered to use the anaesthetic, but she said she might not be able to tell me whether I was getting it right if her hand was anaesthetised. She was grateful to me because I had facilitated her additional income and I protected her in a dangerous industry. She also respected me and probably would have been willing to enable me to practice something even worse on her. She let me do it once to each hand explaining to me where I was getting it wrong. Particularly she warned me against my hand shaking while I was doing it and how to hold my hand steady while I was holding her hand in my other hand. Once one gets the idea, it is not too difficult, but nobody likes needles.

I got out of the library a book on executioners. The children thought it was funny that mummy was reading about executioners. Marc pretended not to notice.

The day arrived. Elephant Joe had selected a private room at my Italian restaurant. He arrived at about twelve with Carbonez and two other lieutenants. They had a

hearty lunch with bottles of good wine – for which Carbonez paid. Elephant Joe embarked on a large Cuban cigar. At two thirty, Blackavo and two of his lieutenants arrived. I picked up my gear, and escorted Blackavo and his men to the private room.

Looking calm and confident was important. I found myself thinking: “My God, I am about to murder a man in cold blood in the presence of six witnesses. I have to do it in a way that I have only practiced twice.” I put those thoughts out of my mind. Think. Concentrate. I have something to do. I know how to do it. I have to look as if I know how to do it. It is going to make it very risky if I mess this up. It will make it unpleasant for everyone. Elephant Joe is a mass murderer. A brutal torturer. He deserves to die.

I managed to greet Blackavo and his men as if I was the headwaiter in my restaurant welcoming them to lunch. I guided them to the private room. I could feel the instant cessation of conversation and freeze as I walked into the room ahead of Blackavo and his men. Leon and Max outside had checked everybody’s guns and weapons.

Elephant Joe was on one side of the table with the seat on his left unoccupied and his boss and supporters were sitting on his right occupying the end of the table. I motioned to Blackavo to take a seat at the other end of the table with his men, and I sat down alongside Elephant Joe. Elephant Joe was still smoking and sipping his glass of red wine as if he did not have a care in the world. One had to respect his total control, and I tried not to let him or any of those present down by showing any lack of control on my part.

I turned to Elephant Joe: “I understand you have come here voluntarily today to give your life to bring about peace and co-operation between two great organisations. I understand that you are prepared to seal their partnership with your blood. Is this correct?” I had rehearsed that little speech. I thought I should use some solemn and grand words for the occasion.

Elephant Joe looked at me a little surprised: “Yes. That is what I am here to do.”

All the others seemed to think that my little speech had been appropriate.

“Have you seen a priest?” I knew that Elephant Joe went to mass regularly – he had a lot of sins which needed forgiving.

“I went this morning.”

“Who is your doctor so that we can get a proper death certificate?”

He told me.

“Do you agree to me being the instrument by which you give up your life?”

“That is what I am here for.”

“Do you forgive me?”

Elephant Joe looked a little surprised. He took a moment or two to answer: “Sure.”

There were some nods around the table. It seemed the general feeling was I had done the respectful thing.

I took the tourniquet and the stainless steel box, my rubber glove and the bottles out of my handbag.

“I am going to put this around your upper arm and tighten it for a few moments to help me find the vein. I am going to put a little local anaesthetic on the back of your hand, but you will probably still feel a slight sting. Would you like me or someone to hold your hand firmly, or would you be able to simply rest your hand on the table?”

“I don’t need any help.”

“While I am working away here, why don’t you tell us of some happy days in your life. Did you have a happy childhood? How did you spend your summer holidays?”

I put the tourniquet around his upper arm and pulled it reasonably tight. His arms were very thick.

“We used to go to my grandmother’s place in the summer. She had a house near a lake ...”

His vein stuck out reasonably well. I put a rubber glove on my right hand and took some cotton wool and dabbed the local anaesthetic liberally on the back of his hand.

“... the water in the lake was very cold, but we used to like jumping into the lake ...”

I had already filled the hypodermic. I do not know how I stopped my hands from shaking. I kept saying to myself. Think. Concentrate. My object was get that little sharp needle into that quite bulging vein without sticking it through the other side.

“... my cousins and I would jump into the lake and then swim as rapidly as we could out of the lake ...”

He took an occasional puff of his cigar. I got the needle in, thanks heavens, first go. I undid the tourniquet. I had a watch with a good sweep second hand on my left wrist.

“... the wharf we jumped from was old and rickety. One day it broke and one of my cousins fell in unexpectedly ...”

I put in the first 5 cc slowly. It took a surprising amount of pressure.

“... we all laughed. ...”

I had scarcely finished the first 5 cc when it was time to start with the second 5 cc.

“... although the water was cold, the sun was hot. One day we all got sunburnt. ...”

I kept the injection going. He was not showing any signs of any effect.

“... my grandmother roused on us for getting our shorts wet and dirty so we had to jump into the lake in the nuddy. ...”

Elephant Joe kept smoking and taking an occasional sip of the red wine he still had in his glass. Some of the people around the table were staring at his hand that I was working on, some of them were looking at Elephant Joe. One of them actually laughed at one point in his story.

“... but the best thing was, we used to get so hungry from jumping into the lake and swimming and messing around that we were always hungry. My grandmother’s stew ...”

I was on the second last lot of 5 cc. He was still not showing any sign at all. What do I do? I suppose I have to look calm and say, “Pardon me boys, I just need to step for additional supplies. Do make yourself at home. I will be back as soon as I can.” I had a feeling of panic which I suppressed. Dr da Silva surely knew what he was doing.

“... it was mainly beans but she had some lamb and some other herbs in it. It was the most delicious stew I have ever had ...”

I started on the last 5 cc. Somehow I was still managing to look perfectly calm. Elephant Joe picked up his glass and drained it and put it down just as I finished the last of the 30 cc. I put a bit of cotton wool with pressure on the vein and removed the hypodermic and put it back in my box. As Elephant Joe reached out to pick up his cigar he gave a little cough and his head fell forward. His eyes did not close. I felt the pulse of the hand I had been working on. I could not find it. I felt for a pulse in his neck. There didn’t seem to be one. I put a glass in front of his mouth and nose. There was no frosting. I closed his lips and held his nose. There was not sign of any struggle or resistance. I put everything away in my handbag. The table was perfectly silent. Everyone was looking at Elephant Joe with an occasional glance at me. I went to the telephone at the side of the room. I looked up the telephone number of his doctor. I phoned the surgery. I did not introduce myself by name, but merely gave the name of the restaurant. Eventually I got to speak to the doctor.

“A patient of yours seems to have died while having lunch. He is generally known as Elephant Joe. I can’t find a pulse or any sign of life. Could you come over and check him out?”

“I know who you mean. Just hang on till I check my records.”

He came back to the telephone a few moments later. He sounded quite excited.

“What did he have for lunch?”

“He had the fettuccini with a cream and mushroom and bacon sauce. He seemed to enjoy it. He was smoking a big cigar and drinking some red wine with his lunch. I think he also had an antepasto. I do not know what it was.”

“You wouldn’t believe it. Six months ago I told him that if he did not stop smoking, change his eating habits and loose some weight, he would be dead in six months and today is exactly the six months.”

“Can you call over and check him? We have another booking for this room this evening and we need to get it ready.”

“I am tied up for most of the afternoon. Just have the funeral directors pick him up.”

“Usually funeral directors are a bit reluctant to pick up bodies without a death certificate.”

“Don’t worry. I’ll give them a ring.”

“Do you know which funeral director it is?”

“Oh yes. All of the G... I mean all of his people use the same one. I’ll give them a phone call and I will drop the death certificate into them later.”

“Thank you, doctor.”

Next, I phoned the funeral director. The doctor was quite right. They agreed to pick up, and indeed they turned up within the hour.

When I finished my phone calls I turned back to the assembled company who were beginning to stand up and get ready to leave. They all nodded their approval. Some of them shook my hand. Carbonez looked quite relieved.

“I have to hand it to you Dama Anna. If I ever have to go, I would like it to be like that.”

After they left, I noticed that the red dot on the back of Elephant Joe’s left hand was visible to anybody who might know what it was. There was a drop of the pasta sauce on the table. I scooped a bit up on my finger and just put it over the red dot on the back of his hand.

The funeral directors picked up the body and took it discreetly out via the kitchen. I assured all the kitchen staff there was no need to worry. He was obviously a very sick man. At least his last meal had been happy. The kitchen staff stood respectfully by as the body was carried out. I then had the room cleared and set up for the business function that was to occur there that evening. As soon as I could, I returned the hypodermic, tournique, local anaesthetic, etc, to Dr da Silva. He did not ask me how it went, for which I was grateful.

The funeral was two days later at a nice church in the next suburban area. It would have been disrespectful for me not to attend. At that time it would have been inappropriate for a single woman to go to a funeral without a male companion. Only the widow did that and she usually had family around her. I never took Marc to any business functions. I thought it would look bad if I took Leon or Max, although they attended separately. I was wondering what to do as I was getting dressed for the funeral. Tim had the day off school. He was a tall boy for nine. He asked me where I was going. I told him. He offered to come with me. If I had thought about it, I probably would not have taken him, but I did. He dressed up in Sunday best with a black tie.

There were four groups at the funeral to whom each person paid their respects. The widow, Carbonez, Blackavo and myself. It was the first occasion that Carbonez and Blackavo were seen together in a spirit of co-operation. I do not know what it is about the crime syndicates, but I think that everybody at that funeral except for the priest and the doctor knew what had happened. The doctor was just ahead of me greeting the widow.

“I had warned him of the danger to his health unless he changed his habits, but you know what Joe was like. You couldn’t change him.”

The widow expressed her thanks. It was obviously she did not believe the doctor at all. I was next.

“My deep sympathy.”

She looked at me very piercingly, but not antagonistically.

“Thank you for preserving my husband’s dignity and honour.”

It was my turn to be surprised. Actually to be thanked by the widow of the person I had just killed. She probably hated him anyway I suppose. I reacted a bit emotionally for me. I put my arms around her shoulders and said:

“Life is very hard for all of us. We all have to perform our appointed role in life. We try to do it as well as we can. We try to do it without cutting down the dignity of our fellow men.”

She shed a tear. What I said was not heard by others, but everyone else noticed the embrace and overall it was well received. Tim got the idea of what was expected of him very quickly. He gravely took the widow’s hand, gave her a little bow, and offered his sympathy.

Carbonez and Blackavo came up together and respectfully, even thankfully, greeted me. I introduced Tim. They both greeted him very formally: “I am very pleased to meet you, Signor Mercanda. I look forward to seeing you often.”

Tim was equally formal and correct in his reply: “Thank you Signor Carbonez. I look forward to meeting you again, but hopefully in not such an unhappy occasion.”

I think everyone at the service came and greeted me and Tim.

I did not realise at the time what I had done. However, I soon worked out that what I had done was to announce to everyone in the city that Tim was my heir apparent, and that one day he would take over my business. That I suppose was harmless enough, but what surprised me is that Tim got the same idea. From then on, he wanted to ask every question he could and to get to know as much about all of my businesses as he could. He asked to spend holidays and weekends in the businesses. What boy would voluntarily give up an afternoon of kicking a ball around in order to help cleaning up in a kitchen? He even worked in the laundry. He also took much more interest in the mathematics and business studies causes at school. He wanted to meet everybody who worked in the organisation.

A couple of months after the funeral, Paulo came home from school one day and asked: “Mum, why do they call you La Tarantula?” That was new to me, and a bit of a shock.

“Well, I suppose it is because I have eight legs: building, restaurants, garbage collection, security services, a laundry / dry cleaning business, a real estate office, buses and real estate investment.”

He seemed to accept that. I then made inquiries and discovered that I was Dama Anna to my face, and La Tarantula behind my back.

Tim worked it out. A few months later he said to me gravely: “Do they call you La Tarantula because you killed Elephant Joe?”

I thought it was probably best to give him an honest answer. That seemed to make him more determined than ever that he was going to work in my business in the future.

A few weeks later, Marc and the children and I had Sunday lunch with Marc's parents. I had no problem with Marc's father. We could always talk to each other on sensible and equal terms. But Marc's mother could never see me as anything other than the lucky woman who was married to her wonderful and clever son. The way she went on about him on any opportunity and her obvious conviction that I should be thankful to have found such a husband, was a regular minor irritation. A slowly dripping tap will wear away a stone. My patience was not a stone. During the lunch she was talking in her usual way about her friends and local events. She referred to a woman she knew whose husband had left her destitute. She leaned over to me in a serious and confidential way saying, as if she was imparting some great and important piece of knowledge –

“Of course dear, you are so lucky to have a good provider like Marc to look after you.”

I had this same sweetly delivered nonsense so often that I was able to refrain from comment. She then went on to local gossip –

“I've heard that there is a person in town called La Tarantula. This person is, I understand, a mass murderer.”

She turned to her husband. –

“I do not know why the government cannot do something about these terrible people?”

Tim looked at her rather intensely. Marc looked slightly embarrassed and changed the subject. Paulo giggled.

Later in that afternoon, I found myself alone in a room with Marc's mother. That is a circumstance I generally try to avoid, but it happened.

“I think it is time I told you the truth. Marc is not a great provider. I own the house. I support the family. I pay the servants. I own the shares in the bank which gives him his job. Marc's income is spent by him on what he wants to do. Particularly, he

seems always to have at least one mistress going and of course he also has to pay for the support of his illegitimate child, Marc Junior. You should meet Marc Junior. He is a very nice little boy. He is the image of Marc. He comes over to play with our children regularly.”

“Don’t be ridiculous. I’ve never heard such nonsense.”

Just then Paulo came back into the room looking for something he had left. I turned to Paulo –

“Paulo dear, when did Marc Junior come over to play last?”

“Mum, how can you forget? He was there yesterday.”

Marc’s mother snapped out –

“Who is Marc Junior?”

“He is our brother. Well, he has a different mother.”

Paulo raced off.

“I insist that Marc pays proper support for Marc Junior. You should meet him. I think you would enjoy meeting him. Oh, and another thing. Most people in this town know that I am La Tarantula. You look very foolish in referring to La Tarantula in the way that you did at lunch today. However, if it is of any comfort to you, I have not killed anybody today – so far.”

She had nothing to say from then until Marc and the children and I left to go home. She did get to meet Marc Junior after she had got over the shock. But she could never bring herself to treat him as just another grandchild.

CHAPTER 15

Amended 20.10.2003, 24.11.2003, 18.09.2004

So there was I was after 10 years. I had four city buildings. I had a construction company. I had five restaurants. I had four brothels. Accidentally and unintentionally, I had acquired a garbage and rubbish disposal business and a bus company. My husband was a congressman in the government. I was regularly consulted by the party executive. I was regarded as the top campaign manager. I was the patron of a dozen women's charities. I was on the board of the new hospital. I was on close terms with the church and the Police.

I had not eliminated corruption. I had merely brought it to an orderly level where it was predictable and manageable, at least in the area in which I was working. Corruption had enabled public servants and officials who would otherwise be living just above poverty, to live in a reasonably comfortable way. Senior officials were able to live at an appropriate level for secure middle management. Corruption had become a tax on turnover in many businesses. It was a means of subsidising salaries for the people who were supposed to be running the place. Corruption can generally speaking only be controlled if pay levels are adequate to make corruption less than necessary.

The level of violence had also been reduced. The honest police were grateful to me, but I suppose, that in turn, was corruption. They did not do their duty about me. I did things that overall helped their policies. I saw that the police administration got appropriate political praise and publicity about the reductions in crime levels.

I had general respect rather than love. I had deference rather than friendship. I had a husband who was always polite and courteous, but he was only ever affectionate in public and before television cameras. I had so many employees and people who were dependent upon me that I had lost count of them.

I had three beautiful children. I loved them dearly. They loved me. They were what made my life and all the effort worthwhile. But of my three children, it was my little Lucy that I loved the most. Her sweet trusting innocent beauty pulled at my heart every time I saw her.

I was working hard, long hours, with enormous responsibility. I was having to do things I hated. I was manipulating a system I hated. Probably overall, I was a force for moderation. I was improving the status of a lot of women. Probably that was only for a temporary period but at least it might have some continuing effect. But it was my children that made it all worthwhile.

Then suddenly my world collapsed.

I was in my original restaurant one night. I had just been downstairs dealing with a management problem in my number one brothel. I was feeling relaxed and friendly. I saw Carbonez and Blackavo sitting together at a discrete corner table. Since they became partners they were often together. There was a third person sitting with them with his back to me. The price of success is eternal vigilance. I should have found who the third person was before I walked up to them. But I didn't. I walked up and greeted them –

“This is a business associate of ours from the USA, Louis. Louis, this is Anna. I have told you about her. She is a big noise in this town. She brought us together.”

I had immediately recognised Harry's successor, the man who had murdered my parents and probably the man who had fingered Tim. He recognised me. Even with different coloured hair, a figure altered by three children, and 10 years, he still recognised me.

“Well this is obviously an important occasion. Let me get a bottle of that special Chilean Cabernet that you like so much.”

I motioned to one of the waiters to set another place for me at the table and I told him to bring four fresh glasses. I immediately went back to the very large cupboard we used as a wine cellar. It also led into the kitchen. Fortunately, Leon had just been downstairs with me. I got one of the kitchen boys to run downstairs for him. I came back to the desk in front of the wine cupboard and began opening the bottle with my

back to the restaurant. Possibly that was a suspicious thing to do, but I did not wish to be away from the table too long. Leon came up to me –

“See that third man with Carbonez and Blackavo. It is absolutely vital to me and the organisation that he dies before he can get to a telephone. If you have to, you can even do it outside the restaurant.”

I was leaning over the bottle. Leon was staring into the restaurant –

“He has just stood up. He is leaving.”

“Get after him. He must not reach a phone.”

I had got used to Leon’s expressions. I could see the wheels clicking over in his brain. He apparently already knew that there was a big buyer in town. That meant the USA. If I wanted somebody dead urgently it must have something to do with what Leon had already worked out was my life in the USA. Leon left me heading back through the kitchen down to the parking area. I could see that he was running as soon as he was out of sight from the main restaurant. I took the bottle back to the table and cheerfully began pouring the wine into four glasses. I looked quizzically at the empty seat –

“He said he had some urgent business to attend to and that he would be back later on.”

“Well, all the more of this lovely wine for us.”

I drank a glass with them. Louis had not returned. I went to the desk and gave instructions that if Leon rang in they were to come and get me. I went back and chatted pleasantly and poured the rest of the wine.

“Would you like me to arrange some female company for you?”

There was a thoughtful nod. I went to the desk and sent down a message to send up girls who were known to be liked by Blackavo and Carbonez. They came up within a few minutes. They joined the table and I excused myself. I remained impatiently near the desk until the phone rang. It had been about an hour since Leon had left. I had the call transferred to the restaurant office where I could be alone.

“He had his car take him straight to the airport. He managed to get on a flight that was just leaving for San Paulo and Brazilia. He was already in the departure lounge before I caught up with him. Sorry.”

“He is obviously going there to change planes and head back to the US. I still want him dead as soon as possible. Take Gomez with you.”

I gave him details of where to go in Mexico City to get different passports and visas so that they could get in and out of the US. I told him everything I knew about Louis and his habits and where they were likely to find him. I told Leon to collect some cash in US dollars before he got on the plane and not in any circumstances to use any credit facilities. I also told him where I thought he would be able to pick up a gun easily when he got there.

I wanted to scream and cry and smash something. The one thing I felt certain about was that at the first opportunity Louis would make a phone call to one of his police cronies –

“Guess who I ran into in Colombia ...”

Even if I was too late to stop that, at least I would have the satisfaction of having retaliated against the man who destroyed my family.

It was about a week before I read in the American press of Louis being gunned down by a shotgun. Gomez did like shotguns. The assassin, with a driver, had driven up in a car just as Louis was coming out of his main office. Police and the press were theorising that it was the beginning of a new gang war. The man who fired the gun was described as being “of Latin American appearance”. In the next day’s paper

there were protests about this racist slur against Latin Americans. What were they talking about? Gomez looked like an extra from a Mexican bandit movie.

Leon and Gomez returned safely. Gomez was now a hit man. His self-esteem had gone up enormously. I gave Leon and Gomez a nice bonus.

But Louis had made the phone call. About two weeks after the death of Louis, Leon came to me –

“The FBI has three agents in town. The word is that they have a new lead on Massacre Millie.”

I had told him never to mention that name again, but in the circumstances, he did the right thing. About a week later, I had a phone call from the Deputy Police Commandant who I dealt with most often. We arranged a confidential meeting in the park.

“The FBI is in town in force. They tell me they have positive evidence that you are Massacre Millie. They have been looking for you for 10 years. They say they have a positive identification. They got some glasses with your fingerprints on them. I told that extradition proceedings against you would be extraordinarily embarrassing to the government and that we would be most reluctant to act unless we were really forced into it. They said they would release all the material to the international press. Massacre Millie is still seen as one of the murderess of the century, and the great women gangsters. The adverse publicity would be picked up here by the socialist press. We couldn't suppress it. There are too many people who listen to international broadcast as it is. There are too many international magazines circulated. We would probably be forced into helping with the extradition proceedings. I suggested that the FBI agents might meet with you to discuss the matter before it went any further in case there was some mistake they had made or some deal you could do. Let me know, and I'll set up a meeting. I have had to tell the Minister for Police and Security. He will probably discuss it with your husband within the next few days.”

I could have cried. I could have fainted. I held onto the railing and looked out onto the pond that we were walking beside. Think. Concentrate.

“Thank you for telling me. I would like to set up a meeting as soon as possible. How about at my office at two o’clock this afternoon.”

“That sounds very sensible. As always, I am able to count on you for a solution. I’ll set it up. Good luck.”

He turned away and walked back to his car. I walked back in the other direction where Leon was waiting for me to drive me. We drove straight back to my office. As I walked into my office and looked at the security guard we had in the corridor and walked through the outer office where my two primary bookkeepers were working and walked into my inner office it struck me. I had become Harry. I was a moderate and more restrained Harry, but basically I was doing similar things in a similar way. The only good thing was that my power was by no means absolute, though it was very extensive. At least the police were able to tear me down in a way that they could never have torn Harry down. It wasn’t much of a consolation.

I rang Sanchez. He must have picked up from my voice that it was urgent. He dropped everything and came.

“Sanchez, there are three FBI agents in town. They’ve come to extradite me back to the US. After 10 years they have identified me as Massacre Millie.”

Sanchez did not look surprised.

“Heavens darling. I worked out that you were Massacre Millie years ago. I’ve always known that if I stepped out of line you’d put a bullet through my pretty little head.”

“What do we do?”

“We talk to them, we find out what sort of deal is possible, but we make no admissions. You cannot have a confidential conference in matters involving serious crime. Leave the talking to me. Let’s put a tape recorder on so we get the whole conversation. We never know, we may have to use it.”

I had some lunch sent up from the restaurant. I didn’t want a low blood sugar level leading me to do stupid things. Sanchez and I discussed the possibilities over lunch. I was having real difficulty keeping myself calm and sensible.

The three FBI agents arrived. I had not alerted the security guard that he need not check them for weapons and accordingly he insisted on taking their guns from them before he would let them into the outer office. Eventually they complied. I apologised to them when they came in.

The three of them were tough. They looked aggressive and hardened. They had obviously seen a lot of violence in their time. They were streetwise rather than intelligent. If they were really intelligent they wouldn’t have stayed in the job for as long as they obviously had. I introduced Sanchez as my attorney. I offered them coffee which they didn’t accept. They looked at me very hard. The older one who was obviously the senior, did most of the talking.

“You don’t look like I expected. I thought I was going to see a big heavy woman who might be driving a truck with a face that could stop one. I didn’t expect to see an elegant society lady.”

“Since you have never met my client before, I wonder that you had any concern or interest in what she might look like.”

After the exchange of a few more preliminaries, we got down to it.

“It has been suggested that you had some finger print identification. What is that?”

“We bought some glasses you have used from one of your maids.”

I couldn't believe it. After all I had done for the domestic staff, that somebody would do that to me. I later quizzed them all. Maria-Theresa cried and said –

“They had told me that that they were admirers of yours and that they wanted something you had personally used and touched which hadn't been washed since you had touched it. I thought they wanted to see lipstick on a glass. They gave me \$100 each for them. They were quite cheap glasses. I didn't see how it could do any harm.”

Sanchez then continued –

“We will have to see if the identification stands up in court. But what is it you want to do?”

“We want Millie to come back to the USA with us. In my legal experience in this country, which is considerable, extradition proceedings can be very lengthy and time consuming and of uncertain result. We know you are well connected. It may be even that you could start a war with the USA if you wanted. We will go through with the full extradition procedure if we have to. But we have an extra resource.”

He produced a spiral-backed file that looked rather like a set of accountant's reports. He pushed it across the table to me.

“It is a series of pictures of the crime scenes that we have never released to the press before. We plan on getting local support for the extradition proceedings by distributing copies of this file of photographs to every newspaper in this country.”

I opened the file keeping them hidden from Sanchez. The pictures were accurate but awful. The scene in my apartment showed one naked body, and another with his pants down. The photograph from the car park left little doubt as to what had been going on immediately before the victim died. The scene in the corridor was in colour showing blood all over the place and it looked as if I had cut his head off. But the worst picture was of the girl. She lay on that couch like some sort of doll. She had one leg on each side of the couch with her vagina fully exposed. She had one arm

hanging down on each side of the couch. It was obvious that her breast had been badly bruised. Despite her position she looked an innocent victim. I closed the file. Sanchez reached out to pick it up but I stopped him. It was obvious to me that if those photographs got into any sort of circulation my position in town would become totally untenable. I would be finished.

The senior FBI man smiled triumphantly, “Lady, your perform has turned to piss.”

“If my client was the person you claim she is, she would obviously have a great deal of useful information. For example, she might have Harry’s original record books giving full details of his suppliers and distributors. It would also include details of payments to politicians and police officers. Who knows, she may even have copies of the material which Tim Wilson the whistle blower had started to use to shut down dirty cops.”

That agents looked momentarily genuinely surprised. They looked at me.

“You gave Tim Wilson the information?”

“My client does not admit having given anything to anybody or having ever had anything to give, but supposing that she had given information to Tim Wilson and that he had been killed before he had moved up very far from the bottom, the information would still contain a great deal of useful material about police corruption, probably by now in the senior ranks of the force. I wouldn’t mind betting that part of the reason that the pursuit of Massacre Millie has continued for 10 years is that senior police officers fear that their names are still recorded in some information Massacre Millie has and represents a continuing danger to them.”

The agents looked mildly interested.

“If such records exist, we would very much like to see them. It may be that some concession can be given in exchange for full co-operation. I would have to seek authority. Because the case has such high profile, it would probably have to go all the way to the Attorney-General.”

Sanchez gave them a run down on what would be likely to be in the records. He had obviously looked at the microfiches, although I had strongly instructed him not to. It was actually a breach of client confidence but in the circumstances at that moment I didn't care. I was glad that he could give a picture of what material I had.

"I'll get back to my superiors in Washington and find out how far they are prepared to go. Most of the material is 10 years old now and would be out of date."

"True, but some of the items would be of continuing interest."

"Don't get your hopes up. I would expect that no matter how good the material is the only way we won't be trying to take you back is if you were to drop dead. It will take a couple of days. We'll be back in touch."

"Apart from a senior police officer wanting to protect his own hide, is there any other reason why this pursuit has gone on so long and why there is still such heat in it?"

"We can never close a file when one of the people killed has been one of our own agents."

That was bombshell. No matter how controlled I was trying to be, they must have seen my astonishment. I said something for the first time –

"Who?"

"The girl you shot. She was one of ours. When we heard you were on the way out, we infiltrated her."

I momentarily lost it. I forgot that we'd agreed that that Sanchez was going to do all the talking and there were to be no admissions.

"You put a woman into the hands of that sadistic monster? In the course of working for you she had to do every variety of sex with him. You hadn't even found out what

she was going to be in for and instructed her how to do it. When she died she was in the middle of one of his favourite tricks. The woman has to cry while he is fucking her. He makes them cry by twisting their breasts. She didn't know she was supposed to cry. She was trying to fight him off and screaming. He probably would have torn her breast off if I hadn't stopped him."

Out of the corner of my eye I could see Sanchez wince. I had made an admission. It didn't matter. They knew who I was.

"They have always wondered what the bruising on her breast was about. It didn't make sense that you had done it."

"Of course not."

"Well, we'll get back to Washington and we'll let you know."

Sanchez gave them his card and asked them to contact him. After they left the room, I could hear Leon giving them their guns back before the door shut. I could see Sanchez looking slightly reprovably. I think he was also surprised. He'd never seem me loose it before. I was a wreck. The disaster was all I could think about. After Sanchez left, I told the outer office no interruptions, I had some big job to do. I sat there trying to think it through.

I could fight the extradition. I had so many connections in so many places, I just might even succeed, even if those photos were circulated.

However, the chances were that the clout of the US and international pressure would lead even my closest associates into sacrificing me. The government would probably also find it very convenient if I were just to disappear. Although the government had on occasions used my cleaning service and rubbish disposal business, they had other resources. Going the public legal way was unlikely to turn out well for the government or me.

I could disappear. I had done it before. I might not be able to take as much money with me. Most of my cash was now well and truly invested. Although Sanchez would send me what he could, they would probably be able to freeze all of my assets.

There would be worldwide publicity if it came out that at last they had found Massacre Millie. I would be identified. Marc's political career would be ruined, but I didn't particularly care about that. What I cared about was that my three children would be ruined and their future life would be destroyed if they had a mother who was publicly and generally revealed as one of the best known criminals of the age. That was the picture that the world now had of Massacre Millie and I was unlikely to be able to change it. Also I had some feelings of responsibility to all my people whose self-respect and position in society was derived from me. Tim was only 9 years old. If it all came out and my organisation collapsed, someone else would want to take over what was left of my enterprises. They might think it advisable to eliminate Tim. If Tim survived to adult life, there would not be much of my organisation left for him to take over. His position would be extremely difficult.

The primary deal I had to do was to stop the publicity. I would never be able to stop publicity if I actually went back to the US. Even if I went voluntarily and there was no extradition proceedings, the press would inevitably find out that Massacre Millie was back and the publicity would be enormous. The only way they weren't going to take me back to the US would be if I was dead.

That night as soon as Marc got home it was obvious that the Police Minister had already spoken to him either directly or through some intermediary. He was a mixture of shock, terror and rage. He didn't even greet the children before he dragged me off to our room. He went on and on. His anger had a serious note of despair in it. He wanted to tear the room to pieces.

"How could you do it? You got me to marry you without telling me your past. You knew that if it ever came out we'd be ruined. You ruthlessly sacrificed me. Think what it's going to do to our children. What sort of monster are you? How many other people have you killed? What other outrages are going to come out? You inhuman monster."

It went on for two hours. I couldn't stand it any more. I wasn't going to give him the satisfaction of seeing me cry or looking repentant. But of course, he had a point.

"I just can't think with you making all this noise and being so angry."

Male anger means violence. Violence was probably the only way to shut him off. I took my clothes off and lay naked across his lap with my bottom sticking up.

"Beat me, but don't use your fist. I have got to be able to walk."

He paused momentarily and then began to hit my bottom as hard as he could with his open hand. It stung and hurt. At first I gasped and then I started to cry. It turned into sobs. At first I was crying because of the sting and the pain as he beat me. Then I started to cry about the life I had had. Always one way or another struggling against male determination to control and subordinate me. Here I was again with a male deliberately causing me pain. Marc had a streak of Harry in him too. Then I was crying about my little children. How would my little Lucy live with knowing that her mother was a famous multiple murderer. Marc went on and on with the beating, and my bottom was a sea of pain. I had to work out some sort of deal with them. It seemed inevitable that one term of the deal was going to be that I was going to have to die.

Eventually Marc got tired and stopped. He seemed to have fully vented his anger. I got off his lap and stood up. It hurt to walk. My bottom was a mass of bruises and pain. As usual, violence in men was a sexual turn on.

"All right. Now fuck me. But I'll have to be on top. It would hurt too much for me to be on the bottom."

I climbed onto him and put his penis into me and as it went on I couldn't help crying.

When we finished and I was lying beside him, I thought I would have to try to give him some hope of a solution.

“If it was just you and me, I know you would stand by me no matter what happened.”

Of course I knew he wouldn't, and once publicity occurred he would distance himself from me as rapidly and as far as he could.

“But the children couldn't manage everything that would be involved. It would ruin their lives. I have had an interview with the FBI agents. I will be able to do a deal with them. The deal is likely to be that I have to give them every bit of information I've got. They may then ensure there is no publicity.”

I paused and drew a breath –

“But a condition is likely to be that I have to kill myself.”

Marc didn't even seem to wince or shudder at that. He certainly said nothing to discourage me.

“That will protect the children and it will protect you. I have made arrangements with Sanchez. The house will be yours. All my investments and businesses will be run for the benefit of the children.”

We lay in silence for a few minutes.

“Please take some care in the selection of your next wife. She will have to be good to the children, and you'll have to treat her better than you have treated me. You are still just not careful enough about the women you get involved with. That new assistant you have in the bank that you are screwing, Celina, is a plant from one of the kidnap gangs. She is just there to collect information on suitable kidnap victims and to monitor the collection of the kidnap money for them. The police have even put a phone tap onto the bank to pick up all her calls. But you are not supposed to know that, so you will have to wait for another reason to fire her.”

He actually turned to look at me with astonishment. But he knew from long experience my information was likely to be accurate.

“You’ve been screwing her for the last six months just because she was young, reasonably good looking and made herself available. I wish to God you would just go to one of my brothels regularly if you need extra sex. You place yourself and me in a terribly risky situation. Without me to control things to some extent, you are going to get yourself into a lot of trouble unless you just use one of the brothels. Generally speaking the girls in my best establishment are good looking. They give value for money. At least the profit will be coming back to your own children.”

He didn’t say anything. I thought afterwards that the world had really turned topsy-turvy when a father’s expenditure in a brothel was going to benefit his own children financially.

After a bit I got up and found some bruise cream in the medicine cabinet. I rubbed it into his right hand which was quite bruised. I had to rub it into my own bottom. The pressure of rubbing the bruise cream hurt. I could see in a mirror that my bottom was bright red.

In the morning, when we went down to breakfast I couldn’t bear to sit down. Paulo noticed –

“What’s the matter mum? Why can’t you sit down?”

“I fell over in the bathroom and bruised my bottom.”

Each of the children had a little laugh.

After breakfast, I got a phone call from Sanchez. They wanted to meet again. This time at his office at 10.30 am. Leon drove me. I had to sit in the back leaning forward on the back of the front seat so that my weight was on my thighs rather than my bottom. It was just too sore to sit on. I told Leon the bathroom story. They arrived right on time.

“We would like at least to see the material before we commit ourselves.”

“My client would permit inspection, but of course no copies or notes could be taken and the inspection will have to occur in this office.”

“Fair enough. What we can get you in exchange for full co-operation is recommendations on sentencing and we would reduce the charges, but we would have to take you back.”

“What is important to me is that my husband and my children must not have their lives destroyed by the publicity. You said that the only way you are not going to be taking me back was if I dropped dead. My proposal is as follows. I give you everything I’ve got. Particularly, it will tell you who the dirty cops were that Tim Wilson never got time to expose. I bet that the people pushing this investigation still include people on that list. I have an accident and die. You close your file and there is no further publicity.”

“How are you going to die?”

“I will arrange an accident for myself so that my family can all attend a nice sad funeral and I can get a nice obituary in the newspapers.”

“Too easy. You’ll give us some charred body in a wrecked car that somebody will identify as you but it won’t be.”

He was obviously right that that was a possibility. Sanchez came up with a solution.

“No problem. We will have series of teeth x-rays taken. Recent dental x-rays are always the best way of identifying a body.”

The agents looked impressed.

“Do we get a look at the material?”

“Not until my client knows that in principle there is a deal. She has no interest in holding back any information if a deal can be done.”

“We will have to get back to Washington again.”

I had been standing throughout the interview but they put that down to my anxiety and tension rather than to its true cause. One of the agents came with me while I went to my dentist and had him take a full set of x-rays upper and lower “to let me know what dental treatment I need”. I introduced the agent as a friend from the US who would probably need some dental treatment himself while he was in our town. Probably as a precaution for being able to check the x-rays if needed, he had some x-rays taken of his teeth too.

I spent the rest of the day with the children. I’d always tried to make sure I had at least a couple of hours a day with them so it was really different for us to be together so long. They still thought it was funny that mummy couldn’t sit down.

The next morning at Sanchez office I had yet another example of negotiating when one side believes they have the upper hand. What I was offering them was to give them more information than they could have hoped for. I was going to close their file for them. All they had to do was to shut up and say nothing about it. But they wanted more.

“Washington has adopted a policy of trying to get financial compensation for crimes. We are looking at major criminals to pay compensation for all the troubles and costs they have caused.”

“What did you have in mind?”

“The bureau had to pay out substantial compensation for the death of the agent you killed. The State Police had pay out substantial compensation for the death of Tim Wilson. There have been considerable expenses in following up inquiries and in bringing us here.”

“What is the bottom line?”

“\$1,320,000. US of course.”

Sanchez with legal efficiency wanted to make sure he had the deal clear.

“The proposal is that my client give you full co-operation and discloses all of the information and records that she has. She pays you \$1,320,000. She kills herself. You suppress any publicity and you avoid disclosing who Massacre Millie was. Is that all?”

“We would have to be satisfied first that the material she has is worth anything, but otherwise that’s about the size of it.”

“What guarantee would my client have that there would be no possibility of adverse publicity after she had killed herself?”

“Just our word I suppose.”

“I suggest that the \$1,320,000 be paid into my trust account in this office. If there is no publicity within the first six months after her death, the money is transferred. If there is any publicity at all, the \$1,320,000 will be used to employ public relations consultants to deny the material as a scandalous lie and a police cover up. Nobody ever likes to hear ill of the dead.”

I couldn’t restrain myself –

“I have to pay \$1,320,000 US for the privilege of killing myself?”

“That’s about the size of it.”

“I had better get this documented in my client’s interest.”

Sanchez sat down at his own desk and typed the document quite quickly. When he had it finished he read it out. It seemed to say all the things we had discussed. It was quite brutal and direct that I was to kill myself. He gave it to the FBI agent. He insisted that all three of them sign. He then passed it to me –

“What name do I sign as?”

“It doesn’t really matter, since the document itself reveals both of your identities.”

I took the paper. I was surprised how firmly I was able to hold my own hand as I signed ‘Millicent McKenzie’ for the first time in ten years and for the last time. Sanchez signed as a witness. He put on a rubber stamp with his full name and firm address. He then photocopied it. He gave the FBI agents two copies. He gave me a copy and he kept two copies for his files.

“How long will we need to look at all the material?”

“There is a lot of it. It will take you several hours. You can use one of the inspection rooms here. I would like to be with you as you go through it all. I will have to have somebody there to ensure that you are not taking copies or notes before the deal is complete.”

“Fair enough.”

“I will go and get them from my safe now.”

While Sanchez was out of the room I just stood staring out the window at the city below. The agents just sat there staring at me. When he came back, Sanchez had the material including the address book of useful contacts and phone numbers, and the microfiches. We went to what he called an inspection of documents room which had a microfiche reader. He started them off looking at the pieces one at a time. After a while he called in one of his clerks and said to him –

“These gentlemen are inspecting highly confidential documents. They are not allowed to take any copies or notes at this time. Please stay with them for a while until I come back. Do not look at the documents yourself.”

He then took me back to his office.

“I’ve got everything in property and investment at the moment. What is the easiest way to raise the \$1,320,000?”

“We have two large apartments the sale of which will be completed within the next couple of days. That will bring in about \$500,000.”

We discussed other possible sources. It was not going to be all that difficult. I went back to my office and got my bookkeepers working on collecting the rest of the cash for me. Then I went home to the children again. They were a bit surprised that they had mummy for more time than usual two days in a row. When Marc came home he was looking anxious and worried. I took him to our room –

“I’ve done a deal with the agents. There will be no publicity. But one of the terms is that I have to kill myself. I couldn’t get out of it.”

“How will you do it?”

His absence of distress was most touching.

“I’m not sure. Don’t worry. It will occur in a way that will not cause any embarrassment. You will be able to have a nice tearful funeral. Your father will probably want to be seen there.”

The inspection took many hours over two days. I got reports from Sanchez from time to time.

“At one stage they really began to gasp about what a lot of hot material you had. They even told me that you were right that the higher up people who are pursuing you were on the list as cops on the take. They now have a pretty good clue about who

gunned down Tim Wilson. They reckon the material is the biggest break they've had in years.”

I delivered the rest of the money to Sanchez and he was able to show the FBI agents that he had \$1,320,000 in a trust account marked “Anna Mercanda Trust”. They confirmed that the deal was on and that the material was not only what I had promised but more than I had promised –

“It’s a goer. All we have to do is to put the rest of the deal into effect and we can be off back to Washington.”

“I take it you mean until my client is dead and that you are not going to wait around for the full six months.”

“That’s about the size of it.”

Again, I couldn’t control myself –

“I take it that means you would like me to kill myself as soon as possible.”

“You’ve got it.”

CHAPTER 16

Amended 20.10.2003, 24.11.2003, 18.09.2004

I spent the next day with the children as much as possible and sorting out with Sanchez what was to happen to the various businesses. I already had a Will that made detailed arrangements. The Will provided for my death prior to Tim reaching adulthood and different provisions as to what was to happen if I died after Tim reach adulthood. That part of the Will was not going to be required. It seemed to me I could not do anything to ensure that Tim would be my successor. I might in fact place his life in danger if I nominated him as my successor and there was somebody powerful enough who did not want him to succeed, so I made some modifications to the first part of the Will. Leon was to take over security. Max was to take over the cleaning and waste disposal business. They were to become in effect partners paying a percentage of the proceeds to the trust for the children. I did similar things with the restaurants, the bus company and the brothels. I also spent some part of the day working out how to do what I had to do.

The obvious method was to use one of the older cars and have it go out of control over an appropriate cliff. The obvious point to use was the big bend high up on Mt Bellevue, where although they had reinforced the guardrails, it had been done by a government contract that I wasn't in charge of. It had been done very badly. If a car hit the northern end of the railing it would go straight through.

That night, which I expected to be the last night, as I was in bed with Marc before we went to sleep we had one of the few intimate conversations we ever had.

“I suppose I got what I bargained for. You have given me three lovely children who, because of you and your family, have a secure and respectable social position. They are going to the right schools. They will grow up knowing the right people. With any luck, they will have respectable and decent lives. I just wish that sometime during our relationship I could have earned your love.”

“Don't think I'm not thankful for all the financial benefits you have brought to me. I appreciate the home you have given us. I have always been thankful for the high standard at which you have supported our entire family. I suppose I have been a bit

resentful that it has been you to do this rather than me. I suppose really I have also been resentful of the fact that from our earliest times together people have tended to think of me as your husband rather than as a director of a small bank and the son of a party politician. It took me some time before I got over being embarrassed or upset by people who would say to me with surprise – ‘Oh, you are Dama Anna’s husband.’

We talked for a half an hour or so before he fell asleep. Perhaps it was longer. Basically we agreed that it was the children that held us together. I was not left with much doubt that he was going to be able to cope with my disappearance from the scene with fortitude and courage. I do not think, in all fairness, that he was actually glad that I was going to disappear.

An alternative plan occurred to me as I was lying there after Marc went to sleep.

The next morning I tried to have breakfast with the children and see them off to school as normally as possible so that they would not have any indication that anything was going to happen out of the ordinary. Even so, I suppose, I gave each of them a hug and a kiss a bit more firmly and for longer than usual. Certainly, my little Lucy looked at me quite closely before she went off. I got our house security man to drive them to school. A bit after 9.00 am, I telephoned Marc’s office and asked to speak to Celina.

I had not told the full story about Celina. Just at that time a guerrilla group was starting up as the result of the political and economic frustrations they felt about the national front government and the power sharing of the two main parties. One of those groups was already trying to put together a bankroll and arms. They later became known as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Because they were a guerrilla movement and saw themselves as revolutionaries, they were not inhibited by the commercial considerations of most of the regular kidnap and ransom businesses. Carbonez and Blackavo and another of the drug syndicates had already come to a commercial accommodation with them providing funds for certain guarantees and protection. They had suggested that I might do the same. I saw a revolutionary group of guerrillas, however, as likely to get a lot of a people killed and generally to be bad for business. I had not contributed. None of the usual kidnap

groups would have thought of kidnapping me or any of my people. However, this guerrilla group might see a kidnap as at least a way of making me a regular contributor like the drug syndicates had already become. If not, they may be able to get a very big ransom for me. Accordingly they might take the bait. The Police were tapping Celina's phone to give the lead on this new revolutionary armed forces of Colombia. There was a risk therefore that the Police might interfere. However, I thought the chance was worth taking. I would far rather go out in a gun battle than having to drive myself over a cliff.

"Good morning, its Anna here. I know my husband is in a meeting." (I knew no such thing.) "And I don't want to interrupt him. Would you give him a message for me?"

"Of course, Señora."

"I'm going to drive up to the markets on Mt Bellevue. I am arranging a new bus route and there are some things I particularly want to see. I don't have time to use the highway past there and then drive back up the hill from the other side, I am going to use the old mountain road, but tell Señor Mercanda not to worry. I am going to take the housekeeper's car, the old red one and none of the kidnappers in that area will suspect a car like that and nobody knows that I am going. I should be back well before evening. I am going to leave in about an hour."

"I will pass that on to Señor Mercanda as soon as he is out of his meeting."

That suggested to me that she was not going to be passing on the message at all, at least not to Marc. He wasn't in a meeting. She should have just said that and put me through to him. She obviously had different plans. Accordingly, when I headed off I had my gun handy to my right hand expecting that there was at least a good chance that a kidnap gang from FARC would have a go at collecting me. If that failed, I would do some shopping at the markets and then go off the cliff on the way back. As I drove, the picture I had in my mind was of my little Lucy dressed for her first day in kindergarten wearing her uniform and looking very grave and serious about such a big event in her life. I started to cry. Think. Concentrate. I have to get this done properly. There mustn't be any suspicions. I might be jumped by some kidnappers. I

mustn't crash into their truck or whatever they were going to use. I might lose consciousness and actually be kidnapped. That would be too complicated. If I have to go off the cliff, I will think about Lucy as I go down. They will be my last thoughts.

I had only started up the hill when I noticed an old truck had fallen in behind me. A common technique for the kidnappers is to have one truck behind and then another truck pull in front. Often this will lead to a smash and the people in the car will be disoriented or lose consciousness in the smash and are easier to pick up. Accordingly, I slowed down progressively and kept my eyes peeled for the potentiality of the truck coming the other way to block me. In the old car I was driving, a slow speed was not suspicious. I wanted to make sure I would be able to pull up without losing control. I wound down my windows on both sides. The truck behind me followed for about the next five kilometres as we steadily went up hill. The road became narrower and progressively more winding. As I was approaching one bend, around came another old truck. I immediately slowed down. The other truck pulled in front of me. The impact was slight. Two men leapt out of the truck behind me. Two men leapt out of the truck in front of me. They raced towards me three to my side, one to the passenger's side. Two of the men on the driver's side had their guns out at the ready. The third had a rifle over his shoulder.

I grabbed my gun and fired at the three coming towards me on the driver's side. From all my training, I shot well and accurately. I dropped the two who had their guns out before they could fire. That gave me time to get the third one as he was taking the rifle off his shoulder. All three of them dropped. As I fired the third shot, there was a loud explosion behind me and I felt a tremendous blow to my right shoulder. The stupid bastard on the other side couldn't shoot straight and had shot me in the shoulder. My right hand dropped uselessly. It did not drop the gun. I took the gun out of my right hand with my left hand. I had practiced so much to make sure I could use my left hand with my gun, that I grabbed the gun with my left hand instinctively. As I turned towards the other window, there was the butt of a rifle coming towards me. I fired just as the butt of his rifle bashed into my head.

* * *

There was a light shining into my eyes. Momentarily I thought, so there is a life after death after all. I wonder whether I am in Heaven or Hell. As my mind cleared, I was aware that I was in a hospital room. The bright light was from somebody leaning over me shining it into my eyes. My head hurt unbelievably. My shoulder ached. I couldn't move. The light backed away. As it did and my eyes focused, I could see that it was a woman doctor with a stethoscope around her neck and a pencil light in her hand that she had been shining into my eyes. After a moment I recognised her. She had put herself through medical school working in one of the brothels. She recognised me. We both tactfully decided not to say anything about our recognition.

“Where am I?”

“Señora Mercanda, you are in your own hospital.”

“It is not my hospital really, even though I am one of the directors and I built it. What am I doing here?”

“Well, you had a bullet wound in your right shoulder which shattered your right shoulder blade. It must have been a fairly heavy gauge because it went right through you. You lost a lot of blood and you've had a blood transfusion. You were also struck heavily on the head. Fortunately, the blow hit your forehead, which is the strongest bone in your head. If you hadn't turned your head that way just at the right moment you would probably be dead. You have suffered a severe concussion. We have used some sedatives. Basically you have been out to it for 72 hours.”

I had a drip into the back of my hand and there seemed to be tube coming out from my shoulder somewhere. My vision was still rather blurred.

“What's in the drip?”

“We've been giving you some sugar, there is also some antibiotic in it in relation to your shoulder wound. Its mainly now saline.”

I realised also I had a catheter in.

“You’re man, Leon Carvardos, has been outside nearly all the time you have been here, except that he has been relieved a few times by Max. Your husband has called in a couple of times. Your lawyer, Mr Sanchez, has called. He asked me to let him know the minute you recovered consciousness.”

“OK, you could ring Sanchez. I suppose my husband will call in when convenient.”

The doctor left. My main thought so far as I could think with my splitting headache was that it was a damned nuisance that I was still alive. I’d have to do it again somehow. Still, a lot of accidents happen in hospitals. With the best of care, people with serious health problems can die. I was sure I would think of something. I probably dozed again for a few minutes at least.

The next thing I remember Sanchez entered. He seemed particularly cheerful. Sometimes when we were alone together he would behave in a very camp way. This was one of the occasions. He hadn’t been drinking but he was behaving almost as if he had. As he came through the door ...

“What? Still alive at forty-two? A fine upstanding lass like you.”

It was obviously a quotation from somewhere, but I didn’t recognise it. I was forty-two, I was, apparently, still alive. I was supposed to be dead.

“Come here you stupid bastard and give me a kiss. It is good to see that somebody is pleased that I am still alive other than my children.”

“Oh darling, I couldn’t possibly kiss you. You look absolutely hideous with that black eye and bruised head. I’ll have to shut my eyes.”

He shut his eyes but managed to give me a small semi-affectionate kiss on an uninjured cheek.

“What are you looking so damned cheerful about?”

“The whole game has changed. You are a national celebrity. Every women’s group in the country wants you to lecture them. The Police Chief has praised your bravery. The President is talking of naming an anti-kidnapping task force after you. Your husband has been offered a promotion into the ministry. It looks like they’re going to make him Assistant Finance Minister. There have been truckloads of flowers arriving at the hospital. You are a national hero. The bishop was having prayers said for you in all the churches.”

“Bad luck for the bishop. His prayers were answered.”

“What happened?”

“Your reputation for being a very good shot at close range has been supported once again. You managed to kill all four of them. Well, at least, you killed three of them on the spot and the fourth died later in hospital. Included in the four you killed was the leader of that gang. The government was delighted. Apparently he is an officer in this new revolutionary army that they are so worried about, FARC. They have arrested the girl at your husband’s office. They had her telephone line tapped so the Police got to the scene within minutes after you had shot them all.”

He sowed me the day’s paper – on the front cover it had an aerial shot of the car, the two trucks, three bodies on one side and legs sticking out of the window on the other side. It had been taken from the Police helicopter.

“The girl is under arrest and being co-operative.”

“Oh my God, she’ll probably talk about having had an affair with Marc.”

“I wouldn’t worry. If she just says that she gave the information to her brother and her boyfriend, both of whom are dead now, out of loyalty to them, she’ll get a fairly light sentence. If she said that she tried to get rid of you because she was having an

affair with your husband, the public will lynch her on the way to the jail. If she has any sense, she and her lawyer will shut up about that.”

“I’m glad of that. I would not want Marc to be involved in a rumour that he was somehow involved in getting rid of me. One of the boys would probably shoot him.”

“On my way over, I rang the FBI agents. I think it is just possible they have some good news.”

Sanchez and I discussed the various possibilities including that if I had to go ahead I could probably manage it somehow in hospital. I didn’t tell him why, but I told him that the doctor who was looking after me may well be co-operative. After a while, a nurse came in and told us that there were some men here to see me. Sanchez went out and came back a few minutes later with two of the FBI men.

“You’re off the hook. You are a national hero here. The state department have told us we’re to stop any thought of trying to extradite. Washington still says that the rest of the deal can go ahead. The information you have given us is a lot out of date, but still very useful. Already two senior police have been suspended pending investigation and a number of other state police have been suspended pending investigation. The complete details of the deal with the drug cartels have also given us new leads. At some time in the future we may want to you to testify by video link as Madam X, but that is the only risk of publicity you will have”

He then offered some polite congratulations on my survival and they rose to go.

“Does my client get to keep the money?”

“No, that part of the deal is still on. We want the money. However, you can keep it for the period we agreed before you forward it.”

“If my client is ever asked to give evidence by video link, presumably the press would identify her under her previous name. It is very unfair to her that she still has such a general bad press and that she is still seen as some sort of female monster. Her side of

the story ought to be told fairly. It's a matter of justice that she should be able to set the record straight.”

They were walking out the door. One of them turned:

“She should write a book about it.”

E N D