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The Lottery Winner

Pat Hanratty
3496 Woodbridge Court
La Crosse, Wisconsin 54601

April 2000

Tom Wolfe carefully studied the document in front of him. The Trust was airtight and provided Adam Gardner a safe harbor from probate.

“I’m eighty-three years old,” the man told him. “I don’t have long left and I don’t want the government to get my hard-earned money.”

Gardner had been the Chief Operating Officer at the La Crosse Insurance Agency for over twenty-years. In that time, he had amassed a fortune. His wife died the year before and he had developed lung cancer several months earlier. In addition, the prognosis was dismal. Gardner had, on the outside, six months to live, probably less.

“I want my two-children to get it all,” he said. “I don’t want the Democrats, and especially that S.O.B. in the Whitehouse, to touch it.”

Wolfe nodded. “This should take care of it,” he responded. “How long have we worked together, Adam?”

Gardner sat up straight in his chair. “You’ve been my contract attorney now more than two decades, Tom. And you’re the best in the business.”

“I’ve certainly enjoyed working with you,” Wolf said.

Tears came to the old man’s eyes. “You’ve saved me a lot of money over the years but...” he hesitated. “Tom, you’ve also been a good friend as well. You were there when Charlene passed and...” He hesitated. “That terrible thing involving Amory. You are the son I always wanted.”

Wolfe considered this. He could have been Gardner’s son. After all, he was fifty-five, the age his offspring were. Wolfe thought about his own family. His children were grown and living out of state and his wife, Eva, was entertaining working part-time in her job as an ultrasound sonographer. *How much longer do I have?* He pondered.

Adam continued. “It’s been good having a reliable friend in the business that I can come to for advice. But now my health is waning and my days are numbered. To be honest, I look forward to the end, to oblivion. That’s what really happens to us, you know. Oblivion.”

“Probably.”

He watched as the older man left his office and waited for the elevator in the hall. *Will I ever see Adam again?* Tom remembered how he had prostituted his values, lowered himself for this man so many years ago. *My ticket to success*, he thought.

Gardner seemed to sense his presence, turning to smile at him through the glass window before the elevator arrived. Wolfe always remembered that moment, that instance frozen in time. Since Tom was the only one left in the office, he grabbed his suit coat, turned off the lights, and took the next elevator down.

It was Saturday morning, late June, and Tom Wolfe decided to go for a run. He had read Adam Gardner’s glowing obituary in the paper that morning, barely two months after their last meeting. Wolfe noted the day and time of the service. He still had contracts with the old man’s company so an appearance at the funeral was definitely necessary. Tom put down the paper and headed for the garage, having already changed into jogging shorts.

His usual route was to jog two miles from his house on Pill Hill in Shelby, a wealthier suburb just to the east of La Crosse, to a Kwik Trip and then return. This day he decided to take a more circuitous course to a convenience store through a secluded area. It would be closer to six miles but, as always, he would buy a lottery ticket, which gave the trip purpose.

Eva was a late riser on weekends so he decided to quietly slip out of the house and complete his run before she awoke. He noted it was sunny, upper sixties and breezy, as he closed the garage door behind him. Wolfe made sure he had plenty of cash stuffed in his shirt pocket next to his cell phone in case he decided to purchase bakery or some other spontaneous buy. After stretching for ten minutes he took off heading east. Traffic was light as he ran down narrow side streets that lacked sidewalks, being careful to face traffic as he moved on the outside of parked cars. Wolfe knew that many drivers were inattentive, texting while they drove, so he had to be hyper-vigilant or possibly end up as a traffic fatality.

Thinking of this, his mind immediately drifted to his son, Bryce. Wolfe, not wanting to rehash the past, forced himself to refocus on the road in front of him.

Wolfe had been running since high school and was in very good shape for a man his age. Barely six feet tall, he was thin with brown hair and a beard sprinkled with gray. The only thing unusual about him were his large feet. He wore a size fourteen shoe.

After some time, the street ended and Tom continued the last mile through an open field. This was a secluded area and there was only a beaten path to follow. High grass and trees provided coverage, at least for a half-mile, until another street opened up. Two blocks further the convenience store came into sight.

Walking the last hundred yards or so, he stopped to stretch. *One could never do too much stretching*, he thought. As he ambled through the front door, he noticed how busy it was. This surprised him, considering it was barely seven-fifteen on a Saturday morning. Wolfe purchased some long johns and bought five dollars' worth of Megabucks lottery tickets. He considered that he didn't need the extra three twenty-dollar bills and put them back in his breast pocket. After paying he exited the store, slowly jogging across the street and into the wooded area. Wolfe stopped once more to stretch and then began his trek home. *Only three miles to go*, he considered.

Tom was careful to stay on the dirt path as he picked up speed. Passing some high bushes, he was suddenly knocked to the ground. Looking up, he noticed an overweight young man in a dark blue ski mask pointing a gun at him.

"Give me the cash or I'll blow parts of you all the way to China," he said.

Wolfe struggled to get to his feet. He tensed. "I've got it here," he responded, trying to pry the money from his pocket. The lottery ticket was wrapped around the bills so it tumbled out as well, falling to the ground.

"Give me the dough," the man demanded. "And the phone, too." He motioned with his left hand, which held the gun, and stuffed the money and lottery ticket into his pocket.

"Would you like some bakery?" Wolfe offered, trying to appease his assailant.

The man hesitated. "I'm diabetic, so no, but thanks for offering." He nodded. "You know, that was extremely generous of you, but I need you to make yourself scarce now."

Wolfe looked perplexed. His eyes became wide. Color drained from his face. *Is he going to kill me?*

The masked man motioned with his gun. "Run," he said, shooting the gun in the air.

Wolfe took off running, never looking back. He made the last three miles in less than twenty-five minutes. Arriving home, he called the police.

Wolfe stuck his head in the bedroom door as the doorbell rang. "Eva," he said. "Better get up. We've got visitors."

"You deal with 'em," she replied, pulling the covers over her head. "Let me sleep."

Cal was careful to stick the gun in his belt before slowly walking out of the field. He removed the ski mask and gloves, putting them in the pockets of his windbreaker. It was a short walk to his car, an old blue Plymouth. On the way, he counted his loot, \$66.19. He studiously examined the lottery ticket. Cal considered tossing it, since, except for bad luck he didn't have any luck at all, but chose instead to stuff it in his pocket with the money. He checked his cell phone to make sure there were no urgent calls from Livy or his mother.

Driving to his small apartment on the south side of La Crosse, he thought about how bad things had gotten. Cal Peterson was now sticking up total strangers. It would only be a matter of time before he was apprehended like his big brother, Rory.

Thinking of Rory, he brought his closed fist down hard on the steering wheel. *He was railroaded*, Cal thought. However, there was little he could do about it now.

"You've got so much potential, Calvin Peterson," he recalled his mother saying. "The doctors say you can do anything you put your mind to." Cal shook his head and stepped on the gas.

Turning onto Losey Boulevard, he thought about that. Cal had graduated from high school with honors although he seldom went to classes. His photographic memory may have had something to do with his success. He even attended junior college for a year before dropping out. That was the story of Cal's life: he didn't finish things. As a result, he was twenty-two now and not exactly setting the world on fire. There was nothing spectacular about him except for his big feet.

Cal realized that his downfall began when he had started using heroin. Considering his family history, he should have known better. But no matter what other people thought about the drug, Cal knew it helped block out the pain. The gnawing discomfort stemmed from a vague feeling of somehow not belonging, not fitting in--feeling like someone different than his own family. He didn't look like his parents or siblings and didn't act or think like them. For one thing, Junior had a dark complexion, hardly Norwegian in appearance. Cal senior had frequently called him a "sand nigger," and this further generated feelings of pain.

Of course, the problem was using heroin to soothe his discomfort cost money, lots of it. It cost more money than his job working nights at the cardboard factory could provide. Therefore, Cal had to supplement his income somehow, hence the stickup.

Cal was smart enough to know, at the moment, he was a nobody going nowhere.

He pulled the old Plymouth into the parking space off of Division Street and put the gun in the glove compartment before locking and exiting the car. Cal knew Livy was up, having the responsibility of caring for a newborn. Livy worked as a waitress at a local diner. Short, she was heavy set with big brown eyes.

Cal could hear Livy's voice as he opened the front door. "That you, Cal?"

Livy was still in her pajamas and slippers. Her brown hair was in curlers and a cigarette hung from her mouth. "We're otta' milk, Cal. The baby's hungry and there ain't no food in the frig. Do ya suppose you could get to Festival like, right now?"

Cal was tired, having worked all night but knew little Francois had to be fed. "Alright, I'll go before it gets busy. Can you borrow some milk from Missy next door in the meantime?" Cal asked.

Livy shook her head and took a drag from her cigarette. "She's always making derogatory remarks 'bout me and the baby. Says we're trash."

Cal smiled. "For whatever reason, you always seem to have problems getting along with other people, Livy."

"It ain't my fault if she don't like me. I think it's because little Francois's black an' all."

Cal rubbed his hand through his hair. "Why do I think that's a nonissue?"

Livy took a drag off her cigarette. She hunched her shoulders in a questioning way as she faced him.

His eyebrows narrowed. Cal's right lip curled up. "Because Missy's living with a Mexican. She's not gonna point fingers at other minorities."

"Jest go get some milk for Francois 'cause he ain't had nothin' since last night," she said, throwing up her arms.

"And maybe some baby food, too? Yuh think?" Cal shook his head and smiled as he walked to the door.

"Just go," Livy repeated as she turned on the TV.

"And what did I tell you about smoking in the house?" Cal responded as he reached for the doorknob.

"Oh, Cal," Livy called after him. "Get me some of them long johns, too."

Cal laughed. He should have taken the bakery he had been offered earlier in the morning. Cal's cell phone buzzed as he opened his car door. It was his mother, Beverly Peterson. "Yeah, Ma?"

He could hear muffled sounds on the other end of the line. "You know what today is, Junior?"

He put the phone on speaker and slowly pulled into the street. "No, Ma, I don't."

His mother's raspy voice grew louder. "A year ago today, big Calvin left this earth." He could tell now she was crying.

"You don't say," Cal said as he turned onto Fourth Street heading north.

"Killed by a stroke. It was so sudden. How do you prepare for something like that?"

"I don't know, Ma. Maybe he shouldn't have drank like a fish."

"Don't say bad things about the dead, Junior. They can't defend themselves."

"Maybe he shouldn't have beat you and the rest of us when he got plastered."

Silence on the other end of the line. Cal was always amazed at how his mother seemed to be able to turn her tears on and off.

"You should talk to Aunt Sally about all this, Ma. I don't have anything good to say about him."

Beverly Peterson paused before replying. "I guess you're too busy with that slummy girlfriend of yours to think about your own family. What's her name again?"

"Livy," Cal responded as he waited for the light on Main Street.

"Just make sure you don't get stuck paying child support for that black child of hers."

The light turned green. Cal floored it. "Francois' father sends regular checks. He's got a steady job at the railroad."

"You know how those people are, shiftless and all."

"I just told you Freddy's working and paying child support. Look, Ma, I gotta' go. I'm almost to Festival. Let's talk later."

"Alright, Junior, but don't forget to call your sister. Julie's pretty upset about the miscarriage. You could give her a word of encouragement."

"Okay, Ma, I'll do that. Later."

He pulled into the lot and turned off his cell. Cal realized he had to dump the cell phone he had taken during the holdup. Glancing at the name on the face, he looked around to make sure

no one was in the area before smashing it into the waste container. *Tom Wolfe, huh. Never heard of 'em.*

Tom Wolfe took a long draw from his Whiskey Manhattan. Sitting in his spacious living room overlooking most of Pill Hill, named for all the internal medicine doctors who resided there, he wondered who the young man was that robbed him earlier in the day.

Eva shook her head. “You could have been killed, Tommy. If that maniac had decided to shoot you, we would not have found your body for days.” She sipped her Gin and Tonic.

Eva Wolfe was tall but extremely thin. Of Norwegian descent, she had long blond hair and a pale complexion. An intense person and one without a sense of humor, she typified the ethnic stereotype.

Wolfe stared down at the brown Berber carpeting on the floor, still visibly upset. “When something like this happens, when one is confronted by one’s own mortality...” His voice trailed off.

Eva glared at him and crossed her arms. She took a sip from her drink.

“It was almost all over but the shouting,” he said, finally managing a smile. “I haven’t had this much fun since taking the bar exam.” Tears streamed down his cheeks.

Eva did not find this funny. “I don’t know how you can joke about something like this, Tommy. I almost lost you today.”

“Come on, Cookie. Try to look at the bright side of things. The guy only got a couple twenty-dollar bills. It’s not like identity theft. It was just a little...” he paused. “Scary.”

Eva forcefully slammed down her glass and picked up the phone. After a moment, she reached her party. “Tickey, is that you?”

Wolfe rolled his eyes. She was talking to another sister, making three today. Tickey Turner was five-years older than Eva and very opinionated. They became engaged in a heated discussion.

Tom grabbed his drink and strolled down the long hall leading to his den. He plopped down in from the big Mac, his new computer, which was the focal point of the room. Who could have done this? He began to type items under the heading, “robbery.”

Wolfe had spent time at the field where the crime took place with La Crosse’s finest earlier in the day. They’d noticed footprints from a size thirteen shoe but not much else.

Unfortunately, they hadn't found a slug from the assailant's gun. The only thing he knew about the perpetrator was he was overweight, diabetic, and left handed. In addition, he was a young man, maybe early to middle twenties, dark complected, and he had big feet for a short male.

Wolfe carefully considered this. If his assailant was a Type I, diabetic, there could be medical records. Unfortunately, he had checked with the police and there was no way they could search hospital charts because of confidentiality issues.

Contemplating this, he considered the perpetrator's other glaring characteristic, his handedness. Approximately one person in ten was a southpaw. Wolfe was intimately familiar with this because, as a lefty himself, he had been beaten by nuns at parochial schools until he'd learned to write with the right hand.

He was taken from his thoughts by sounds from the living room. Eva had finished her phone conversation. She was calling him.

Tom returned and sat down next to her. "So, what words of advice did Tickey give you?"

"My sister said you should sue the police department for incompetence."

He raised his eyebrows. "How so?" he asked.

"The man must have seen you in the convenience store or how would he know you had money? All the police would have to do is check the cameras that these stores have positioned above the counter when a customer pays for gas or other items. The suspect would have been somewhere in the picture."

"The lead detective informed me that the cameras weren't working. They were down for repairs when I was there. Tickey should quit dishing out advice when she doesn't have all the facts."

Eva shook her head. "No matter what I say, it's wrong. You know more than me. You know more than my sister, who worked for a detective agency. You are always smarter than anyone in my family, aren't you, Tommy?"

Wolfe raised his hands as if saying, 'what'd you gonna do?'

Cal was awakened early Monday morning by Livy. "I'm taking Francois to my sister's," she said as she slipped on her diner top.

"Go ahead," he responded. "I'll get him at noon when she goes to work."

“Yeah, Cal. Go back to sleep. You’re not working today so you could watch the baby but I’ll inconvenience my sister so you don’t get put out. Gotta get your sleep, right?”

“Yup,” he said, and turned over. He farted as if to emphasize the point.

It seemed like minutes later, the phone rang. “Hello?” Cal answered on the third ring.

“Hello, dear. It’s your sister, Juliette. Did I wake you?”

“No, of course not. What time is it anyhow?”

“Ten after nine, sleeping beauty.”

“Oh, Jeese. I gotta get my act together.”

Cal sat up and rubbed his eyes. “So, how’s life with you, Julie?”

There was a pause on the other end of the line. “Haven’t you heard, my insensitive brother? The baby died in my bosom.”

Cal reacted quickly. “Oh, Jeese, I forgot. I’m sorry, Julie. Ma told me. I should be more careful.”

“That’s better,” she said.

He hesitated. “So, you and Phillip gonna try again?”

Julie screamed into the phone. “I just buried my fetus and all you can say is, ‘are you gonna try again?’”

“Oh, Jeese. I guess that was the wrong thing. Are you planning on adopting?”

“Calvin Amory Peterson Junior. Are you ever going to learn to be sensitive to others? How about, I’m sorry for your loss?”

Cal put his head in his hands. “Yeah, of course, Julie. I’m sorry for your loss.”

“That’s better, Junior. Did you hear about Rory?”

Cal put his large feet on the floor. His back stiffened. “No, what happened?”

“They put our big brother in solitary confinement for fighting. Can you believe that?”

“Rory should never have been sent to prison. He wasn’t guilty of beating that old guy. Rory just had a crappy public defender, that’s all. The lawyer should’ve had the charges thrown out on technicalities. The case was all circumstantial.”

“You’re so smart, little brother. You should’ve gone to law school.”

“Sure,” he responded. “If I could afford it, I would.”

Julie laughed. “Well some lucky sucker certainly can. The latest lottery winner was drawn right here in town at a convenience store in Shelby. The jackpot was worth over twelve million dollars. Can you believe that?”

Cal looked over at his pants lying on the chair next to his bed. His ticket was inside the pocket. “No,” he said. “I can’t.”

Cal tried to keep a low profile but the media was anything but respectfully distant.

“Calvin Peterson,” the man said. “You have just won twelve million, two hundred and twenty thousand dollars. Congratulations.”

Cal had never seen money like this before. Where was he going to put it?

The man at the convenience store seemed to be reading his thoughts. He shoved a card into his hands. “My uncle’s the vice president of Rock Bank in downtown La Crosse. He’ll get you set up.”

A sudden insight struck him like a blow from a hammer. He didn’t have to work anymore. Cal didn’t have to live in some crappy apartment on the south side of La Crosse. He could buy a nice house in the burbs, purchase a fancy car--he could be like Eddy Facci. An abrupt gloom came over him. His distant friend Eddy had, like Cal, won a lottery and, within a year, lost it all. He was busted, broke. Friends he never knew came out of the woodwork, all asking for money. And Eddy gave it to them.

“Hold it right now,” he said to three reporters snapping pictures. “I don’t want my name or picture released to the newspapers or any other media outlet. I want to stay anonymous, understand?”

The reporters backed off and Cal was careful not to tell anyone else about his good fortune. He decided the first person he would talk to was Livy but even this conversation would be fraught with landmines. Livy liked to talk. In fact, she had a big mouth, Cal realized. In addition, his girlfriend had two sisters and a mother who all needed money.

Cal put his head in his hands. His situation wasn’t much better. Julie was struggling financially and his mother was subsiding on a small social security check and food stamps. They all needed money.

Cal had a sudden epiphany: he couldn’t save the world. But the one person he could help was his brother, Rory. To do this, however, he would need to get a law degree and that would

take time--and money. Now Cal had the money. Next, he would need to hit the books. He'd need to excel at college then law school.

Cal's first stop, however, would be Rock Bank.

August 2010

Tom Wolfe swiveled in his chair as he looked out the window of the small rental apartment. Gone was the big house, his wife, everything. His only possessions now were the desk in front of him and chair he now sat in, and a sprinkling of furniture. Wolfe no longer had a view of Pill Hill but instead saw his neighbor's south side flat. He had fallen far.

It started to unravel five years earlier with Eva's stroke and subsequent hospitalization, before she was eventually placed in a long-term care facility costing over six figures a year. This left her severely disabled and comatose. Disability insurance: that's what they told Wolfe he should have had. His colleagues admonished Tom that, in light of his wife's strong family history for cardiovascular disease, he should purchase a disability policy. That would help insulate him from the escalating costs of extended treatment in case the unthinkable ever happened, which, of course, it did.

Wolfe should have been thinking more rationally on the subject. Four of Eva's five sisters, her mother and grandmother, in addition to extended family all had suffered strokes or heart attacks. And, at the time, he had enough money for insurance. Tom just didn't want to part with it. As a result, his savings and investments were drained. Wolfe was able to get some of the money that was tied up in his law firm, since it was an LLC or Limited Liability Corporation, which partially shielded his assets. But over time, the hemorrhaging continued. Finally, he had to liquidate his house.

In the midst of this financial debacle, a wealthy former client emerged to accuse Wolfe of unethical behavior, bringing charges against him. The partners at his firm did not want to have anything to do with the matter so they asked him to leave their group. Tom knew that if he were convicted, he would be disbarred and never practice law again. In that event, he would almost certainly end up bankrupt. Wolfe shook when he thought of this. He had grown up in abject poverty and had no intention to returning there.

Suddenly, the tables were turned. Wolfe was no longer a prestigious and sought-after lawyer. Now he had to hire an attorney, and this was expensive. Moreover, he knew and disliked

all the legal practitioners in the area, and he couldn't afford to import one. Wolfe had to settle for a young lawyer who had only two-years of experience. Someone named Calvin Peterson. To say the name rang a bell was an understatement. Could this be Beverly Peterson's child?

Peterson, of course, was a common name in the Norwegian plagued La Crosse area but, all the same, he felt compelled to find out. Cal, as he preferred to be called, offered to do this pro bono--in other words, for free. Since they were perfect strangers, Tom thought this odd. However, he had little money, so he wasn't about to object.

"Tell me, Cal, how many cases have you won so far?" Wolfe asked on their first meeting, being careful not to sound sarcastic. They were sitting in Peterson's spacious downtown office. The young man was seated behind a large oak desk, feet on top of it, exuding confidence.

Wolfe studied Cal. About five-feet seven inches, he was slightly overweight with a dark, pock marked face and short brown hair. He also noticed the fellow was left-handed. *Could he be the man who robbed me a decade ago?* The details of that morning had been singed into his memory. He couldn't seem to let go of it.

Peterson produced a newspaper article that read: 'Rory Peterson released from prison after being wrongfully incarcerated for twelve years.' There was a picture of Cal embracing the other man, both smiling.

"That's my brother," Cal said, pointing to the illustration.

Wolfe looked closely at the caption. He didn't notice any family resemblance between the two men. The man on the left was tall and light skinned and Cal was, well, neither. Tom put his hand to his face and absentmindedly rubbed his chin.

"He was my first case and, so far, most successful. Lawyers can't advertise wins and losses so you'll have to trust that I'll not only win this for you, but also get you a sizable settlement."

He looked again at Peterson. Wolfe remembered that Sasha, the young woman from his past, was short and recalled her family had struggled with their weight. He carefully examined his new attorney but couldn't find any resemblance. Tom felt a pit in his stomach as he considered the person who had meant so much to him so many years ago.

"Tell me, Cal. Are you related to Beverly Peterson?" He waited expectantly for the answer.

Cal hesitated. He cocked his head. His eyebrows narrowed. “Yeah. Where do you know Mom from?”

“High school.” Sweat began to bead on his forehead. He blushed.

Cal came around his desk and sat down across from Wolf. “Were you and Mom... close back then?”

Tom laughed, being careful to avoid eye contact. “We might have been shared some classes.” He felt sweat engulfing his armpits.

Cal stared blankly at him.

“You seem awfully confident for a newbie,” Wolfe noted, abruptly changing the subject. He smiled. Meanwhile, his stomach was doing flip flops. His thoughts began to race. *OMG. This is Bev’s son.*

“I finished at the top of my law school class,” Cal said, sitting up now and walking back to his desk. “I could have gone to any firm in the country but I chose instead to practice right here with the good people of La Crosse.”

Wolfe shook his head. “Why are you not charging me for your services? I know you said you empathize with me being a lawyer, but that doesn’t seem convincing. Of course, I’m not complaining. I’m just wondering if, like me, you’re a closet idealist. I did ten percent of my client load pro bono. Most of the attorneys I know would have charged me double.”

Cal hesitated before responding. His eyes moistened. “You’re probably right. But you know I’ve had my share of tragedy as well. My dear father was felled by a stroke, just like your Eva. I can’t get Dad back, but I can help another human being, and a fellow attorney, who is going through now what I had to endure in the past.”

A look of embarrassment clouded Tom’s face. *Don’t look a gift horse in the mouth*, he considered. He hesitated before speaking. “You seem like a decent fellow. Are you a family man, Cal?”

Cal nodded. “My wife’s name is Livy and I have a ten-year old biracial son, Francois. Livy went back to school and became a court reporter. You might have seen her. She’s often assigned to Judge Jackson’s court.”

“What does she look like?” Wolfe crossed his legs as he waited for a response.

“Short and very muscular. Livy’s a real athletic type. She used to smoke like a chimney but now she’s got her act together.”

“Well that’s really nice, Cal. You seem to have the world by the ass.”

“It wasn’t always this way. I developed a problem with drugs when I was young but after sitting down and listening to my dad, I was able to shake it.”

Wolfe crossed his legs away from Cal. “I need an attorney who’ll get his hands dirty if necessary. Someone who can be vicious when the time comes.”

“I can get real ugly for my clients. Real ugly. Any other questions?” Cal asked.

“This fellow we’ll be facing in court, Marshall Graham, has deep pockets and connections in the community. Don’t go with a jury verdict. The judge used to be my golfing partner. Trust me, he’ll be fair.” He smiled.

They continued to discuss the case. Wolfe came to understand that Peterson, although a young man, seemed incredibly versed in the law. Like himself, he could connect seemingly unrelated legal principles and argue them authoritatively in court. He could spot a legal loophole and capitalize on it like a cat pouncing on an unsuspecting mouse. Tom realized he was in good hands. In addition, Wolfe was now convinced that Cal and him somehow shared a deeper connection.

Two months later they won. A year afterwards, they triumphed in civil court and won over five million dollars for Tom Wolfe. Cal refused to take a cent. Of course, there were endless appeals and, both attorneys knew, that could go on for years.

During this period, Wolfe felt an overwhelming urge to level with Cal, tell him the truth about his past and their deeper connection. He knew, however, that would open a can of worms. Tom let his better judgment rule his actions. *That way no one gets hurt*, he reasoned. *Let sleeping dogs lie.*

Sometime later, Eva expired. Wolfe had already grieved her parting so the funeral was more of a formality. However, he took the opportunity to connect with some former business partners and other people from a bygone era.

As his legal trouble came to a close, Tom decided to open a small office downtown. He was in his middle sixties but still enjoyed practicing law part time. In addition, since he’d been exonerated, Wolfe had clients he’d worked with for many years who were still loyal to him. As a result, he enjoyed a busy practice.

Even though he had survived financial debacle and abandonment by his peers, Tom Wolfe did not feel satisfied or vindicated. He felt unease because of what he had done in the

distant past. Like someone winding through a 12-step program, he sought to make amends and they would be big ones.

Wolf cringed as he considered the years gone by and the task in front of him. He would need to seek out the one surviving person he had harmed and make things right. *Tomorrow*, he thought. *I'll start tomorrow.*

One week later.

“Did you know my dad?” he asked. The young man was standing at the front of the line of family members.

The Schumacher-Kish Funeral Home was busy today, with side-by-side services. There was a particularly somber mood in the room as many felt the deceased had parted prematurely, the result of a fall.

“Yes,” he responded. “I did. He was a fine man. And I sympathize with you. I lost my mother recently as well.”

“Can I ask your name?”

“Certainly. Calvin Peterson Jr. I’m an attorney in town.”

“Did you work with my father?”

“I wasn’t his partner but we had dealings. They were all good, too. In fact, it’s fair to say we shared a special bond, a closeness, most people don’t. He was like a father to me.” Cal smiled as the words left his mouth.

“Thank you for coming,” the young man responded. He quickly turned and shook the hand of a woman standing behind Calvin, the first of many mourners.

Cal walked up to the casket and looked at the man inside. He could make out large feet at the bottom of the coffin. *So, this is how it ends*, he thought. *Oblivion.*

On his way out, he stopped and stared at the name of the deceased, Thomas Oliver Wolfe. As Cal turned to leave, he thought he saw Wolfe’s reflection in the window, smiling. *Impossible*, he thought. *There’s only oblivion.*

September 1978

“Tom, I’m in a bind here,” Adam Gardner said.

They were sitting in attorney Wolfe’s downtown office.

“What seems to be the problem, Adam?” Wolfe asked.

Gardner strolled to the window, looking out over the Mississippi River below. “One of my little excursions seems to be causing a problem or two.” He raised his eyebrows, giving Wolfe a knowing nod.

The younger man wiggled uneasily in his chair. “Sasha?”

Gardner nodded.

“How so?”

“Well, to start with, she was supposed to be on birth control but it either didn’t work or she purposely went off it. Gave birth two-weeks ago.”

Wolfe stiffened. “You should have said something sooner, Adam. I could have helped with this issue.”

Gardner sat down opposite him and stared straight ahead. “We’ve been together for over two years now. In fact, I met her the night we had dinner, with you and Eva, at the Freight House. Remember? It was on my sixtieth birthday and Charlene threw a surprise party for me. Anyway, Sasha worked at the bar that night. I gave her my business card and we hooked up after that.”

“I remember now. She was a short, attractive girl with dark features, early twenties. Looked Italian.”

“You’ve got a good memory, Tom. She’s actually Sicilian.”

Wolfe beamed.

“Kept her in a nice apartment on the north side. I thought things were going great between us until she got pregnant.” Adam paused, putting his hand to his chin, deep in thought.

“Her full name’s Sasha Groppi and she gave birth to my son, Amory.” He shook his head. “She’s making loud noises now, wants me to marry her...” His voice trailed off. Gardner turned and faced Wolfe. “Can you get rid of this problem for me, Tom?”

Wolfe hesitated. “She can be... taken care of, but it’ll cost. What about the child?”

“Money’s no object. But I want to keep an eye on Amory, monitor his progress, and, naturally, send him to the best schools.”

“I’ll need an address, Adam. The least you know about this, the better.”

Gardner hesitated. Tears came to his eyes. “You’re a good friend, Tom. I’ll make this up to you. As soon as I know the problem has been... resolved, I’ll transfer all my contract work

your way. Of course, you may have to hire another attorney or two to handle the paperwork.” He smiled.

Wolfe stood. “Consider it done.”

Twenty-four hours later.

Sasha Groppi shook her head. “I won’t do it,” she said in a loud voice. They were standing in the living room of her apartment.

“You can’t blackmail a man like Adam Gardner. He’s too powerful.” Wolfe was measured in his speech, as though talking to a child.

“I need money to pay my medical bills, Tom. I’ve got health problems.”

“I know. Adam’s willing to help out but he needs you gone. We can set you and Amory up in a nice place in the cities.”

“No. I was raised here. I don’t want to live in Minneapolis.”

“That point is not negotiable.”

“I’m supposed to just leave because that pig wants me to? I’d rather be dead.”

Color enveloped his face. He slapped her. “No, you don’t. Don’t you ever say that!”

Sasha began to cry. “I told you I’d leave if you ever hit me.”

He grabbed her shoulders firmly. “I’m sorry I struck you but I need you to listen now. Adam is willing to keep you in the way you’re accustomed but just not here. Do you understand, Sasha?”

She broke free and ran to the front door, opening it. “Get out!” she screamed.

Wolfe nodded. “We’ll talk tomorrow,” he said, as he passed through the entrance.

“I’m done talking,” Sasha yelled, slamming the door behind him.

Then there’s the other way, he thought.

Two weeks later.

“We haven’t spoken in years, Bev,” Wolfe noted. “Probably not since high school.”

They were sitting at the Hungry Peddler restaurant on La Crosse’s south side, sipping coffee. It was just past breakfast and most people had finished eating and were filtering out.

Beverly Peterson beamed. “Those were good days, Tom. I was a cheerleader and you were the quarterback on the football team. We made a great couple.” She looked down at the table as the smile drained from her face. “I wish I could go back and change things.”

Although nearly forty, Beverly looked quite appealing to the discerning eye of Thomas Wolfe. Short and trim, she wore her brunette hair long, falling half way down her back. It was more than that though. The low gravelly voice still drove him crazy. He half wanted to jump across the table and have her there. Better judgment, however, ruled Wolfe’s actions.

Tom straightened up and took a sip of his coffee. “Me, too,” he said. “But what’s done is done. But I’ve got something that might help your situation.”

Beverly leaned forward in her chair. “My situation? You always thought I was stupid, didn’t you?”

Wolfe shook his head. “Of course not, Bev. You’re just not book smart.”

“No. I don’t have a photographic memory, like you.”

“People are smart in different ways. You’ve got good people skills, Bev.”

“You’re just being nice, Tom. You must want something.”

He nodded. “Actually, I’ve got a proposition for you. I know money’s tight with Calvin out of work and all. I also know it’s tough working those long hours at the daycare.” He paused.

“What are we talking about here, Tom?”

“I need to find a good home for a child, Bev. His mother died unexpectedly and I don’t want him placed in foster care.”

Color flooded into Beverly’s visage. “How old?”

Wolfe avoided eye contact. “A month, almost.”

“Oh my God. You’re talking about a newborn.”

“The father is prepared to pay generously for...”

“Why doesn’t the father just raise the kid himself?” she screamed. A waitress stuck her head out of the kitchen to see what was going on.

Wolfe changed positions in his chair. “His name is Amory. I can offer you ten grand a month to take him. What do you say, Bev?”

Beverly Peterson sat back in her chair. Her eyes grew wide and her face became white again. “What do I tell Calvin?”

“Tell him Amory needs a home.”

Beverly looked away. “Ten grand a month?”

“You’ve got two kids at home, Bev. And I’ve doctored the birth certificate to...”

“I’ll do it. When do we start?”

Wolfe smiled. “Right away.”

An hour later, Tom was back in his office. Sitting in his chair, he swiveled, facing the window, trying to postpone the inevitable. He took a long breath before dialing.

“Is it done?” he asked. Wolfe listened a moment and then hung up the phone. He turned and silently sobbed before throwing up in the wastebasket next to the desk.

March 1979

“Adam, I have no control over what Mrs. Peterson does. Apparently, she’s having differences with her husband over the child’s name. Calvin doesn’t seem to like ‘Amory.’ He wants his son named after him.”

They were speaking on the phone. Judging from his labored breathing, Wolfe could tell Gardner was extremely upset.

Gardner spoke in a loud voice. “Now listen, Tom. Amory was my mother’s maiden name. It’s important that he be called that.”

Wolfe shook his head. “Bev is dealing with a raging alcoholic so I can’t imagine she’s got much leverage.”

“What kind of a home did you put my son in, anyway?”

“Adam, I had no idea Calvin’s drinking had progressed to this point. Anyway, he seems to be calling the shots.”

“If I’m giving them a significant sum of money, then they’ve got to play by my rules. Understand?”

“I understand. I’ll try to set up a meeting here as soon as possible.”

“Just remember, Tom, if these people don’t abide by what I say, I won’t pay them a cent. In which case, you can find my son a different home.”

Wolfe moaned. “I know Bev has already bonded with the child.”

“So what?”

“That means she could raise a ruckus, Adam. If we’re not careful, this could come back to bite us.”

“Then talk to them. Just remember, my rules or no money.”

Wolfe heard the phone go dead.

He dialed his secretary. “Get Bev Peterson on the phone.”

“Bev, don’t do this. Just name the boy Amory. Is that so hard?” Wolfe sat behind his large oak desk in an authoritative position.

“Listen carefully to me, Tom. Calvin is dead set on naming our son after him. We call him ‘Junior.’”

Tom gasped. “Your husband didn’t even show up for our meeting today. What does that tell you?”

“That he’s busy. Calvin got a job as an alcohol distributor.”

Wolfe let out a loud moan. “They let an alcoholic peddle booze? Never mind. What about the money, Bev? Isn’t that why you did this in the first place?”

“Money’s not everything. Anyway, we’ve got enough of it now to keep me in cigarettes. Besides, Calvin has really bonded with the baby. I haven’t seen him smile like this in years.”

“All right. But my client is prepared to cut off your funding. Are you ready for that?”

Beverly Peterson shook her head and spoke in a low gravelly voice. “I never thought I’d love a strange baby like this. But it’s as though, you know...” She paused. Her eyes moistened. “We don’t care that much about the money but we’re willing to compromise a little. We’re keeping the baby and his name will be Calvin Amory Peterson. Someday he’ll understand.”

Wolfe blushed and looked down at the notes he had formulated for today’s meeting. He hesitated. “I don’t think my client will go for that,” he said, trying to shake off the feelings that were arising in him. “Amory needs to be his given name.”

Bev smiled. “That’ll never fly with big Calvin. Never.”

Tom sat back and shook his head. He was sweating now. “It doesn’t sound like you’re in control, Bev. Would it be better if I talked to Calvin?”

Peterson stood. A look of fear flashed across her face. “Don’t ever do that, Tom. Promise me.”

He shook his head and looked away. “As you wish, Bev.”

As Bev reached his office door she stopped and turned, dropping the purse on the floor, and walked briskly towards Wolfe who was now standing. “Tom,” she wailed in that voice as

she threw herself in his arms. “Bev,” he responded as they grappled together, eventually settling on the couch before disrobing.

April 2015

“Dad, Oliver’s saying some weird things.”

Calvin put down his newspaper and faced his teenage son. “Francois, what is the problem? Can’t I spend a quiet Sunday morning without being interrupted?”

“Sorry, Dad. It’s just that we were watching cartoons. The wolf was chasing a rabbit and suddenly little Ollie blurted out that he was a wolf when he was big. When I asked him what he meant by that, he said you would understand.”

“Understand what? He’s three-years old. Kids that age don’t make sense.”

“Whatever. I’ve got to get to basketball practice. Okay?”

“Yeah, go. By the way, where’s your mother?” Cal started to get up.

“Mom’s at that bake sale, remember? You know, the one with all those rich ladies.”

“Jeese, I forgot. Okay, then, I’ll talk to Ollie.”

“Thanks, Dad,” Francois said as he picked up his duffle bag and headed out.

Cal slowly descended the stairs, walking carefully into the lower level living room. He could hear the television blaring as he approached. Curled up in a blanket on a loveseat was his son, Oliver Thomas Peterson. “Turn down the TV, Ollie,” he instructed.

The boy did as he was asked, his eyes never leaving the screen. He was chewing on the blanket.

Cal plunked down on the seat next to him. Cartoons were playing and a wolf was talking to a horse. Ollie seemed fixated on the events playing out on the screen.

“You like Wolves?” Cal asked.

Ollie turned to him and laughed. “Yes, Daddy. When I was big, my name was Wolf. Don’t you remember?”

“No, I don’t. Tell me about that.”

“You robbed me, remember, Dad?” Ollie laughed again before returning to his cartoons.

Cal blushed. He felt his heart pounding. “Just watch your TV program,” he said, standing to leave. Cal felt like his head was spinning as he ascended the stairs. He would need to make a

phone call to the only person in town who could understand what was going on. He would have to talk to Dr. Jim Jennings.

“What you have here is a child who remembers a previous life,” Dr. Jennings said.

Cal crossed his legs and stared sideways at the old psychologist. Although trained as a traditional clinician, Jim Jennings had drifted to the left field bleachers over the years. He believed in reincarnation and worked with families that were caught up in this issue as a result of having a child who claimed to have been reborn.

Livy, slumped down in her chair, wore a strained expression. Her eyes caught Cal’s as if questioning the reason for their visit.

Jennings was a tall man with a crop of white hair sticking straight up from shaved side burns. A blue sweater and slacks covered his thin torso and legs.

“I still don’t understand,” Cal said. “You mean he was someone that I knew in a past life?”

Jennings smiled. “Based on what your son told me, he was a colleague of yours several years ago, another lawyer, perhaps. His language is limited, of course, being a three-year old.”

“Who? What was his name?”

“Did you know an attorney named Wolfe? I’m not sure about the first name.”

Cal nodded. “Yes, Tom Wolfe. We were close before he died.”

“Well, apparently Mr. Wolfe had some unfinished business with you.”

Cal’s eyes met Livy’s. “I don’t understand.”

Jennings stood and walked to the front of the desk. “Children in this situation are very peculiar. Let me give you the whole scoop.”

“That would be good.”

“These kids usually begin talking about a previous life between the ages of two and four. By the way, these memories often fade a few years later.”

Cal laughed. “Well, that’s a relief.” Livy stared straight ahead.

“Many of them died violently before they could tie up loose ends. So, it’s possible they return for that reason. In Ollie’s case...” Jennings’ voice trailed off.

“Go on,” Cal said. He was sitting straight up in his chair now.

Jennings hesitated as he read from prepared notes. He said, “I was a bad man. Kill someone.””

Livy shook her head. “Who? Who’d he kill?”

Jensen made a face and grimaced. “The only thing I could get out of him was ‘pretty woman.’” He raised his eyebrows before speaking again. “Ollie said, ‘Daddy’s mom.’”

“But my mother died of natural causes...” His voice trailed off. Cal remembered how he always felt different from his brother and sister, like a stranger, an outlier. He looked and acted differently as well. Was it possible?

“Does any of this make sense to you, Cal?”

He shook his head. “As far as I know, I wasn’t adopted. I think my parents would have told me something like that.”

“Is there anyone in the family that can answer this question for you?”

Cal looked at Livy. “Aunt Sally?”

Livy hunched her shoulders and addressed the psychologist. “She’s Cal’s mom’s older sister. Sally’s got heart problems but her mind’s still sharp.”

“I could meet with her,” Cal said.

“Do that. We’ll talk next week, same time.”

“Aunt Sally,” Cal started. “I have a few questions for you.”

They were sitting in Sally Forester’s small living room in the Bethany Lutheran Assisted Living facility. The room was sparse with a table and two chairs. A refrigerator and stove completed the living area. A small adjacent bedroom and bathroom were attached.

She was a thin, diminutive woman with white hair who sat in a wheel chair, arms folded in front of her. Aunt Sally wore a thick white sweater. Cal and Livy were perched on either side of her in the only other chairs available.

Sally nodded. “I’d like a cup of java. It acts as a pick me upper in the afternoon.” She motioned to the carafe on the counter near the sink.

“Sure,” Livy said as she rose to find a cup.

“In the cupboard to the right of the frig,” Sally said.

Livy opened the door. On the left side of the shelf were four cups, which had clearly been used frequently. Two were chipped and none of them looked like they had been washed in ages. Livy took one and rinsed it out and poured Sally a cup of coffee from the carafe.

“Aunt Sally,” Cal said. “You were Mom’s sister. Do you have any information about... ?” He hesitated. Finally, he shook his head. “About me being adopted?”

Strangely, Sally smiled. “I thought you’d never ask,” she responded.

Cal raised his eyebrows. “What do you mean?”

“Brace yourself, Calvin. You’re absolutely correct. You were adopted.”

Color rushed to his cheeks. Cal breathed heavily and stared at the old woman. Livy reached to hold his hand but he pulled away. “By who?” he belched out.

“By your mother, Beverly Peterson. The better question would be: who was your biological father?”

He now looked at his aunt sideways. His eyebrows narrowed. “Pray tell.”

“Adam Gardner was supposedly the man who sired you. However, I don’t buy that. Your father was someone named Thomas Wolfe. He was a local attorney...”

“I know who he was,” Cal said, interrupting. There was a stern tone in his voice. His face was now red.

Sally continued. “You see I’ve got inside information. A student of mine, Sasha Groppi, was your biological mother. She was a gifted student who shared much of her personal life with me.”

Cal changed positions in his chair. “Sally,” he began cautiously. “What subject did you teach?”

Sally laughed out loud as she tried to sip her coffee, spilling some on herself. “I was a nursing instructor at Viterbo College, now university, for over thirty years. Sasha was one of my most colorful students.” Sally shook her head as the smile drained from her face. “She met a sudden, untimely end. To this day, no one knows what really happened to her but... I think I do.”

“Tell me,” Cal implored. Livy moved her chair closer to him.

“Sasha said that she was worried about Wolfe killing her. She told me the story of Adam Gardner, the old man who thought he was your father. Gardner wanted her to relocate to Minneapolis because she was beginning to cause problems for him, making too much noise, that sort of thing.”

“Tell me about Adam Gardner.”

“As I said, Cal, he was a very wealthy man. Gardner had several women he kept but was very discreet about this. From what I understand his wife looked the other way.”

“How do you know Tom Wolfe killed her?”

“I can’t prove it but this is what Sasha was concerned about. She didn’t want to leave La Crosse because of her connections with the faculty at the nursing school and because of health issues. She was seeing an endocrinologist for brittle diabetes. Although only in her early twenties, Sasha had major health problems.”

“My mother was a diabetic, too?” Cal’s eyes met Livy’s.

“Type I, and it was serious. She needed daily shots of insulin. Without it, she wouldn’t have survived.”

Cal put his head in his hands. “So, all someone would have had to do was hold her somewhere without insulin and wait ‘till she died?”

Sally nodded. “Of course, it would probably take some time... maybe a few days, or weeks.”

“Let’s say you’re right, Sally. Let’s say Wolf killed Sasha, my mother. Why would he give me to Mom for adoption? Why not give me away on the black market? You could never trace it.”

“Because he was accountable to Adam Gardner, an influential man in La Crosse at the time. Gardner wanted to keep you close. And there was one other thing. Wolfe tried to raise you in his own home, but that didn’t take.”

“What happened?” Cal asked.

Sally looked off into space. “Around the same time, Wolfe’s son, Bryce, was killed in a grisly car accident. This pushed Eva, who was high strung anyway, off the deep end. When the story that Bryce had been drunk and was responsible for the carnage hit the newspaper, people were outraged. A big expose followed on the two college co-eds also killed in the crash. It was pretty sad. Anyway, Eva began drinking heavily and told her husband to get rid of Amory. That’s why you came to be brought up in Bev’s house.”

“You said Eva had a drinking problem? How do you know this?”

“La Crosse is a small town. Anyway, my brother-in-law later worked with her at Skemp, where she eventually ended up in treatment.”

Cal looked straight ahead. His hand closed tight on Livy’s. “Now I understand,” he said.

“Thank you for seeing me on such short notice,” Dr. Graham. Cal was sitting in his host’s condo in downtown La Crosse. “This is a beautiful place. It must have cost you a few pennies.” Spacious glass windows looked out over busy streets four stories below. Ethan Allan furniture surrounded a large gas fireplace on plush oriental carpeting.

Graham shook his head. A prominent local psychiatrist, he was a short, pudgy man with a large head covered with black hair sprinkled with gray. Cal remembered that Graham referred to himself in the third person and talked down to people, a habit that helped Cal easily defeat the little man in court. “Marshall does not like to make small talk. You indicated you wanted to discuss Mr. Thomas Wolfe. What, specifically, did you wish me to elaborate on?”

Graham neglected to offer him refreshments, Cal noticed. It was mid-afternoon, he surmised, so a glass of wine or other libations would have been appropriate. For a person who supposedly understood human behavior, Dr. Graham appeared glaringly deficient in the social graces.

“In the case you brought against Mr. Wolfe, you said he murdered your niece yet you lacked evidence to support this conclusion.”

Graham crossed his legs. “As Marshall has repeated in court, a man named Joey Callas approached me with information about my niece, Sasha’s, disappearance and her subsequent demise. Mr. Callas lacked the courage to make a statement to this effect even after he was subpoenaed. I suspect he feared for his life.”

“Was that the unethical behavior you referred to in your charges against my client, Thomas Wolfe?” Cal asked.

“He had my niece murdered, Mr. Peterson. Murdered. Wouldn’t you be upset if that was your family member?”

Cal shook his head and smirked. “Well, it didn’t hold up in court and you were left holding your johnson after this Callas guy bailed on you. If you remember, we subsequently took you to civil court on libel and made a small killing there as well. It wasn’t smart to proceed without legal representation.”

“Did you come back to rub my nose in it, Mr. Peterson?” He turned and faced Cal directly. “You know this isn’t a very friendly town for homosexuals and Marshall Graham is a homosexual. That could have factored in as well.”

Cal hesitated for a moment. “I don’t think so. Several of the legal aides in the DA’s office are gay. Anyway, you didn’t have any hard evidence. Do you have any idea where the body is? It would sure help if we had a body.”

Graham hung his head, looking down at the floor. “No,” he finally murmured.

“What motive would my client have had to do this?” Cal continued. “He was a respected member of the bar and a married man with a family. This makes no sense.”

Graham rose and walked to the window facing Main Street. After a moment, he turned his head back towards Cal. “Marshall’s niece was carrying his child. DNA would have confirmed this. After what Sasha told me privately, I’m convinced your client ended her life.”

Cal’s eyebrows narrowed. “Do you know what happened to the baby?”

“He was placed with a family but I don’t know their name. It could have been anyone. I had hoped to get this information in court.”

“Wouldn’t there be a paper trail?”

Graham pursed his lips. “It was a secret transaction. I’ll probably never know who my great nephew is.” He hung his head.

Cal sat back in his chair. “Let’s have a glass of wine to celebrate.”

“Celebrate what?” Graham’s face turned red. He clenched his teeth.

“Let me have the honor of introducing you to your great nephew. Marshall Graham, this is Calvin Peterson.” He pointed to himself.

Graham’s eyes lit up. “My God, you’ve got Sasha’s eyes. And your hair it’s... identical. Except for those big feet, you’re the spitting image of my lovely Sasha.”

“The feet,” Cal said with a smile on his face. “Those belong to Wolfe.”

“Marshall will break out the wine. This is certainly something to celebrate.”

Cal laughed. “It certainly is.”

“A man I deeply admired killed my mother,” Cal said. Tears began to stream down his cheeks. “And now... and now he’s come back, reincarnated, as my son.” He put his head down and began to sob.

They were sitting in Jim Jennings’ office. Cal had decided to come alone for this session, leaving Livy at her court-reporting job.

“Everything I thought was mine never existed. My family...” He shook his head. “Now I’ve been awakened to a new reality.”

“This has to be traumatizing for you, Cal,” Jennings said.

“What do I do now?”

“Live your life, what else?”

“What about my biological father who’s now my son. What do I do with that?”

“Well, I know it sounds very Oedipus-like but I’ve seen this before and it’s been reported in the literature. I suppose your relationship with both Wolfe and Ollie is an expression of karma.”

“So how am I supposed to handle this?”

Jennings put out his right hand in a halting gesture. “Very carefully. Your father killed your mother, probably to climb the corporate ladder. Afterwards, he saw the error in his ways and wanted to make amends. Wolfe died before he could do that so he came back as your child.”

“You think little Ollie understands this?” Cal asked.

“Of course not. He’s three years old, for God’s sake. He’s not yet capable of comprehending any of this. My advice is just live your life and realize that you have things to work out with Ollie.”

Jennings hesitated before proceeding. “You have a hidden bond with him, a cord that binds the two of you. Somehow, Cal, you have to make sure that any feelings expressed henceforth are of love, not hate. As the parent, you’re in the driver’s seat now.”

“You know, Jim, I’ve felt like an outsider my whole life and all because I never got a chance to be raised by my mother. Thomas Wolfe took all that away from me.”

“Cal, for your own good, don’t get vindictive. You have a chance to start over with Ollie.”

Abruptly, Calvin Peterson Jr. rose and walked to the office door.

Jennings couldn’t interpret the expression on his client’s face.

Turning, Cal said his final words. “Thanks for all your help, Jim.”

He quietly closed the door behind him.