

ONLY GOLDEN  
FINGERS  
COULD PLAY  
SO HEAVY

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RoCeMaBra Publishing

Dedicated to my Mom and Dad



## CHAPTER ONE

### *1948 - Henry*

Henry Mall began his shift at the chicken farm much like he did every day. Rising at 4 AM, he walked the short distance from his modest home over to the hatchery building. In this line of work, he was literally up before the chickens and the rooster took its cue from him to begin the day.

The smell was atrocious, as one would imagine when 1,500 chickens were cooped up in the building, providing the farm with a modest output of eggs, and occasionally, a new batch of hens.

“Cock-a-doodle-doo!” began the rooster as Henry entered, and he failed to let up for nearly 30 minutes. The chickens began rustling from their slumbers and Henry went about the business of checking each and every coop for the presence of that day’s bounty. Before his shift was over, he would collect hundreds of eggs and clean up gallons of manure. One would think it to be an existence that no one could tolerate, but Henry had the secret to keeping the job on this side of fun. It was the rats. Yes,

rats. They scurried off to wherever they hid during the day when Henry arrived in the morning, but a brave one would show his whiskers and as often as not, it would be his last time in the light. For Henry carried with him each shift a .22 caliber pistol, and liked to take pot shots at the rats when they would appear.

Henry's passion for rat killing was his only vice. He was a good employee, arrived on time, worked unsupervised, and was responsible for the success of the hatchery in more ways than even his bosses suspected. His diligence was not unobserved, and soon Henry was promoted from egg gatherer to egg inspector. This gave him the opportunity to work with the automatic machinery, and be even more responsible for the success of the business.

Once collected, the eggs were carefully placed into a large vat with a feeding tray off of the end. The eggs rolled individually onto a conveyor belt, making their way to the inspection station. Along the way, they were graded for size, quality, and color and most important of all, the light test. Each egg was individually checked in front of a strong incandescent light to ensure there were no surprises inside. Occasionally, that randy rooster would get into the chickens' areas and one never knew if a new little chick was going to appear.

The strong light would reveal the tiniest speck of blood, a new life, and that egg would be taken off the production line and into the "nursery" portion of the hatchery, where it was allowed to grow for twenty-one days to become a new chicken life. Henry nurtured each of these eggs as if they were his own, and named each emerging chick.

But Henry had a lonely life. Sure, he had his friends at the hatchery, but his family was gone. No, they didn't die,

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but they were stuck in a time and a place where life moved even slower than it did on the hatchery. Henry had to get out, find the excitement, so he left his family when he was just fifteen, gathered all his worldly possessions and took the train to California on his first great adventure.

Henry wasn't exactly unhappy in his time in North Dakota; in fact, some of those times were the happiest of his life. The cold and brutal winter storms would sometimes take a break, and the skis and sleds would come out. His brothers and sisters, there were eight in all, and the kids from the neighboring farms would all get together and race. There were no hills, but that didn't stop them from pairing up and running through the snow, pushing their partner on his or her sled, striving to be the first over the finish line. And summer, though a tough time in general due to the Great Depression, still could be fun with cow patty throwing contests, horse riding, sleeping in the hay, hiding in the corn fields, riding on the tractors. It seems there was no end to the fun.

But still, Henry knew there had to be more for life to offer. His parents weren't entirely happy that he wanted to leave the homestead, but begrudgingly gave their assent. When he arrived in California, he moved in with an older cousin who helped him get his job at the chicken hatchery. Although Henry hadn't worked with so many chickens before, he had been raised on a farm. He did have the basic skills, if it could be called that, to do the job.

Henry had always clocked in each day shortly after 4 AM, until his big promotion. After that, he got to "sleep in" until 6 AM. But what a difference the two hours meant. For Henry, accustomed to getting into bed at 8 PM, could now spend a little more time in the land of the

living, checking out the nightlife, so to speak, of the big city.

Henry wasn't a drinker, but he liked music, and the local bar, the Stomping Grounds, had the best Country Western band in the area, at least in his opinion. The "Scuffling Scrappers" knew what people liked, and every weekend the place was full, people dancing, drinking, and occasionally fighting. But the music kept going, and the Scrappers were gaining a reputation as the Next Big Thing. When word got out and a local talent agent saw them, it looked like it was their ticket to stardom. They went off to the big city to record their first record, "The Boots are Covered with Manure." Henry adored the band and had always wished he could be a part of it. In time, he was able to sit in with them while he was learning to play the guitar. He wasn't very good at first, but with practice and perseverance, he found that he was improving daily. He also started to build up a small record collection, and listened to the radio vociferously, learning all the songs from his favorite County Western artists.

Henry was overjoyed when he was invited to join the band full-time. He soon began playing the circuit, visiting other clubs in the area. He dabbled in writing songs, but could never quite get past the first verse before running out of ideas. There wasn't a whole lot you could write about in the life of a Chicken Farmer that would inspire folks to kick up their heels and dance to the tunes that the band put together.

Fridays and Saturdays now had a special meaning to him. He was out with friends, playing the music that he loved, and most importantly, meeting girls.



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His first great love was Sandy Thompson. She, like him, was born in the mid-west but came to California as a young child when her father joined the U.S. Air Force. He was gone much of her early life, and when he was killed during World War II, it was a blow to her and her entire family.

That tragedy left Sandy a broken teen, and she took to drinking, smoking and general carrying-on. But, she had the looks. A lot of guys at the high school wanted what Sandy had to offer, and Henry, even though he was not a student, admired her from afar as he saw her in the bar each weekend. No one seemed to care that she was only sixteen. They still served her beer, and she would slip out every once in a while, returning a half hour later, her clothes a little tussled, her perfectly coiffed hair a little messed up.

Henry longed for a chance to be with Sandy, but she never gave him as much as the time of day. Maybe it was his shyness, maybe it was the constant stench of chicken manure that never quite would leave him, but there was to be no love for Henry and Sandy, despite his claim to his friends that he “would marry that girl, someday.”

When Sandy turned up pregnant one day, to no one’s surprise, Henry knew that he had lost her. Truthfully, if he was willing to admit it, he never had her. She would not be his girlfriend; she would not be his wife. She and her family moved, and he was sure he would never see her again.

Then there was Miriam Jonas. Miriam did not have a lot of friends, and she didn’t frequent the bar. Her father was the local veterinarian, and she spent a lot of time with the animals. But outside of that she was quiet, kept to

herself most of the time, and spent a lot of her quiet time alone in the library. Henry enjoyed reading, but rarely had time for it. He would drop in at the library from time to time and Miriam would always be there. She was pretty, in an odd sort of way. Something wasn't quite right about her, but Henry found her attractive nonetheless. Perhaps it was the way her nose sat to one side a bit; perhaps her eyes weren't quite the same color. Perhaps it was that streak of white hair among her brown tresses. Still, he was attracted to her solitude, like his own, and thought once again, "that's the woman I'm going to marry, someday."

After months of visiting the library, Henry finally decided to ask her out. She, shy as she was, said no. Henry was crestfallen, but he would not give up. The next week, he asked her to go on a picnic with him, and she finally assented.

Saturday at noon, he picked her up in his 1945 Dodge truck, and they took off for the park. Laying out the blanket and the food, they enjoyed the warm weather, and found that they were beginning to hit it off. Although she was born in the area, they did not share any mutual experiences of growing up. Their mutual shyness, however, was a topic for conversation. They spoke of missed opportunities for friendship and young love, and hours they had each spent alone. They found they had much to converse about: their thoughts, their dreams, their plans for the future. When Henry told her about his thoughts on marriage, she was taken aback, but on reconsideration, fancied herself a bride and even warmed to the idea. "It's too early to speak of that", she said, but they did allow themselves time to fantasize about their life together and what their kids would be like, and what it

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would be like growing old.

Henry and Miriam seemed a perfect fit, instantly compatible, a match made in Heaven. By the end of their day together, they had already fallen in love, and the future seemed so bright.

It was just past 6 PM, when they left the park to head home. They were talking and laughing and still thinking about their life together when they were about to pass the Stomping Grounds. Jerry Naylor, already with a few beers in him, pulled out in front of them, giving Henry no time to react, and the two vehicles came together in a horrendous crash, throwing Miriam through the windshield. When the ambulance came it was too late, Miriam was dead.

## CHAPTER TWO

### *1949 - Henry and Juliette*

The months since the accident had been hard on Henry. He withdrew into his shell even more, and stopped socializing at the Stomping Grounds. His day-to-day existence returned to getting up at dawn, off to work, back to home, doing a little yard work, listening to the radio, off to bed. His only public outlet was Saturday, when he would do some shopping at the local grocery. He missed Miriam terribly, and could barely think of anything else.

One Saturday in June, while doing his weekly shopping chore, he noticed Juliette Arden, a new young female clerk at the store. Once again, he was sure this was the woman of his dreams, but he stopped himself, knowing how his past two efforts had failed so badly. Still, he couldn't deny he was attracted to her.

Juliette had a fresh face, long brown hair, a cute turned up nose and eyes that twinkled. She greeted every customer with a smile, and was quick to listen to his or her stories and troubles. She seemed wise beyond her seventeen years.

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Henry learned that Juliette was a recent transplant to California. Her parents had relocated from Kansas, where her father had worked for a local newspaper. Juliette's younger brother, Arthur, was fourteen, and although he was a good kid, he was also prone to mischief.

Juliette had heard of Henry through the grapevine and about the accident that had killed Miriam, but had never met him. When Henry stood in her line at the checkout, she was unaware of who he was. As he moved toward the counter, a slight smile graced his lips, the first in months.

"Hi, you new here?" Henry asked.

"I've been working here a couple of weeks," Juliette replied. "My family just moved here from Kansas. I'm Juliette. And you?"

"I'm Henry," he stammered, his innate shyness beginning to take over. "I work over at the chicken hatchery."

"I've heard your name around," she said, and Henry brightened up. "Someone said you used to play in a band at the Stomping Grounds."

"Yeah, a few months ago, before the accident. But I broke my arm, and never went back even after it healed," he recalled sadly.

"I'm so sorry. I heard about the accident and the poor girl who was killed. Dr. Jonas and wife shop here and they are still in mourning."

Henry hung his head, and Juliette quickly added "But they don't blame you, they know that that Naylor fellow was drunk, and shouldn't have been behind the wheel. It's a shame he didn't get more jail time. The judge let him off easy."

"Seeing him around town makes my blood boil, and I

don't even go into the Stomping Grounds anymore because he still hangs out there," added Henry.

The conversation lapsed into an uncomfortable silence while she finished checking out his groceries, and when the final total was paid and Henry began gathering up his bags, she told him to come back and see her again, she enjoyed talking to him.

That brief encounter put a little extra spring into Henry's step. He seemed to have new demeanor that had been months in suppression. Suddenly, Henry felt as if the world existed for him again, and there was possibly a brighter future ahead. For the third time, Henry felt he was in love.

Juliette was not so easily smitten. She enjoyed her conversation with Henry, but thought him a little morose. Still, as the week passed, her thoughts often turned to that conversation, and how it had started off so happily, but turned dark. She hoped their next encounter would be a little more positive.

Her day off was Wednesday, and she decided to see if Henry might like some company at the chicken hatchery. At lunchtime, she stopped by, to see if he might be taking a break. She wasn't quite prepared for the stench, and with the noise of the conveyors carrying the eggs for inspection; Henry didn't notice it when she said, "How can you stand it?"

Henry looked up, surprised. "Oh, sorry, I didn't hear you," Henry said as he switched off the equipment.

"I said, how can you stand it? The smell, I mean," as she wrinkled her nose.

"You get used to it, I 'spose," he replied. "I've worked here a long time, so I don't really notice it anymore."

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“I don’t think I could ever get used to that!” she said. “It’s too overwhelming.”

As a rat scurried between the two of them, Juliette shrieked and Henry quickly pulled his .22 from his back pocket and shot it.

“My Hero!” Juliette laughed, “That took me by surprise. It’s not like it’s the first rat I’ve ever seen. My brother Arthur once found a nest of them in the basement back in Kansas, and let one loose in my room. Now there was a shock!”

“Your brother sounds like a little brat,” declared Henry.

“He’s OK, he’s only fourteen and likes to make a bit of trouble when he thinks it can get me riled. I guess that’s what little brothers are for.”

“Is it just the two of you?” Henry asked.

“Well, plus my mom and dad, of course,” she giggled.

“I’ve got eight brothers and sisters, but I’m second to oldest, and my youngest brothers are twins, so that made double trouble,” Henry replied back. “They were pretty young when I left home.”

“I miss, ‘em, though,” as he turned again into a silent reverie.

After a few moments, Juliette interrupted, “Don’t they live around here?”

“No,” he replied. “They live in North Dakota. But they are coming out to live here in a few months, except for my brother Ed, who’s going to take over the family farm.”

“Well, I’m sure it will be nice to all be together again.”

“I hope my dad will be able to find a good job,” he mused. “He’s done nothing but farming all his life, although he does have good handyman skills.”

“This town could use a good handyman, perhaps that

will suit him,” she offered.

“My parents have had it hard. If it wasn’t for all the kids, my dad might have had to go to war. Lucky for us, he didn’t have to,” Henry thankfully replied.

“My father was the sole breadwinner in the family, so he also didn’t have to serve, though he would have been willing to do so, if asked,” she added.

The conversation lagged, then Juliette continued. “The smell is really getting to me. “Maybe we can step outside?”

“Outside is not much better, but if you’d like, we can hop in the car and head into town for a bite to eat. If I’m not being too forward?” Henry asked.

“That sounds nice, let’s go!”

As they left for the car, Henry noticed that he did not smell all that great, and Juliette, while not trying to notice herself, couldn’t help wrinkling her nose.

“Oh, I forgot about how the smell clings to the clothes. Maybe now’s not a good time to head into town. I’d really need to clean up a bit first.”

“Perhaps we can do something this weekend?” she asked.

“You work on Saturday, don’t you?” Henry asked her.

“Yes, but I’m off at four. Dinner? Would you like to eat at our house? That is, if you don’t think my brother will be a problem.”

“I think that will be nice,” he said. “May I call in the next couple of evenings?”

“Yes, please do. I’m at 6823. Or just ask Gladys the operator for the Arden house. She can ring us up.”

“OK, will do.”

As Juliette drove off, Henry watched after her, not quite believing all that was happening. Could she be the one?



## CHAPTER THREE

### *1950 - Henry and Juliette*

When Henry and Juliette had been dating for a year, Henry proposed. Juliette did not hesitate to accept, and they planned an August wedding. Juliette asked her best friend, Sarah Jennings, to be her maid of honor. Henry asked his brother Ed to be his best man.

Juliette was well liked in the community, and several of her friends asked if they could be one of her bridesmaids. Before long, her bridesmaid list was almost as long as the guest list for the wedding itself. Not wanting to offend anyone, she agreed that all of them could be her bridesmaids, but rather than stand at the altar with her, they would occupy the first few pews of the church where the wedding would take place. The local paper saw the novelty of the situation, and did a short feature on the day of the wedding.

August 12 arrived quicker than anyone could have expected, and they were soon a married couple. They honeymooned at Lake Tahoe, spending a total of three days in the splendor of the mountains. When they

returned, they moved into Henry's small home and soon Juliette brought her feminine sensibility to make it a real home. Juliette made sure that Henry had clean clothes to wear and Henry made sure they had plenty of fresh eggs. Juliette kept her job at the grocery store. Henry built a workshop where he could spend time on "his projects."

When the couple had time to spare, they spent their evenings enjoying radio programs like *The Lone Ranger* and *The Adventures of Superman* and occasionally going out to the movies.

Now that most of Henry's family was in town, he was upbeat and largely happy. He enjoyed reading letters from his brother Ed, now back on the family farm, and getting updates on his nephew and niece. Juliette's brother was now in High School and playing on the freshman football team, the "Tigers." As a couple, they were like a literal picture of Americana, straight out of Norman Rockwell painting.

But all that changed when Henry had the accident that could have taken his life.

As Henry clocked in on that fateful Thursday, he went about his work as if it was any other day. Inspection was going fine until the conveyor belt seized up and production came to a halt. Henry went into the motor room and saw that a rat had gotten wedged into one of the gears. Blood and fur were everywhere, and the only way to get it going again, was by sheer muscle. He grabbed an iron bar, and attempted to lever the mechanism backward, so that he could clear the obstruction.

The bar slipped, and Henry stumbled, falling into the machinery. With his hand crushed into the gears, he

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screamed out for help. Although his co-workers arrived quickly, it was too late for Henry, and three of his fingers had been severed.

Henry was rushed to Dr. David Orson, the family physician, for treatment. Although he was able to stitch up the wounds, there was no possibility of saving Henry's fingers. He would never play guitar again.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### *1951 - Henry and Juliette*

It seemed there was no luck for Henry, except bad luck. He sunk into a deep depression, and missed several weeks of work. His boss was sympathetic, but needed Henry back on the job. After convincing him that Henry was absolutely essential to the operation of the hatchery, he returned to work.

Although Henry was technically crippled, he did not let that deter him from doing a good job. Egg inspections continued without any problem, but Henry could no longer hold his .22 pistol, and shooting rats was no longer possible.

But the rat problem persisted, and Henry turned his ingenuity to solving the problem once and for all. Noting that the rats tended to nest under the coops, he devised a tiny electrical fence that would maintain a steady current, greeting any unlucky rat that encountered it a nasty, often fatal, shock. Before long, the rats were keeping clear of the henhouse altogether, and Henry's boss commended him on his invention. Once again, things were looking up.

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Outside of work, Henry liked to relax at home. They bought their first television set from a local appliance store, a giant 17-inch screen. Although it cost nearly a month's wages, the convenience of having it in their home and the envy of their houseguests was incomparable. They were able to pick up a couple of local stations, although one of them was a bit snowy. They especially enjoyed watching the news and their favorite newsman was Hardy Rochester, ruggedly handsome and a wise communicator. The I.B.C. newscast was known as the up and coming information source of the day, and many tuned to it each evening. Their coverage of local events was unprecedented, and set the standard for follow-on stations for years to come.

On this particular evening, Hardy introduced a new sponsor, Fender Guitars. It seemed an unlikely arrangement, until their first advertised product, the Broadcaster, made the connection obvious. But when they also showcased the new Fender Precision Bass, Henry took notice. He had always wanted to play bass, but disliked the upright and bulky basses seen so often in combos of the day.

Henry longed to own the instrument, but kept his desire to himself. He knew that even if he had it, it would be a challenge to play, considering his missing fingers. And the cost was another issue. How could he justify spending \$300 so soon after purchasing their first television set?

Henry mulled over it, over and over, running the figures, looking at future income and finally broke down and brought it up with Juliette. While her response was not a direct "no," she did not think it was a wise choice at the time.

“We need to be thinking about putting some money aside for the baby.”

“Baby? Are you preggers? How?”

“No, I’m not, but we need to plan ahead. It will change our lives. I won’t be able to work anymore, and you might have to get a second job.”

“But won’t it be nice to have a little one around the house?” she continued.

“Maybe so, but we’re not ready now. We can barely afford the grocery bill.”

“And so you want to buy a bass guitar, rather than eat?”

“Well, when you put it like that, I guess not. It will have to be a dream, unfulfilled, for now,” he declared, wistfully.

Henry put the thought of the bass guitar in the back of his mind, but never really forgot about it. He would continue to dream about the day when he would buy it and proudly be able to play in a band again.

In the meantime, Henry continued to find pleasure tinkering in his workshop. Although it was a challenge, he was able to adapt certain tools so that he could use them despite his mangled hand. He found his left hand getting stronger, and his ability to use it for more precision work was improving.

Henry was starting to develop a reputation as an inventor. His Rat Deflector had caught the interest of a local hardware store, and soon Henry was building them for sale to other local farmers, and even some households that were plagued by the vile creatures. The materials were inexpensive, and Henry saw a little bit of profit from his hobby. He started stashing a little away for that “rainy day.”

Juliette also enjoyed her job at the grocery. She arrived

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for work at 8:30 AM and opened the store for the first customers at 9:00. She always had a friendly smile, and enjoyed conversation with the regulars. A few of the older ladies frequently asked when she was going to have a baby. Although they meant well, Juliette grew tired of the constant prying, but took it in stride. She was on her own schedule, and the time was not right.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### *1952 - Greta*

Henry and Juliette were excited to see that Governor Warren was a possible presidential candidate in this year's elections, but when he dropped out of the race to support General Eisenhower, Henry and Juliette followed suit and supported the new candidate as well. Although Juliette wasn't old enough to vote, Henry was looking forward to casting his first presidential vote.

Juliette proudly wore her "I Like Ike" button at the grocery store, and drew some criticism from those customers that supported Governor Stevenson. Both Juliette and Henry liked to watch the TV ads for the campaigns, and felt like they were part of the process, even though most of the action was on the East Coast.

Hardy Rochester was at his peak in the reporting of the campaign, and was nominated for several broadcasting awards, increasing his own stature as a newsman to watch. When Hardy announced the nomination of Eisenhower to be the party's candidate, it was one of his highest rated airings.



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But outside of the presidential race, both Henry's and Juliette's families were pressuring them to start a family. They were still not ready, but to appease the family, they capitulated and adopted Greta. Greta was beautiful, had blonde hair and brought a touch of magic into the Mall household. Juliette would cradle her, and Henry enjoyed feeding her from a bottle, and before long she was eating solid food.

In the late summer, the three of them began taking long walks in the park, and Greta grew quickly. Before long, Henry and Greta would run in the park, and Greta would love to fetch the stick. She would come back, drop it at Henry's feet, and then jump up in his lap and lick him on the face.

Henry and Juliette loved Greta, and Greta loved to spend time with Henry at the hatchery. Greta would lie at his feet as he manned the conveyor belt, and occasionally chased after the brave rat that did not pay heed to the Rat Deflector and tried to enter the building.

Sometimes Greta would sit and listen to the chickens cluck. It was as if they were having a conversation, and Greta was their silent confidante. One particular pair seemed to catch her fancy, and sometimes she would sit by their cage for hours on end.

The crisp autumn nights were a real treat for the trio. Henry would set fire to the week's trash pile, and he and Juliette would sit in the swing, watching the flames flicker until the entire pile burnt down to a few embers. Greta would run excitedly around the fire while the flames were licking at the sky, so fierce, yet so beautiful. Eventually, she would calm down, move into a position by Henry and Juliette and enjoy the ember glow together.

The November elections came and Henry proudly cast his vote for Eisenhower. By the next morning, the results were coming in, and it looked like a sure victory for their candidate.

## CHAPTER SIX

### *1953 - I*

It was March, a new President was in office, and spring weather was chasing away the winter doldrums. New life was rampant on the hatchery, and everywhere you went, blossoms were beginning to emerge on the trees and flowers were starting to bloom.

Henry and Juliette enjoyed the springtime, and especially enjoyed walking in the evening. They liked to go into town, have some dinner and then go to a movie at the local theatre. Playing at the Bijou was "The Story of Three Loves." Juliette loved romances, and persuaded Henry to take her. While Henry generally enjoyed Westerns, he was touched by the story, and when they returned home, the couple continued their romantic evening.

By June, it was becoming obvious that Henry and Juliette were expecting. The families were ecstatic. "It's about time!" they would exclaim, and summer was busy with planning for a nursery and shopping for baby clothes.

"Do you want a boy or a girl?" curious inquirers would

ask.

Henry always answered, "It's a boy! No doubt about it!"

While Henry was so positive, Juliette wasn't as sure. "It could be a boy, but there is definitely something special about the baby, I can feel it."

While Juliette grew, it became harder for her to do her job at the grocery store, and she finally relented and quit. Everyone was sorry to see her go, but now that she was home much of the time, there was a never-ending stream of visitors to see that she was doing well. The radio was a constant companion, now that Henry had taken on a couple of extra shifts at the hatchery, and she was enjoying the new types of music that she was hearing. The baby was enjoying it as well, since it moved around every time the radio was on, almost as if it was dancing.

September and October passed quickly, and once again a return to the cool autumn evenings of November. As Henry and Juliette sat by the week's trash burn, after their Thanksgiving meal, Juliette felt a strange pang.

"It's not time yet!" she exclaimed. "It's still at last three weeks!"

Henry quickly got on the phone and called Dr. Orson. "I'll be right over," the doctor offered. "It's probably nothing, but we'd better check just in case."

When the doctor arrived, Juliette was not doing well. Her stomach was in pain, and the baby seemed agitated, moving about, kicking and generally causing her discomfort. Dr. Orson took out his stethoscope and listened to Juliette's heart and also to the baby.

"Everything sounds OK, as far as I can tell," he declared. "Maybe it's just indigestion. Did you eat a lot

today?”

“I did have two extra helpings. ‘Eating for two,’ they say.”

“Well, that’s it then, just a little overindulgence. It’s an easy mistake at this time of year. Take a couple of Alka-Seltzer and you should be fine. Before long, you’ll be feeling fine, and the little one will settle down as well,” the doctor advised.

The next morning, Juliette did feel better, but she was ready to have the baby. Each day was increasingly more difficult for her to get around, for her to get into the car, even for her to sleep at night. To comfort her, Henry stayed home in the evening, dropping his extra shifts. Just past midnight, on Thursday, December 3, the pain hit again, and this time Juliette knew the time was right. They got into the car, and headed to the hospital.

Dr. Orson met them as Henry pulled into the parking lot and helped Henry with Juliette to get her inside. The pains were increasing, almost to the point of her being unable to bear them, and then they would subside. This continued throughout the night, and Henry tried to comfort her as much as he could.

When Juliette let out a shout louder than any previous, Henry concernedly asked, “Honey, how do you feel?”

Juliette replied, “I feel that something special is about to happen.”

Henry continued, “Is that really what you feel?”

Juliette, exhausted, simply replied, “Yes, I feel that something is about to happen.”

With another great cry, the nurse rushed in and ordered Henry to the waiting room, while the nurse called for Dr. Orson and they proceeded to the delivery room.

Juliette was screaming, the nurse worked to calm her down, and Dr. Orson watched as the baby began to crown.

The doctor tried to keep Juliette calm, even though she was in great pain. He spoke to her calmly as the nurse swabbed her forehead with a damp cloth.

“OK, try to push,” he told her. “The baby’s coming.”

Juliette pushed, and pushed some more and suddenly it was over, the pain had ended, only to be replaced by more crying. But this time, it was not from Juliette.

“It’s a boy!” the doctor declared. “You have a little king!” Juliette burst into tears of joy and relief. She had a son.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### *December 3, 1953 - I is born*

Juliette had no problem falling asleep after the baby's birth. As happy as she was that all went well, she could not overcome the fatigue and fell asleep before they wheeled her to her room. She only stirred a moment when they put her into the bed.

Dr. Orson met Henry in the waiting room. Henry was pacing, wondering when he would hear anything.

"Congratulations! You have a bouncing baby boy!"

"Thank you, Doctor. I couldn't have done it by myself."

"That's true. Without your wife you probably wouldn't have had much luck," the doctor joked.

"How is she?" Henry asked.

"Just fine. She's sleeping right now. Would you like to see the baby?" the doctor offered.

"Sure! Could you tell me how old he was when he was born?" Henry seemed confused.

"It's hard to say," the doctor played along. "We'd have to take X-rays and study his dental charts first. A lot of trouble."

“Well, it really doesn’t matter.” Henry continued. “Let’s see him.”

“All right. But I must warn you, he probably won’t recognize you at first. In fact, he may even be frightened. It’s something like a kid first seeing Santa Claus. Ho! Ho! Ho!” the doctor jested.

“You don’t think he’ll reject his father, do you?” Henry asked, concerned.

“No, with luck he’ll be asleep. Maybe your wife is awake now. I’ll bring the baby to the room.”

Henry was directed to Juliette’s room, and when he saw her, he gently placed a kiss on her forehead.

“Hello, dear. How are you feeling?” he tenderly asked.

Juliette woke up, but was puzzled by her surroundings.

“Just a minute... give me time... I’ll get it yet... That’s right. Hi, honey. I thought I’d seen you before. Where’s Muriel?”

“Muriel?”

“The woman in the other bed. Where is she?”

“There is no woman in the other bed.”

Henry let it slide. He knew Juliette had had a tough time.

“The good doctor is going to bring the baby in here.”

“Baby?” Juliette was still confused. She paused, “Oh, that’s right.”

Just then, the doctor entered. “You may find your wife a little incomprehensible. She was given a pill to help her sleep.”

Henry replied, “I haven’t noticed any difference. She just woke up.”

Juliette interrupted, “I had a dream while I was sleeping.”



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Henry quipped, "That's usually when they happen."

"What was it about?" Dr. Orson asked.

"Well, there we were, the baby and I. But he wasn't a baby; he was a man! And he was singing!"

"Singing! He can't even talk yet!" Henry observed, bemusedly.

"Don't be too sure." Juliette responded, mysteriously.

"What was he singing?" the doctor asked.

"I don't know," she strained to remember, "but there were a lot of people there. They all seemed happy. And a strange smell in the air."

"How can you smell in a dream?" Henry asked.

"Well, it looked like it smelled funny." Juliette replied.

"But he wasn't happy," she continued, "and he was asking for me to take a big load off of him."

"That was some dream!" exclaimed the doctor.

Henry, remembering that he still hadn't seen his new son, asked "By the way, where's the baby?"

The doctor, distracted and confused by Juliette's dream, replied, "Baby? Oh, that's right. Let's see now. Where is he?"

Dr. Orson left the room mumbling, and Henry and Juliette stared after him.

Henry returned his attention to Juliette, "I guess the hardest part is over. We'll be going home in two or three days."

Juliette replied, "It was worth it. What should we name him?"

Henry offered, "I want to name him 'I.'"

"Where did you come across a name like that?" Juliette asked, puzzled.

"It's in the dictionary. Ninth letter of the alphabet."

Henry declared.

“But why would we choose it as a name?” Juliette prodded.

“I like the sound of it. A nice ring to it, don’t you think?” Henry insisted.

“Hmm,” pondered Juliette, “it’s also the Roman Numeral I. Fitting, for our first and only child.”

“Only?” Henry queried, surprised.

“You don’t expect me to go through that again, do you?” Juliette replied, somewhat indignantly.

“Well, I’m sure it wasn’t that bad.” Henry meekly offered.

“You really have no idea,” Juliette responded resignedly.

“Well, I certainly hope the doctor finds the baby.”

Henry confused at the sudden change of topic, replied “Baby?” He recovered his senses, and agreed, “Where is the baby? I’m going to check on him.”

Henry left Juliette, and she continued to ponder the morning’s event, and the eerie topics explored in her dream. What did it all mean? Why did she see her new baby as a man, and how did she know it was him? What harm would come to him?

As she thought about these things, the doctor arrived, carrying little I.

“Here you go, Mrs. Mall. All cleaned up and shiny!” as the doctor handed over the baby.

She tenderly cradled him, looking at his tiny face, again wondering where life would take him.

“Oh, Mrs. Mall,” the doctor interrupted her reverie, “There’s a television news crew in the hospital looking for some cute stories to air around Christmastime. I think they’d like to see a newborn baby. Would you like to see

them?”

“Oh, I’m so tired. I’m just not sure.”

“They wouldn’t take too much time, just a few camera shots, and a short interview.”

“Well, all right. If it’s quick.”

The doctor left her alone to find the TV crew, and Juliette was getting a bit annoyed that Henry had not returned. When the doctor came back, Judith Abrey, the California correspondent for I.B.C. News, accompanied him.

“Good afternoon, Mrs. Mall,” greeted Judith, “I’m Judith Abrey, from I.B.C. News. We’re doing a few stories for some upcoming Christmas shows.”

“Yes, the doctor told me about it. What do you want me to do?”

“We’d like to get some film of your baby, you and your husband and talk a bit about what it’s like to raise a family in the world today.”

“My husband is away at the moment, but feel free to film us now before the baby wakes up. I’m afraid he’ll start to cry and spoil the interview.”

“Oh that all right, ma’am, a crying baby is the least of our problems when we do the news. People understand that babies cry.”

The cameraman started filming, as Judith began asking a few questions. “We’ll have to get started, as I’m on a deadline. Perhaps your husband will be joining us soon?”

“He’s been gone awhile,” Juliette stated, concerned. “He should have already been here. He still hasn’t seen his son.”

Looking at her watch, Judith decided to begin the interview. “Your son is born at yet another turning point

in America. Our new President is about to finish his first year in office, the war is not ten years gone, and now we are sending soldiers to fight again in a foreign country. Communists are being found all over our own country. We live in constant fear of The Bomb. How can a baby coming into this world survive?"

"Those are some pretty negative thoughts for a Christmas story," Juliette mused. "Can't we talk about something a little lighter?"

"You're right, of course," Judith apologized. "I guess it's the reporter in me trying to get to the facts. Let's start again: I'm told that your baby's name is I. That's quite unusual? Why?"

"It was my husband's idea, but I quickly came to accept it. I like to think of I as my Number I. Or perhaps it could represent "I" for Important. I had a dream that he was going to be an important figure," Juliette explained.

"But don't you think a name like that will cause him to seek out his own importance, trying to live up to it?" Judith asked.

"My son is destined for importance," Judith insisted. "I can feel it with every part of my body."

"How do you..."

Judith was interrupted as I awoke and began to cry. Juliette, tried to comfort him, and his crying subsided. He began to babble when, clearly audible, the words "Rock and Roll" came from his mouth. Both Juliette and Judith gasped.

"Kevin," exclaimed Juliette to the cameraman, "please tell me you got that on film!"

Kevin nodded and continued filming, but I fell silent, then fell asleep again.

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The excitement in the room began to grow, and the doctor suggested “Let me take your son back to the nursery. All this noise will not be good for him.”

The doctor picked up I and exited the room. Judith turned again to Juliette.

“Those were words. I could have sworn that’s what I heard! But this baby is not even a day old. How is that possible?”

“I told you he is destined for importance,” Juliette replied. “He is my special boy.”

Judith asked a few more questions, but had a hard time concentrating. “I’ve really got to get this back to the studio. This is something that could even go on the National News!”

As the news crew began gathering up their equipment, Dr. Orson returned. “I’ve just left your son back in the nursery. He was laughing and cooing. I suppose he might even be telling jokes to some of the other little ones.” He chuckled.

“Is your husband still gone?” he continued.

“He mumbled something and took off just before the TV crew arrived. Probably went to the coffee shop downstairs. I’m a bit concerned, though.”

“I’m really delighted that I was here to witness it. You must be very proud of your new son,” the doctor declared.

“Indeed I am. His father will be sorry he missed it. When can I see the baby again?”

“I’ll bring him back, if you’d like,” he said as he left.

A few moments later, Henry returned.

“Where have you been?” asked Juliette, edgily. “You missed the big moment.”

“You know I couldn’t be there,” Henry replied defensively. “I had to stay in the waiting room.”

“Not that big moment! I.B.C. was here!” Juliette exclaimed.

“I.B.C.? Something wrong?” Henry asked, concerned.

“Better you see it yourself. It’s almost six o’ clock. Turn on the news.” Juliette suggested.

Henry looked around the room. “Where’s the boy? I still haven’t seen him yet.”

“The doctor is bring him back from the nursery. Oh, here he is now!”

Dr. Orson entered, holding I, and Henry called out “Hi there, Tiger!”

“Please, Mr. Mall, only my wife calls me that,” the doctor jested.

Juliette interrupted the joking. “We’ve just turned on the news.”

“Mind if I stay and watch?” the doctor inquired.

“Please do,” although Henry was confused a bit by the doctor’s curiosity. “What’s going to be on?”

“Just watch and see,” said Juliette, excitedly.

The familiar I.B.C. logo appeared on the screen, and Hardy Rochester appeared in shadow. The announcer began: “Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, this is the six o’clock edition of the I.B.C. news with Hardy Rochester, brought to you each evening by Fender Guitars. ‘With a Fender you’ll never bend your ears.’”

Henry always pined a little when he heard that introduction. He still hadn’t gotten over his yearning for the Fender bass guitar. In his reverie, he didn’t notice that Hardy had announced a special event that was taking place in California. The film being shown was of the very

hospital they were in.

“Henry! Pay attention,” Juliette prodded, as she noticed Henry’s inattention.

Henry returned his attention to the screen as the story revealed local reporter Judith Abrey along with Juliette and I.

“We’re here today with Juliette Mall and her newborn son I. We’ve just witnessed something that is simply miraculous, I know that I’d never seen anything like it before. This little wonder boy has already spoken his first words.”

The broadcast cut over to a close-up of I as he uttered “Rock and Roll” and the stunned silence was quickly replaced by gasped and excited murmurings.

“You’ve clearly heard the baby’s own first words, and at only hours old,” as Judith returned. “This is Judith Abrey, reporting from California.”

“Thank you, Judith,” as the broadcast returned to Hardy Rochester, also barely able to contain his own excitement. “That’s December third. Goodnight.”

They turned off the TV and Henry stood there, stunned, for a few moments, trying to understand what he’d just seen.

“No! I won’t believe it! A three-hour old baby just doesn’t talk,” he exclaimed.

“Well, this one does. Both the doctor and myself distinctly heard something.” She looked at the baby tenderly. “He surely must be something special. If you hadn’t been out of the room you would have heard it, too,” Juliette chided.

“I couldn’t help that I had to go to the men’s room. ‘When nature calls, don’t ignore it.’ I always say,” Henry

defended himself.

“You always say a lot of things. Why don’t you try thinking once in a while?” Juliette joked.

Henry ignored her comment and turned to the doctor. “Maybe the kid is special, but that doesn’t mean he can talk. What’s your opinion, doctor?”

Dr. Orson reflected, “If I hadn’t witnessed it myself, I’d say it sounds like what I’ve read in my studies. Just baby talk.”

Juliette jumped in, “This was not baby talk! I think he was trying to tell us something. A mother’s intuition tells me he’s already chosen his direction in life.”

Henry glared at her. “Hold it! Hold it! You mean to tell me you got all that out of three words?”

“Not just three words, the manner in which they were spoken suggested...” Juliette began.

“We haven’t even agreed that he can talk and he’s already given a speech. Next you’ll be telling me he’s running for president!” Henry blurted out.

“Don’t be silly, I wouldn’t go that far. I’m just saying that he seemed to know what he was talking about.” Juliette tried to bring some reason to the conversation.

Henry was puzzled. “But ‘Rock and Roll’ doesn’t have much meaning as I see it.”

“That’s just it,” continued Juliette. “It’s definitely a new concept. If you could imagine all the notions churning around in this child’s head,” she paused a moment, turning a tender gaze back to I, “it must have meaning to him.”

Henry turned to the doctor. “I think she’s going delirious. Maybe a sedative?” he prescribed.

“No, I don’t think so. I’ve read of cases like this in



medical journals. A woman, having been one with the child for some nine months, can sense the thoughts of the infant, and when he is born, she acts as spokesman. Naturally, the three words spoken, whether or not by accident, must have some deep psychological meaning,” the doctor lectured.

Henry observed, “That’s all fine and good, but what does he mean by ‘Rock and Roll?’”

The doctor replied, “I have a feeling it’s got something to do with gem tumbling. I’ve read in lapidary magazines...”

Juliette was frustrated with the direction the conversation was taking. “You’ve both got rocks in your heads. That’s a new term for the kind of music they’ve started to play lately. You know, the songs with the bouncy beat.”

Juliette had noticed that music was changing as she listened to her radio while waiting for this big day. As she reflected internally, she felt that that change just might be centered on little I, though she wasn’t sure how.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### *Interlude - December 3, 1953 - Ike*

President Eisenhower was a busy man, as any President of the United States would be. One of his pleasures was to keep on top of the news himself, rather than depend on a summary presented by his aides.

He and Hardy Rochester had crossed paths several times during the campaign, and although they did not always see eye to eye, he respected him as a journalist, and liked to tune into the 6 PM I.B.C. newscast. He especially liked the little human interest stories, and his attention was caught by the story unfolding before him.

“And that’s December third. Goodnight!” and the President began pondering the implications of what he’d just seen. He’d had an inkling over that past year that there was something coming, but he’d never been able to put his finger on it. Something big. Something that would change the world. Why did this story strike such a chord with him?

He called in his chief of staff. “Jenkins! Come in here!”

“Sir?” replied Jenkins.

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“I need you to arrange a trip to California right away,” he declared.

“Sir?” puzzled Jenkins.

“I’ve just seen a news story that I believe has great implications on the way this country is going to turn.”

“Sir?” inquired Jenkins, yet a third time.

“Just arrange the trip. I can’t explain it, but I need to be in California tomorrow.”

“Sir!”

## CHAPTER NINE

### *Interlude - December 3, 1953 - Bert*

*“My Dearest Elsa,”* Albert Einstein wrote as he began another letter to his wife. *“I am an old man now, but I’m about to take what I believe to be one of the most important trips of my life. I leave tomorrow for California. I must pull together all my resources and quickly arrive. There is a call, I cannot explain it, but I must follow.”*

Bert mused over his words. “Would they say enough?” he thought, “Can I even explain it to myself?”

Rather than continue to muse, he sealed the letter, called for his assistant and asked her to post it right away.

“I am leaving for California in the morning. Please contact the airport and get me a ticket on the earliest flight out,” he told her.

“Where will you be staying?” she asked

“It’s not important. I will arrange for lodging and transportation when I get there. I must leave as soon as possible. It is a matter of great urgency!”

She left, shaking her head. Bert had been known for his eccentricities, but this was more unusual than most. Why

the haste? Why the mystery?

## CHAPTER TEN

### *Interlude - December 3, 1953 - Chuck*

Charles Ives was ill. He knew it was only a matter of time – Weeks? Months? – before his time on this earth was to end. He stared at the music he was trying to complete. Inspiration continued to elude him, as it had for the past twenty-five years.

“Nothing sounds right,” he opined. “Yet there is that strange music in my head, as if it’s a call. It’s not mine. What is it?”

Chuck was troubled by it, and could not concentrate. He called to his wife, “Harmony, do you hear it?” But she could not.

The intertwining melodies, the strong bass line, what did it all mean?

“I must go.” He flatly stated. “I must go to California.”

“Charles,” his wife warned. “You’re not well. You can’t travel across the country.”

“But I must. I cannot explain the call. This is as important as anything I’ve ever done.”

Charles insistence was frightening to Harmony, yet she

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could see that he would not be sated otherwise. In the morning, he was flying to California.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### *December 4, 1953 - Three Kings of the East*

Henry arrived at the hospital early the next day to see Juliette and I. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary today, other than the fact that twenty-four hours ago, he was not yet a father. Henry thought about how their lives would change now that their family had a new member.

Henry looked at Juliette and I as he entered. The two were asleep, with I laying atop her. He gently picked him up and put him in the bassinet, then returned and gave Juliette a kiss to wake his Sleeping Beauty.

As she awoke, she smiled and quickly glanced around to see where the baby had gone.

“It’s OK,” Henry said. “I just put him down to keep sleeping. He had a big day yesterday. Today should be a lot quieter.”

No sooner had the words left his mouth, than the sound of beating drums came from out in the street.

Henry peered out the window. “Is there a parade today?”

“I don’t know what on earth for,” Juliette replied.



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“Thanksgiving was a week ago, and Christmas is still three weeks away. I read in the newspaper that there’s a parade due on the twenty-second.”

“If it is a parade, it’s only a small one,” Henry observed. “Just three men. They’re coming this way.”

“Anyone we know?” Juliette inquired.

“Let me take a closer look” as he peered out the window. “By George, it’s the President!”

Juliette asked “Of the Chicken Breeder’s Association?”

“Of the United States!” Henry replied excitedly. “They’re coming up the steps! I wonder who that is with him?”

Juliette pulled herself out of the bed and looked out the window. “Looks like Albert Einstein, the famous genius.”

“I didn’t recognize him. I’m not much on brains,” Henry confided.

“You can say that again,” she joked. “And that other one’s Charles Ives, the composer.”

“Charles who?”

Juliette ignored him, and the three men came into the building, up the hallway and right into their room. The couple was amazed that three men of such stature would be together here at this place.

“Ah, there he is,” said Ike, indicating I, who had come awake at the noise.

“Our baby, what do you want with our baby?” cried Juliette.

“Please don’t be concerned, ma’am,” indicated Ike. “We’ve just come because of the call of the child.”

“Yes,” agreed Bert. “We’ve heard about your son and his miraculous feats. His legend is already growing.”

Henry and Juliette looked at each other, clearly

confused. Henry spoke up. "What feats?"

Ike replied, "Why this young boy will change everything. A great movement rests upon his shoulders."

"And it's all tied to his music," continued Chuck, seemingly frail, but with a sparkle in his eye that belied his physical condition.

"I believe that young I here has the makings of a great leader, perhaps he'll be President, or counsel Presidents and other leaders," suggested Ike.

"And I believe that he is highly intelligent, perhaps he will be a great scientist, or perhaps an inventor, creating fantastic machines for the benefit of all mankind," offered Bert.

"And I believe that he will be a great musician, so renowned that he will be known the world over!" concluded Chuck. "I have been one of the foremost American composers for the last fifty years, but now it's time for me to step aside and allow him to reign."

"We all see a great future for him, and we are here to celebrate him," Ike said.

Bert dug through his briefcase and pulled out a set of documents, "His music is so mathematically complex, I could not help but to begin to develop new and alter my own older theories of the Universe to account for it. In addition, I have been authorized by the highest authorities to confer upon this young man his first honorary doctorate degree. He is officially the youngest ever to receive such an honor." He provided the documentation to Henry.

"And I am here to present him my last piece of music. It was unfinished until I received the inspiration from him to complete it. It has never been performed, and it is my gift. But I ask you, please, to do nothing with it for at least

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ten years.” Chuck turned to I, “One day you’ll hear the bells from the steeples, and rock will shout from the mountains!”

Ike stepped forward. “And I have brought two gifts. First, I have authorized the Post Office to print a commemorative stamp to honor this day, and secondly...” He paused for effect and the others waited with bated breath.

“Yes, secondly,” he continued, “I have declared that from this point forward, December Third, the day of his birth, shall be a national holiday called ‘I Day.’ We have needed a day like this to celebrate for a long time, and now is the right time to begin observing it.”

A shocked look of disbelief was all the reaction that Henry and Juliette could muster. How much had changed in their lives in such a short time!

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### *1954 - Henry*

So much had happened in December that it was all a blur to Henry and Juliette. By the time the New Year rolled around, things were finally returning to a bit more of normal.

Henry returned to work, and continued to tinker with his inventions. He liked to make little adjustments to the Rat Deflector to improve its efficiency and effectiveness, and little by little, he would add just a bit more current to make sure that the rats would never return. What he didn't count on was the King Rat, who thought he could outsmart the device.

One night, about three in the morning, while Henry and Juliette were sound asleep, King Rat entered the henhouse. King Rat was huge, a good sixteen inches from the tip of his tail to the tip of his pink nose. His whiskers spread a span of six inches, and his deep black color belied the fact that he was merely a rat.

King Rat had watched his brothers and sisters die, felt their shrieks as they succumbed to the Rat Deflector. He

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sniffed the air and could detect the smoky presence of their hair as it was singed from the currents of electricity that scoured the life from their bodies. He even mourned for his cousins the field mice, as they wandered into parts unknown and never returned.

But King Rat was clever, and he knew that there were ways to get around this killing machine. While the other rats merely stumbled onto the circuitry, King Rat noticed that the source of the danger was the transformer that connected all of the wires into the deadly grid. He reasoned that attacking that source would be an end of the device, and a return to the reign of the rats in the henhouse.

King Rat began to gnaw at the wire that exited the transformer, and before long had worn away the insulation, revealing the bare wire. But the wire proved too strong, and King Rat could not chew through it. King Rat moved on to the next wire, and once again, the insulation gave way. That was King Rat's fatal mistake, for when his body came into contact with the two bare wires, the effect was immediate. King Rat's body surged with electricity, and burst into flames.

But King Rat was a fighter, and he still had a bit of life in him as he streaked away from the transformer and into the chicken coop. Loose straw was everywhere, and as he moved through it, it too sparked into flame.

The fire spread quickly though the chicken coop, and soon the entire building was up in flames. Chickens were screeching, and as the fire snuffed out their lives, an eerie quiet began to pervade the area. The only sound was the crackling of timber and finally the huge explosion of the roof collapse that finally stirred the residents of the home

next door, Henry and Juliette.

As they rushed outside, Greta passed them and ran into what remained of the burning building. Henry frantically called for Greta to return, but she was on a mission, to rescue her chicken friends, should they still be alive. Greta bit into one of the cages that had fallen to the ground and had somehow escaped the flames. She dragged the cage, braving the heat, and succeeded in bringing it out. But not without cost: her leg was badly burned, and she collapsed onto the ground, as she could not support her weight on it.

Henry rushed to Greta's side and lifted her, the heat licking at his own face as she valiantly licked it as well, to cool it off for him. She was weak, but she made it, with Henry's help.

When the fire department finally arrived, the complete structure was a total loss, but the firemen kept the flames from reaching the Mall's house.

"You folks are lucky to be alive," the fire chief offered.

"We are," Juliette responded, still shaking and clutching onto Henry, "but Greta is not doing so well," as she indicated the heroic dog lying at their feet.

The chief noted the burns, and retrieved his first aid kit from the truck. He cleaned the wound, and wrapped it with gauze tape.

"You'd better get her over to the vet first thing in the morning. He may be able to save that leg."

"We will," Henry replied. "She's one special lady."

Greta's injury had distracted Henry from the fire for a bit, but the hard reality was this: Henry was out of a job. The focus of the egg industry was moving elsewhere, and the owners were unlikely to attempt to rebuild and restart

the business.

Henry still had a small income from his inventions, but it wasn't enough to make a living, it was more of a successful hobby. As the sun began to rise on this disastrous day, Henry began thinking of his options.

At 9 A.M., Henry entered the grocery store and asked for the manager. Because Juliette was a former employee, Henry felt that he might have a chance at getting a job. Unfortunately, all positions were filled, and although the manager was sympathetic, it just wasn't possible at this time to give Henry a job.

Henry went back home, his head hung, and Greta whimpered when he entered the door. Looking up at the clock, Henry saw that it was nearly 10 o'clock, and the veterinarian would be opening his office soon. He picked up Greta and put her in the bed of his pickup and headed back into town.

Dr. Jonas greeted Henry and looked with concern at Greta and her bandaged leg. Word had reached him about the fire, but he wasn't aware that there had been injuries beyond the death of several hundred chickens.

He was impressed by the professional wrapping of the wound and commended Henry on it.

"Oh, no, I didn't do that!" Henry was flustered. "The fire chief cleaned and dressed it himself."

"Then it's a good thing he was there, because she's going to be just fine," Dr. Jonas replied. "I'll apply some medicine to make sure it doesn't get infected and you need to be sure to keep her leg clean for a few weeks."

"Well, I'm sure I'll have plenty of time to do that. My job is gone. The fire took care of that."

The vet agreed and suggested “Perhaps something new will come up.”

“Maybe so, but I’m worried,” Henry mulled. “With a new baby and all, I really need a job. I know chickens, and that is going nowhere right now. What’ll I do?”

When the vet was finished with Greta, Henry let her walk out on her own, and though she favored her leg a bit, her tail was wagging and her eyes were bright as she looked up at Henry. It lifted his spirits, and he wore a hint of a smile on his lips.

As he left the vet’s office, Henry saw Sam Martin coming out of the hardware store next door. Sam was recently a new father as well, and they had shared some camaraderie during their wives’ pregnancies. Sam’s son, Osgood, was born quite premature, and had been lucky to survive. Even though he was a couple of months older than I, I had grown much faster and appeared to be the older one.

“Hi, Henry! What’s new?” offered Sam, making some small talk.

“You haven’t heard? The hatchery burned down last night,” Henry stated.

“Oh, that’s rough,” Sam sympathized. “I heard sirens but didn’t know. Are you all right?”

“I’m out of a job, and I don’t know what to do,” Henry confessed.

“I heard the Scuffling Scrappers were looking for some help, perhaps that’s something that could tide you over until something else comes along,” offered Sam.

“Oh, I don’t play anymore since the accident,” as he held up his hand. “There’s not much I can do for them.”

“They’re not looking for a musician, though I’ll bet they



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would take you back if they were. They're looking for someone to handle their business affairs. They're about to record an album, and may even go on tour soon," Sam revealed.

Henry thought a minute then said, "That sounds like something I'd like to do. I'll stop by the Stomping Grounds this evening."

Henry thanked Sam and let Greta jump into the cab. His mood was significantly happier as he made the short drive back home.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### *1955 - Henry and Buddy*

Henry's star was rising. The Scuffling Scrappers were about to embark on their first national tour, and it was all due to Henry's outstanding efforts. Their first major label LP, *The Scuffling Scrappers Scrap Along* was getting airplay at many stations across the country on the strength of its single "All I Need is a Guitar and You."

Arlen "Buddy" Jones, the group's steel guitar player was one of Henry's best friends, and an outstanding musician. Henry initially met him through Buddy's brother-in-law Sam and befriended him after Buddy's wife Deborah died in childbirth a couple of years back, leaving him with a young son, Adrian. Buddy would often be invited to dinner, and Adrian and I would play together.

Juliette would occasionally invite one of her girlfriends over when Buddy was visiting, in an effort to "fix him up" with someone. She didn't think it was a good idea that he should be alone. Buddy didn't seem to be all that interested in most of her friends, though, and poured his spare time into the band instead.

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Henry and Buddy were down at the Stomping Grounds when Annette Samson walked in. A strikingly beautiful woman, many of the men watched her as she strode up to the barkeep. Even Henry couldn't help himself, and Buddy was especially taken.

"I'd like to apply for the waitress position," declared Annette to the bartender. "Is the manager in?"

The bartender stammered a bit before responding, "Len's office is over there," indicating the door to the left.

Annette headed toward the door and at least a dozen eyes followed her as she disappeared into the manager's office.

Henry and Buddy took a look at each other, and Buddy broke into a smile. "Now there's someone I could be interested in."

"She seems to be a little too highfalutin for you," Henry replied. "I'd bet she wouldn't even stop to give you the time of day."

Buddy looked longingly at the door of the manager's office, and then returned his attention to his bottle of beer. "I guess you're right. It's just a dream."

A few minutes later when Annette emerged, the scene replayed itself, but this time her eyes lit on Buddy, and she gave him a smile as she left the bar.

When Len emerged from his office, all eyes turned to him as he announced, "OK boys, I'm sure you're probably wondering what that was all about." A murmur went up. "Quiet down, everyone. Annette starts her new job as waitress tomorrow."

A cheer went up, along with a few whistles, and a number of the men clinked their bottles together. Buddy beamed a little more, and considered his chances.

By the next day, word had passed throughout the town about the new beautiful young waitress. The bar was full as Annette began her first shift at 4 P.M. Even a few curious wives were present, if only to keep an eye on their husbands.

Henry and Buddy were at their usual table when Annette approached them to take their order. Once again, she smiled at Buddy and spoke. "You're Buddy Jones, aren't you?"

Buddy was speechless for a moment before he finally blurted out, "Yes, miss, that's me."

"I thought so," Annette continued. "I've seen you on the *Country Corner Show* and was surprised to see you in here yesterday. I'm a big fan of the Scrappers."

Buddy's confidence returned. "This is where it all started," he swept his arm indicating the bar, "just a few years ago. A lot of the guys that started the band aren't around anymore, but even Henry here," indicating Henry, "was a part of it at one time."

Annette nodded at Henry and returned her attention to Buddy. "What'll it be this afternoon, boys?"

"Just a couple of beers," replied Buddy, "and then we have to be on our way. The band is getting ready to go on the road, and Henry is going to go over the schedule with us tonight."

Annette left and returned with the two beers, and then began taking orders from the other patrons. Henry and Buddy still couldn't help but watch her as she moved from table to table.

"Just my luck that a beautiful thing like that would come into town just as I'm ready to leave," Buddy groused.

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“You’ll only be gone for a month. I’m sure Len will keep her around for a while if the bar fills up like this every night,” replied Henry.

“I think that’s the girl I’m gonna marry,” observed Buddy.

“Now you’re sounding like me, a few years ago,” agreed Henry. “She would be a good catch, I tell you.”

Henry and Buddy finished up their beers and headed over to Henry’s office. Henry had worked out of his home until the Scrappers popularity began to soar, and finally had to rent a storefront office on Main Street.

Buddy had a hard time concentrating on the upcoming tour while he was thinking of the encounter at the bar. Henry caught him daydreaming and gave him a friendly punch in the shoulder. “C’mon, Buddy, we’ve got work to do here.”

“Sorry, Henry, I’m not sure I can go on the road. I’m just too caught up in the possibility that Annette is interested in me. What if she takes to some other guy while I’m gone?”

“It could go the other way, she could take to another guy if you don’t go. Remember, she said she’s a fan. What would she think if you dropped out?”

“Yeah, I guess so. I can’t think right now. I’ve gotta go back and ask her something.”

Buddy rush back up the road to the Stomping Grounds and caught Annette between customers.

“Hey, Buddy,” she said. “Back for another beer already?”

“Not really. No,” he said as he looked at the floor and rocked on his feet. “I was just wondering. We’re going out on the road in a few days, and I’d like to call you on the

phone. Would that be OK?”

“Why certainly, I’ll look forward to it,” she replied.

Buddy practically floated out of the bar on his way back to Henry’s office. “I think I have a chance with her,” he explained to Henry. “Let’s see that schedule!”

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### *1956 - Buddy and Annette*

With the success of the band's album, Henry had been able to purchase an old bus to transport the band's equipment and convinced Buddy to drive it. The Scuffling Scrappers tour was a major success for the band, but for Buddy, it had been those phone calls from the road that kept him going. Buddy and Annette had developed quite a long distance relationship, and he couldn't wait to return back home to see her.

The Scrappers had just one more night on the road before they would triumphantly return to their hometown. The show in Reno, Nevada, would likely draw a few of their friends who would not mind the drive across the Sierras. Annette thought it would a big surprise to Buddy if she were to see the final show, and made plans to go. She took a morning shift at the Stomping Grounds, and headed out of town at 4:00 P.M.

Buddy was driving the bus coming in from Pocatello, Idaho, where they had played the previous evening. The Pocatello show was an overwhelming success, and with the

long drive the day before up from Salt Lake City, and the late night, Buddy had not been able to call Annette. Buddy knew there would be little time once they arrived in Reno, so he told the band they were taking an early dinner break in Winnemucca, Nevada.

Buddy pulled into the parking lot at the Heaven's Haven Diner about 4:15 P.M. and looked for the nearest phone booth. He checked his pocket and found that he had just enough change to talk for about 10 minutes. Not enough time for him, but it would have to do. Buddy called the Stomping Grounds number, since he knew Annette would be at work at this time, but Len told Buddy that Annette was off today.

Len knew that Annette was going to surprise Buddy on Reno, but didn't let on as Buddy asked where she was. Len suggested she might be at home, but since Annette didn't have a phone at home, he couldn't call her there.

Buddy left the phone booth, sorry that he couldn't make the connection and wandered towards the diner to meet up with the rest of the band. As he crossed the parking lot, he didn't see the car that rushed in off the highway and when he finally looked up to see the screeching car, it was too late, and he was thrown by the impact nearly 10 yards.

It all happened so quickly, and was witnessed by the remaining band members in the diner. They rushed out as one to come to Buddy's aid while their waitress called the hospital for an ambulance.

When the ambulance arrived, they splinted Buddy's leg and took him in. While he was pretty scraped up, the broken leg was his only injury, but he would have to spend some time recovering before he could get home.



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Annette arrived in Reno at 7:00 PM and headed to the Spangle, where tonight's Scrappers show was to take place. When she heard the show had been canceled, she started to worry. Where was Buddy? She asked about and finally got the news of the accident, and that Buddy was at Humboldt General. She once again set out and pulled into town at 10:00 PM.

Though it was well past visiting hours, she was able to convince the night watchman to let her in. She rushed up to the third floor, where Buddy was and burst into his room. Buddy woke up as she entered, and with the light from the hallway behind her, he thought she was an angel.

She leaned over and grabbed him about the neck, and finally exclaimed, "I got here as soon as I could! I've been so worried."

Buddy was shocked to see Annette, but it raised his spirits considerably. "I've missed you," he confessed. "I'm so glad you're here."

Buddy spent the next few days in the hospital, and when he was released, Annette agreed to drive him back home. The band had taken the bus back home, so Buddy was happy for the offer.

Annette had spent hours at the hospital each day, and Buddy and she learned a lot about each other. Annette had grown up in Fresno, and left there after high school to try to pursue a career in modeling. Though she had the looks, she couldn't make the right connections, and did not achieve her dream. She moved from town to town, taking waitressing jobs, until she ended up at the Stomping Grounds.

Buddy told her of how he dreamed to be a musician

ever since he first heard Gene Autry on the radio as a young boy. He decided on the steel guitar because he loved the sound, the sweet slides and how much it added to the overall feel of the music.

The hours flew by as they exchanged their lives' stories, and when released, they were in love.

As they passed through Reno after Buddy's release, Buddy's playfully suggested, "Let's get married in Reno!"

Annette fell silent for a few moments, and Buddy apologized, "I'm sorry, I was just joking. Didn't mean to shock you."

"No, no, no," she replied, "I was just trying to figure out if that was a real proposal or not."

"It could be, if you want it," Buddy responded.

Annette pulled the car over and kissed Buddy, "But we have no ring," she complained, only partially in jest.

Buddy opened the door, grabbed his crutches and got out of the car. He hobbled over and told Annette, "Open the trunk."

He pawed through his suitcase until found an old guitar string and started wrapping it up into a tight circle around his pinky. He found a pair of pliers in the toolbox in the trunk and snipped off the excess wire.

Annette watched Buddy amusingly, as he returned to the car and tried to kneel. His leg cast did not allow the flexibility he needed to make the move, so Annette reached up from the driver's seat and took his hand.

Buddy asked, "Annette Samson, will you marry me?"

"Yes, Buddy Jones, I will," she replied. They kissed passionately and saw that a wedding chapel was only a couple of blocks away. Within an hour, on May 15, they became Mr. and Mrs. Arlen Jones.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### *1957 - Buddy and Annette*

Annette did not feel like a model now, and she wasn't getting the kind of looks she used to do as she waited on the patrons at the Stomping Grounds. Her flattering outfits had given way to maternity wear, and her carefully styled hair had taken on a stringy look. She was tired all of the time, and her feet hurt constantly. Her normally pleasant demeanor had slipped in favor of an attitude with a bit of an edge.

It wasn't easy to be expecting and to care for her stepson Adrian while Buddy was out on the road. Finally, she'd had enough. She walked into Len's office.

"Len," she began, "I'm tired. I can barely keep up each day, and I'm afraid I need to take some time off. Maybe a lot of time. The baby's going to be here soon, and I don't know if I can come back."

Len understood, and even was a bit relieved as some of his customers had stopped coming in and he felt it might be related to Annette's attitude.

"I'll be sorry to see you go," he offered, "Can you stay

on a few days until I can get a replacement?"

Annette conceded and they set her last day for the end of the week.

When Buddy called her that evening, he was surprised to hear of her decision, but also a bit glad that she would be home more with Adrian. His babysitter was complaining that he was getting a bit rough with the other kids, and hinted that she no longer wanted to care for him. Perhaps Annette's attention would calm him down.

Adrian spent his first three years mostly with Buddy's parents, and only occasionally with his mother's parents. They had a tough time accepting him, because of their unspoken blame for him as the cause of their daughter's death. Now with Annette in the picture, they had practically severed all contact.

Annette had loved Adrian as if she was his own, even if he was a handful at times. Now that she was at home, she was getting a first hand look at his rambunctiousness. He got into too many things, and when he didn't get his way, he cried until Annette finally gave in.

Annette was exhausted even more after a day with Adrian than she had ever been on her shift at the Stomping Grounds. She began to wonder if taking time off was a good idea.

One particularly trying day, Adrian could not be calmed down. He would run across the room, knock over a lamp then run back and throw a pillow. Annette had had enough; she grabbed him, stared him right in the face and firmly said, "Stop it!" Adrian struggled to get away, but Annette held tight. Adrian dodged one way and when Annette shifted her weight to keep up with him, he dodged the other. Annette took a stumble and landed

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hard. Suddenly, a pool of water gathered beneath her. She knew what that meant; the baby would not be far behind.

Struggling to get up, she finally reached the phone and called Buddy's parents. "The baby! It's coming!" Buddy's dad assured her he would be over right away to take her to the hospital. In the excitement, Adrian was concerned and cried "Mommy, what's wrong?"

Annette hugged him, and said "It's OK, little one, you're about to have a new brother or sister." A cramp made her gasp as she said "Grandpa is coming to take me to the hospital and Grandma will be here to watch you."

"Mommy! Don't go!" he cried. "Don't go!"

Annette hugged him even tighter and he calmed a little. A few minutes later, Buddy's parents were there.

"Thanks, Dad," Annette was relieved. "It's getting very close."

They climbed into the car and rushed to the hospital. "No need to speed, Dad. There's time to be safe."

When they arrived at the hospital, Annette was admitted right away, and taken directly to delivery. Two hours later, she was the mother of a beautiful baby girl.

When Buddy called at his usual time in the evening, he was surprised to hear his mother answer the phone. "What's wrong? Where's Annette!"

"Annette's fine. The baby came early," his mother said.

"But it's still two weeks before she's due," Buddy protested.

"These things happen," his mother tried to comfort him. "You have a new daughter."

Buddy told her, "I'm leaving right away. She needs me now!"

He was home by morning.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### *1958 - Adrian and Angela*

Adrian adored his little sister Angela. Now that she was a year old she was more fun to play with, and even when she got into his toys, he didn't mind. When his father was home from touring, the four of them would go to the park. Annette was regaining her shapely figure and with Buddy's ruggedly handsome looks, they would not have looked out of place on the cover of the *Saturday Evening Post* as the typical American family.

As Buddy and Annette strolled through the park on a rare Saturday afternoon together, with Adrian tailing behind towing Angela in his little red wagon, they encountered an uncomfortable scene. It was Adrian's grandparents, on Deborah's side. Adrian rarely saw them, and when his grandmother reached out to pick him up, he ran and hid behind Annette.

"Hello, Mary... Fred." Buddy greeted his former in-laws somewhat uncomfortably. "Fancy meeting you here," he said, not knowing exactly how to deal with the situation.

“Hello, Arlen,” replied Mary. She was the only one who ever called him by his given name. He didn’t appreciate it, but let it pass.

“Come here, Adrian and give your Grandma a hug.” Annette and Angela were virtually ignored.

Adrian warily stepped from behind his stepmother and tentatively stepped up to Mary. When she bent down to pick him up, he once again stepped back, a little unsure of her intentions.

“What’s wrong, Adrian, are you afraid of Grandma?”

Adrian looked back at Annette, and she gave him an assuring nod. Mary frowned a bit at her perceived pomposity thinking, “*What right does she have to mother my daughter’s son?*”

“Did you enjoy your birthday present?” she asked him. Adrian nodded timidly, although he had no idea what that present might have been. “You’ll have to come over to play at Grandma’s house this week.” She turned to Buddy, “Would that be OK?”

Buddy didn’t understand this sudden interest, but conceded that it would be OK. Once again, Annette’s presence was not even considered.

“All right, Tuesday it is!” she decided, without any further consultation. “Bring him by in the morning. Goodbye Arlen.”

As quickly as they had happened on the situation, Mary and Frank were off. It was almost as if they had conspired to be there at that time.

“I’m sorry Buddy,” Annette whispered to her husband so that Adrian wouldn’t hear, “but that woman is a real witch!”

“They are Adrian’s grandparents, so they have the right



to see him,” he replied.

“I know, but still,” she gave a questioning pause. “Was she always like that?”

“Before Deborah’s death, she was more pleasant, but never what I would call ‘nice’. I suppose our mutual loss was more that she could bear. Maybe it will be good for her to spend some time with her grandson.”

On Tuesday, Annette brought Adrian over to the Martin’s home. Mary again barely acknowledged Annette as she greeted Adrian with a forced smile, “There’s my little guy. Come in!”

“I’ll be back at four to pick him up,” said Annette as the door closed without acknowledgement or even a simple goodbye.

Inside, Mary asked Adrian, “Would you like a cookie?”

Adrian replied, “Mommy doesn’t want me eating cookies before lunch.”

Mary cringed and told him, “Well, she’s not really your mommy now, is she?”

Adrian looked at her a little confused. For most of the last two years, Annette was all he’d known as a mother. For him, she was “mommy.”

“No, that woman is not your mother, but I can show you who was.” Mary opened a picture album on the table.

“See here? This is your mother.” It was a picture from Buddy and Deborah’s wedding back in 1951. “She was a beautiful bride,” Mary sighed.

Adrian looked at the picture, and began to wonder why he’d never seen anything like it before. He recognized his father, but the woman was a complete stranger to him.

“And here’s a picture with you.”

Adrian looked, but could not see himself anywhere in the picture. It was the same woman as before, but this time she was fat.

“Your mother was a wonderful little girl, too,” as Mary turned to a picture of a girl not much older than Adrian.

When she showed him a picture of Deborah as a baby, Adrian asked, “Is that Angela?”

Mary slammed the album shut and glared at Adrian. “No, it’s not,” and left it at that. Adrian was confused by her sudden change in demeanor.

“Grandma,” he said tentatively, “can we play now?”

“Not right now, Adrian,” she said, a tear forming in her eye. “I need to lie down for a while.”

Adrian decided he did not like being at Grandma’s house.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### *1959 - Adrian and Osgood*

Adrian didn't even know he had a cousin Osgood until a few weeks ago. While he didn't fully understand, Adrian's uncle Sam only recently began visiting Buddy and would often bring Osgood over to play. The young cousins could not be more different. At nearly six years old, they were beginning to develop characteristics that would likely shape their later lives.

Adrian was much taller than Osgood, and a maybe a little "husky" as folks were prone to say. Osgood, on the other hand, was shorter than average and tended to whine a bit when he spoke. Adrian played ball with his father, at least when he was home, and liked to sport a Giants cap, honoring the team that was about to kick off its second season in California. Osgood liked to push Angela around in her stroller, and play dolls with her. Osgood liked his little cousin and couldn't understand it when his grandmother would tell him, "She's not your cousin!"

With Buddy being a musician, it wasn't unusual to have a variety of musical instruments around the house. Adrian

was drawn to some bongos that his dad had occasionally played with and Osgood would bang on the piano. Annette liked Elvis Presley, and even though he was now away in the Army, she liked to play his records. Adrian and Osgood would play along.

When Sam first called up Buddy after several years' absence, Buddy was suspicious. *Why now? What's going on?* he wondered. Sam asked to come over to talk, and brought Osgood with him.

"Hey, Sam," Buddy greeted him at the door. "Long time, no sec."

"Yeah, I know," Sam admitted. "You're a hard man to catch home, sometimes."

"I guess that's true, Sam," he confessed, "and when I am home, I like to spend as much time as I can with the family."

"I'm family, Buddy. Right?"

Buddy was a bit embarrassed at the implicit accusation. "Of course, Sam. Of course."

"Well, I guess I haven't made that much of an effort since Debbie's funeral."

"So why now? Buddy inquired.

"It's Mom," Sam related. "Well, my Mom. I guess she's not really your mother-in-law any more."

"Well, that's true. But after years of neglect, I'm curious why she's suddenly taken up such an interest in Adrian."

Sam lowered his voice conspiratorially, "It's because of Annette and Angela."

Buddy eyes widened, with an edge of anger, "What do you mean?"

"Last year Mom began to dwell on old pictures of Debbie, and nearly had a breakdown over it. She spent a

lot of time crying and Dad was no help at all.”

“I know what I felt when Debbie died,” Buddy said. “But I guess I can’t understand what she went through.”

“Anyway, she’s jealous of Annette,” Sam continued. “She resents the fact that Adrian looks at her as his mother, and Angela is a casualty of that perspective.”

“That explains a lot about her sudden interest in him. But he’s almost afraid of her. She comes on too strong, at times.”

“I know my mother, and I can’t say I disagree.”

“OK, so I can see her renewed interest. Is that why you’re here?” Buddy pressed.

“She did ask me to be more of a presence, but she didn’t really have to. I’ve wanted to reestablish our friendship for a long time. Our estrangement didn’t affect only us. I haven’t spoken to Henry for years either, I was hoping the three of us could become friends again.”

“You know, Sam,” Buddy composed his thoughts. “I could go for that. C’mon down to the Stomping Grounds. I’ll call Henry and see if he can join us.”

Annette was a bit hesitant when Buddy told her he was leaving for the Stomping Grounds, and that Adrian’s cousin Osgood would be staying to play. Angela was an active two year old and Adrian and Angela together were even more of a handful. Adding a third child to the mix was going to be worse.

To her surprise, Osgood was a model child, and enjoyed playing with Angela. Angela, as a result, played quietly, and Annette had a chance to relax. Maybe this was a good thing, after all.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

### *1960 - Juliette and Annette*

Henry enjoyed Elvis Presley because of his Country roots, while Juliette enjoyed his rockier side. While that didn't seem to be a significant issue, it did cause a bit of a rift between the two of them. The rift was further widened when Henry expressed his support for Vice President Nixon and Juliette preferred the handsome young Senator Kennedy in the upcoming Presidential elections. Kennedy's beautiful wife, Jackie, was an inspiration to many young women, and Juliette was not alone in her adoration of her keen sense of style and, some might say, majestic presentation.

Juliette found an ally in Annette, both in her musical tastes as well as choice of candidates. With the busyness of raising their children the two had not had much opportunity to spend any time together. Now that the boys were enrolled in school, it was easier to make the impromptu visit, and sometimes accompany each other on a girls' day out shopping, having lunch and general gossiping.

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“Henry and I had a big fight last night,” Juliette confessed to Annette after she had settled in for a morning visit. “It’s that Tricky Dick. Henry adores him, but I can’t stand him. I’m ashamed that I voted for him in 1956.”

“You voted for him?” Annette asked for clarification.

“Well, not him exactly, but I wanted to show my support for President Eisenhower. He did us a great service when I was born.”

Annette seemed momentarily confused, trying to associate the President with Juliette’s birth. “Oh!” she exclaimed as she explained her confusion.

Juliette had a knack for numbers and did a quick calculation in her head. “Come to think of it, he would have been about Kennedy’s age when *I* was born. Actually, a bit younger. Do you think he was as handsome?” Juliette chuckled.

The two laughed a bit at the absurdity of the comparison, and continued their conversation.

“That Jack Kennedy is a dreamboat, and I positively adore Jackie,” Juliette remarked. “But Henry thinks he’s too young to be an effective leader.”

“That ridiculous,” countered Annette. “Nixon’s only four years older. That’s not a very great gap.”

“Henry thinks that his experience of the last eight years as the Vice President makes him the better candidate,” suggested Juliette. “To me, he was a failure.”

Angela, who had been playing quietly in the other room, wandered in and interrupted the conversation. “Mommy, I’m hungry.”

The two looked at little Angela and Annette suggested, “Let’s continue this conversation over lunch.”

“Let’s not. I’m getting too flustered all over again,”

Juliette replied.

“One final word, and then I’m done for now. You can’t let this affect your home life, but don’t back down. It’s important that we girls are heard, too.” Annette didn’t realize it, but she was speaking for a generation.



## CHAPTER NINETEEN

### *1961 - Henry and Sam*

While Kennedy only won by the narrowest of margins, Juliette was satisfied with the election's outcome, and happy to see the young family in the White House. She was especially fascinated with the young Kennedy children. Juliette even would imagine her son I all grown up and married to Caroline. *A foolish thought*, she reconsidered, *I think everyone has Camelot fever.*

Henry was not so taken, and still felt that Nixon had been robbed. "That Jack Kennedy, he's got connections," he complained to Sam shortly after the inauguration. "I think there was a fix in."

Sam wasn't willing to speculate on a conspiracy, but said, "Don't count out Dick Nixon. He'll be back."

Henry was temporarily mollified. "Maybe he should run for Governor."

"Yeah, I'll tell him that next time I see him," joked Sam.

Henry laughed and said, "I guess getting all worked up is of no use. Hey, you know what, let me show you

something I came up with.”

Henry had returned to tinkering in his workshop in his spare time. As they headed to the garage where Henry maintained his workshop, Henry noted I’s bicycle lying in the driveway. “That kid’s gonna lose that bike if he isn’t careful.”

Henry picked up the bike and tucked it away in his workshop. “Let’s see how long before he notices it’s gone. That should teach him a lesson.”

Henry returned to the workbench to show Sam what he’d been working on. “I’ve never really given up on my dream of getting in the band again,” he explained.

Henry directed Sam’s gaze to the vise, where a tangle of wires, rods and hinges looked a bit like a mechanical hand. Sam commented his thought out loud.

“You’re exactly right,” Henry said proudly. “I’ve been trying to give myself artificial fingers.” He raised his right hand and wiggled his index finger. “I can finally get past this and back to playing guitar.”

Henry’s enthusiasm failed to completely convince Sam that the “invention” would be practical. “And just how is it supposed to work?”

Henry cranked the vise open and pulled out the hand. He laid it on the back of his own hand, slipped his thumb through a loop and tightened a small leather belt across his palm. When he moved his thumb the three mechanical fingers flexed toward his palm. He moved his thumb back and the fingers straightened out.

Sam raised his eyebrows, “That’s pretty neat, I guess. But is it useful?”

“You bet,” said Henry. “Watch!”

He laid his hand over a screwdriver and flexed his

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thumb. The fingers closed around the handle and he picked it up. Then he flexed his thumb back and the screwdriver fell to the floor. “Well, it’s gonna take some practice, but I think I’ve got something here!”

As Henry bent over to pick up the screwdriver a second time, I came into the workshop frantically, “Daddy! I can’t find my bike!”

“Where did you last see it?” Henry didn’t let on that he’d hidden it and winked at Sam to keep quiet.

“I left it right outside, just for a minute!” he cried.

“There’s your mistake,” Henry replied. “It’s probably been stolen.”

I began to cry, “But it’s my bike! That’s not fair.”

“Life seldom is fair, son,” as Henry held up his maimed and partially mechanized hand.

I ran into the house and Henry turned to Sam, “I’ll give him a day or two to stew over it, then give it back. That should teach him a lesson.”

A few minutes, Juliette came into the workshop. “I is crying his eyes out. It’s something about his bike. What’s going on?”

“He left it in the driveway,” Henry explained. “I hid it away and told him it was stolen.”

“That’s a horrible punishment. You should take some advice from Elvis: ‘Don’t be cruel,’” she accused. She stormed out of the workshop and returned a few moments with I. He was wiping tears from his eyes.

Sam was embarrassed to witness the events unfolding before him, but saw no way out.

“Tell him, Henry! You’ve broken his heart.”

Henry went over to the closet where he’d hidden I’s bike. “Here it is,” he said cheerfully. “But you should be

more careful.”

I rushed and grabbed the bike, giving his father a glare as he rode off. Juliette turned her back and stormed out as well.

Sam offered his opinion, “I think you’ve got some problems brewing.”

Henry stood in stunned silence, his mechanical fingers flexing as he tried to suppress his rising anger. “She coddles that kid a little too much. He’s gotta learn the hard realities that life can hand him, or he won’t be able to handle it when it all blows up on him.”

Sam excused himself from the uncomfortable situation. Henry, so full of energy because of the demonstration of his invention, now felt only a lump in his stomach. How can he teach a life’s lesson if Juliette was always playing the end around?

## CHAPTER TWENTY

### *1961 - Henry and Juliette*

Henry gave himself a few minutes to calm down before going back into the house. Juliette was furiously scrubbing the kitchen counter. It was clear to him that she was in no mood for sweet talk.

“What just happened?” Henry began.

Juliette lashed out, “More and more you’re making it hard on I. For years you’ve been working with the band, but rarely spend any time with us. And if it’s not that, then you’re out in your workshop or you’re down at the Stomping Grounds, drinking. I’ve been left to raise him practically on my own.”

Henry started to protest, “But...”

Juliette reeled on him, “Don’t ‘but’ me. You know it’s true!”

Henry had not seen this side of Juliette before and was thoroughly confused.

Juliette continued, “I’ve been unhappy for the last two years. Just look at Buddy and Annette. Even with Buddy on the road so much, he still makes the extra effort to

spend as much time as he can with the family. You,” she sputtered, “You couldn’t even find the time to get me something for Valentine’s Day!”

Juliette finally dealt the killing blow, “I’ve already spoken to my parents. I’m going to move back home for a while and I’m taking I with me. You can take some time to think about what’s important in your life while I’m gone.”

Henry was dumbstruck, but Juliette would not be swayed by apologies and excuses.

Henry slept that night on the sofa, and in the morning tried to reason with Juliette. “Maybe I haven’t been paying attention, but I’m bringing in good income, and we are in a much better state than we were after the fire.”

“After the fire was the best time of our life. You were loving, cared deeply for the baby, and even made special events from everyday occurrences. That’s the Henry I fell in love with, not the one I see before me now.”

“Don’t try to talk me out of it. I have to get away,” she concluded.

Henry could offer no more excuses, and watched as she gathered up the suitcase she had packed as well as a small one with I’s clothes.

“I’m not going to tell him right away why we’re going away, but I’ll be back to gather up more of my things. *If* I come back to you, there had better be some changes around here!” she threatened.

Juliette marched out with a confused I as Henry called out, “Don’t let the door hit you on the way out!” It didn’t help the situation, but he had to say something.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

### *1961 - Isaac*

It had been seven months since Juliette had moved out, and there was still no progress on convincing her to come home. Rather than try to truly change, Henry ended up spending even more time at the Stomping Grounds. When Buddy was off the road, Annette sometimes encouraged him to spend some time with his friends, so Buddy joined Henry.

“I don’t know what to do, Buddy. I’m at the end of my rope.”

“Annette spoke to Juliette this morning. She seemed happy, and that can’t be good for you,” Buddy revealed.

“I miss her, and I’m lost.” Henry took another drink from his beer bottle.

While he steeped in his current loneliness, he thought of how much he missed Juliette. He could see no way for reconciliation, no way to undo the wrongs she had caused him. Maybe it was time he tried to move on. He thought about meeting another woman, sharing an illicit affair, and regaining his stripped manhood.

As if by magic, fate chose to clear the air in the smoky bar and he could see clearly to the other side. Across the bar, a crowd seemed to be gathering. Henry spotted a familiar face within it. He knew in a flash that it was Sandy Thompson, his first great love.

His heart began to race and he began to wonder. Is this possible? Is this a sign? The once woman of my dreams is right here in this very bar at this very moment. He pushed aside his chair, and as if attracted by a magnet, began to approach her. On closer inspection, the facts gave way to the realization that this woman had seen better times, and now was not one of them. She was thin as a rail, barely skin and bones. Her blond hair, once so beautifully fashionable, was stringy and greasy. Even her once smooth complexion showed signs of scarring. Acne? Disease? He wasn't sure.

As she sat there with a lit cigarette between her fingers, and a glass of whiskey at the bar, Henry was surprised that she still seemed to attract a fair amount of attention from some of the guys. Henry's brief affair of the heart was abruptly halted. Still, he felt compelled to at least greet her.

"And then that lousy rat of a husband up and left me with two kids," he overheard her saying as he approached the bar. "I decided to come back here to try to start a new life."

She looked as Henry joined the crowd of men around her, with a slight glimmer of recognition. "I know you!"

Henry was a bit taken aback, as he reintroduced himself, "Henry," he simply said.

"Yeah, that's right, the chicken guy," she laughed. Henry hadn't been "the chicken guy" for nearly seven



years, and some of the newer guys didn't understand the reference.

"Yeah," she continued. "You really used to stink of that chicken shit."

As the other guys began to laugh, Henry tried to take it in stride. "That was a long time ago," he explained. Henry was wondering if it had been a good idea to make the effort to reacquaint him with her unique "charms."

"Ah, I'm just kidding. You were a cool guy," she recalled, taking another gulp from her glass.

"So what brings Sandy Thompson back to our neck of the woods?" Henry inquired.

"I was jush," she slurred her words a bit before trying to recover, "just tellin' the guys here about how my old man left me. Oh, and it's Sandy Daly, now. Though I don't know if I want to keep that name anymore." She took another gulp and a drag on her cigarette. The hanging ash fell to the floor.

"He was a bum anyway. Better off without him. When he knocked me up with my son Isaac, I at least thought he would be a better man than my oldest's father. He married me, but I couldn't have been more wrong about him." The guys at the bar lapsed into an uncomfortable silence.

"Ah, what the hell! Drink up everyone!" She raised her glass and drained it. "Barkeep! Another!"

Henry excused himself and went back to sit down with Buddy. "The woman is a mess. I can't imagine what she must have been through to bring her to such a low."

Buddy agreed, "I'd hate to meet the guy who could put up with that for a few days, much less a few years." He chuckled, somewhat in embarrassment, at her misfortune. "Better him than us!" and raised his own bottle of beer.

Henry looked away, not wanting to further kick the woman when she was down, when he saw Sandy get up and move towards his table.

“Hey, Henry” she sloshed. “They tell me you got a kid the same age as mine. He don’ know anybody ‘round here. Maybe they c’n be frennsssh.” Her speech was even sloppier than at the bar.

“Uh, yeah, sure Sandy. They probably go to the same school.”

“OK, good,” as she stumbled back to the bar.

Henry spoke in a low tone to Buddy, “Let’s make a quick exit before she thinks about coming back.”

“I’m with ya, man,” Buddy agreed.

Outside the bar, Henry confided in Buddy. “I once thought the world of that woman. When I first saw her tonight, I thought maybe she had been sent to me to help with my loneliness. I couldn’t have been more wrong. I miss Juliette.” Henry was a wreck himself.

“Maybe she *was* sent,” suggested Buddy. “But not for the reason you think. What you’re seeing there could be you if you continue on this path of self-destruction. Sleep on it, and go see Juliette tomorrow. If you really want it, you can get her back.”

The next day at school, the teacher introduced the new student to his classmates. “This is Isaac Daly, he’s coming here from Boise, Idaho.” The teacher pulled out a map of the U.S.A. and showed the second graders where Boise was. *Any opportunity for a teaching moment*, she thought.

At recess, Isaac saw two boys from his class throwing a ball. “I’m Isaac,” he introduced himself.

“Here, catch,” as Spike threw the ball to him. “I’m

Spike. This here's I."

"Spike?" Isaac questioned, "I thought I heard the teacher call you Adrian."

"Well, yeah, that's my name, but I like Spike better. Adrian's a sissy name."

Turning to the other boy, he said, "Did he say your name is Eye?" He pointed to his own eye and laughed.

"It's 'I. Just one letter," I said defensively. "Ninth letter of the alphabet," he added unnecessarily.

"That's a stupid name," Isaac continued. "I, Eye, Aye, Ai yi yi!" I started to react, but Spike held him back.

Isaac pulled out a handkerchief and blew his nose. "Hey, man, just kidding. I just never heard of anyone named I before." He sniffed again.

He looked as another kid hovered nearby. "Who's that?"

"Oh, that's my cousin, Osgood," Spike explained. "He likes to hang out with us sometimes. He's OK. A little girly, maybe." He called to Osgood, "Hey, Ozzie, cm'here!"

Osgood shyly moved forward, and Isaac reached out his hand. As Osgood went to meet it, Isaac quickly pulled it back, making Osgood the fool. "Gotcha!"

The soon to be friends were off to a shaky start.

Buddy's advice to Henry was wise, and Henry stopped in at his in-laws' home to see Juliette the following day. It was obvious that Juliette had been crying.

"Are you all right, dear?" Henry asked with concern.

Juliette wiped at a tear. "No, not really. I'm lonely. I try to make the others think that everything's all right, but when I'm here by myself, I am always sad. Even Annette

doesn't know how sad I've been."

Henry reached out and held her hand. "I've been thinking about the things you said when this all blew up. I have been selfish with my time, I have been ignoring you and I, and I've squandered a life from you. It's taken me this long to realize it. Can you come home? Can you forgive me? I promise things will be different."

"I will come home," she said. Then she added, sternly, "But if things haven't changed, if they don't change, I will make this permanent."

Henry privately vowed that things would be different.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

### *1962 - Greta*

Henry was true to his word, and devoted his spare time to Juliette and I. He stopped frequenting the Stomping Grounds, and eventually broke the word to Buddy that he could no longer continue as the Scrappers' manager. Buddy was sorry to see him relinquish the post, knowing how much he had given the band, but also understood Henry's dilemma.

Although Henry had been inattentive to his family life for so long, one thing he had not been was a spendthrift. The Scrappers success had also been his success, and he made a lot of money working with them. He was a savvy investor and his secretive ways in the years before the near failure of his marriage allowed him to build up a substantial sum. His total assets were in the neighborhood of \$250,000.

When he revealed the sum to Juliette, she nearly fainted. They were rich! He was not yet 35 years old, and he considered the opportunity to retire altogether. But Henry was also humble, and did not let on to his friends

how much his success had benefitted him and his family.

Juliette allowed him time for one vice, and that was his love for tinkering in the workshop. When asked how he now supported his family, he would point to one of his many inventions and claim that he'd been lucky.

True, several of his inventions had been patented and they did bring in some additional investment income. But the fact was this: many of the inventions were pure junk. Henry didn't care, because for him, it was the tinkering, the craft. The actual outcome was not important. If it was a success, then the rest was gravy.

Greta, the faithful dog, was getting old. She spent much of her time lying down in the workshop when Henry was working. Her glory days as the heroic savior of chickens was long gone, and even the last several years of playing in the yard with I were no longer a priority for her.

Henry had noticed her lethargy and decided it was for lack of exercise. He got to tinkering and using some of the machinery scraps he had saved that were left over from the hatchery fire many years earlier and began constructing a motorized running pad for her. Greta watched quizzically as the machine took shape. First, he assembled a frame out of wood, then using one of the old conveyor belts and a couple of rollers, laid out a bed two feet wide and six feet long. An old washing machine motor would serve as the drive and he added some gears and a variable power supply to allow it to operate at different speeds.

Within two weeks, it was completed and Henry turned it on. It worked flawlessly, and Henry urged Greta to step onto it. She at first resisted, so Henry himself got on the moving platform and took a walk. Finally, her curiosity got

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to her and she stepped on and began walking. Henry stepped off and Greta remained. He turned up the power a bit and she started to run, she barked happily and kept running until, suddenly, she seemed to stumble and then fell off. Henry rushed to her side, but it was too late. The run had proven too much for her old heart. Greta was dead.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

### *1963 - I, Spike, Isaac and Osgood*

I and his three friends were together on the playground. I faced them and shouted, "Alright, you guys, line up! You're in the army now!"

Spike glared at him, "Army?! Just a minute! This is recess. We're supposed to be pickin' teams for playin' basketball or somethin'."

Osgood suggested, "Why don't we play hopscotch or jump rope?"

I played the drill sergeant and got right up in his face, "Shut up, sissy, and get in line! We're gonna march now."

Isaac complained, "I don't want to march. My stomach hurts."

"You'll march or your head's gonna hurt," I threatened.

Spike turned to Isaac and Osgood, "I don't like the idea of this at all. He's always giving orders. Man, I think we really are in the army."

The tight discipline that I was trying to enforce began to fall apart. Isaac looked around and spotted a cute girl, "Hey, look at that girl over there!"



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Spike took notice, too. “Man, is she stacked! Must be one of those sixth graders.”

While Isaac and Spike ogled their object of attention, Osgood observed, “You guys are always looking at those girls. I don’t see anything good about them.”

I was fed up that the other guys aren’t paying attention to him and shouted, “You guys quit chattering back there!”

Osgood, just barely beneath his breath complained, “Boy, what a bully.”

I turned around angrily, “What did you say?!”

Osgood hung his head, slightly embarrassed as he struggled to find an excuse. “Uh,” he stammered, “I said lunch made me full.”

I warned him, “You shouldn’t eat so much. That’s probably why your stomach hurts.”

Osgood tried to correct his observation, “But it doesn’t hurt, Isaac’s does.”

I goaded him, “You do everything else he does, so you must have a sore stomach, too.”

Spike was getting annoyed, “Let’s go play basketball instead.”

“I’d rather go smoke behind the backstop.” Isaac suggested. “I took a pack of cigarettes from my mom,” as he flashed them from his coat pocket.

I maintained the drill sergeant role. “There’s no smoking during marching practice. Now get going! Hup, two, three, four. Hup, two, three, four.”

Surprisingly, the other boys fell into line and started marching with I across the playground.

“Hey! Hey! Get outta my way. I just got back from the U.S.A.!” they chanted as they marched.

Isaac stumbled and yelled “Ow! I stubbed my toe!”

“I’m going to cut off your leg if you don’t shut up!” I angrily retorted.

Spike had finally had enough, “Whady’a say we take a break?”

I insisted on being in charge, “I say when we stop.” He paused briefly, then “O.K., let’s take a break.”

Spike was giving up on him, “I’m going over to play basketball.”

Isaac and Osgood had tired of it as well. “Me, too” Isaac agreed.

“Me, three.” Osgood echoed.

Is anger broke out, “You!” indicating Spike, “Shut up!” and turning his attention to Isaac and Osgood “You!” he pointed, “Sit down!”

“I’m in charge here,” he continued, “and don’t you forget it. I’m giving the orders, and you will listen to my demands. If you want to do something, then you’d better ask my permission first. Even if you need to talk, walk or breathe. You’d better ask!”

Spike quickly attempted to reverse the roles and faced off with I, “Look, man, we’re done with you. We’ve made up our minds to play someplace else, and maybe it’s you who needs to be asking our permission to stay. I’m so pissed right now, you just might be facing a knuckle sandwich.” He paused to let it sink in. “Or worse!” he threatened.

“So are you gonna stay, or run away like a sissy?” Spike demanded.

I was in a state of shock as the other began to walk away with Spike.

“Hey, where are you going? Get back here!” he tried to

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demand to no effect.

Spike called back, “Aw, g’wan, get lost! You ain’t part of this group no more.”

I tried to assert himself again, “Whady’a mean? You can’t leave. Only I can say when you leave!”

But it was obvious that he had lost his tight control on the group, “Only you can stuff it! Let’s go, guys.” Spike replied, as he turned his attention to the basketball court on the other side of the playground.

I relented, “O.K., we’ll play basketball. But I’m captain.”

Isaac, bolstered by Spike’s retorts, called back. “Forget you! You’re not playing at all.”

Even meek Osgood got in his shot, “That’s right, you bully. You ain’t playing.”

I was stunned, he’d always had his way, and this was not his way.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

### *1963 - I-Day*

I always enjoyed the celebration of I-Day, and the fact that it fell on his birthday was a double pleasure for him. I had no idea that the day was meant to honor him. Henry and Juliette did not want it to color his early life, and they kept that part of its origins a secret from him.

Without knowing its true meaning, I secretly reveled in the fact that the holiday had the same name as his. One might suppose it was like a kid named Chris born on Christmas, a kid named Hal born on Halloween, or a kid named Abe born on Lincoln's birthday. To them, it was coincidence, but they enjoyed it along with everyone else.

This year's I-day celebration was more subdued than others, with the President's assassination only twelve days earlier, but as a birthday, Henry and Juliette had never let the occasion slip without a great celebration.

"It's your birthday!" exclaimed Henry as he tried to get I out of bed. "You're a year older than you were yesterday. Do you feel it?"

"Leave me alone," I declared in his grogginess. "Let me

sleep.”

“You’ve got a long life ahead to sleep, sleepyhead,” said Juliette. “But you’ll have to fill your years ahead with more than sleep, too, I hope.”

“That’s right,” said Henry. “You can’t take it with you when you die.”

“Henry!”, exclaimed Juliette. “That’s a morbid thought to pass along to a ten year old.”

“I’m just sayin’,” Henry defended his statement. “He needs to take advantage of what he’s got now. That will help him get by the future. After all, ‘another day, another dollar.’”

“If you play your cards right,” Henry turned to I, “you’ll be a leader and others will follow you. But don’t be overbearing, because they will turn on you.”

“Henry! That’s enough!” exclaimed Juliette, not quite sure of the meaning of the words coming out of Henry’s mouth.

“Happy birthday little one, our little son, you’re number one!” Juliette sang.

I pulled the pillow over his head. His fight with his friends was too fresh in his mind, and he wasn’t sure he even wanted to go outside today.

“Just a minute,” Henry cried and he ran out of the room. He returned smashing a cymbal he had received a couple of years earlier as a going away present from the Scrapers drummer’s kit. “Greet the morning, boy. This oughta get you up!”

I sat up and wiped the sleep from his eyes as the words finally began to sink in: it was his birthday. He was ten!

Henry and Juliette left him to get dressed and come into the kitchen for the special breakfast that Juliette prepared.

In a way, having a holiday made it so much easier to celebrate all day long, and a good breakfast was a good start, as she always told him.

As I entered, Henry raised his glass of orange juice in a toast, “The years that follow will be fulfilling,” he predicted. “So live them well. Always be willing to change your ways to please the people.”

Juliette turned again to Henry, “What’s gotten into you? Now you’re being philosophical?”

Henry lowered his glass, but ignored the comment as I dug into the stack of birthday pancakes. And just as quickly, he wolfed down his own glass of orange juice.

“Where’s my present? Where’s my present?” I asked in excitement.

“Now, now. Calm down,” chided Juliette. “Daddy and I didn’t forget. Henry?”

Henry looked up from his scrambled eggs quizzically, then bopped his forehead with the heel of his hand. “Oh, right! Just a minute,” as he left the room.

He returned with a big package, at least three feet on a side, and I’s eyes widened almost as big.

“This is for you!”

I ran over and began tearing off the wrap, revealing a nondescript box beneath. He grabbed the edges and tore open the box cover, peering inside to reveal its contents: another wrapped box.

I, slightly disappointed, pulled the second wrapped box out, unwrapped and opened it only to reveal a third. With each box growing smaller by degrees, his excitement as he moved to the final goal began to wane. When he opened the tenth and final box, all that remained was an envelope which simply said “Happy 10<sup>th</sup> Birthday I!”

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I nearly threw it aside in disgust. Juliette encouraged him to open it.

Inside was a note that read, “Look in the red book on the bookshelf.” I ran over, expecting to find great riches stuffed inside, only to find another note. Henry and Juliette chuckled at the look of consternation on I’s face. That note led to the vase on the table, the next to the top shelf in the closet, and finally the tenth note led to a small box hidden behind the salt and pepper shakers right there on the kitchen table.

I had lost all enthusiasm for the search by then, but Henry urged him “Go ahead, open it!”

I lifted the lid on the tiny box and turned it over as ten shiny pennies spilled out. “What’s this?” he dejectedly asked.

“It’s a penny for each of your years,” Henry explained as he picked one up. “Look! Here’s 1957, the year you turned four!”

I was even more disappointed, and a tear began to form. “That’s it?” he inquired.

“Well, not quite,” Henry admitted, as he left he room for a second time, returning this time with something a bit more substantial.

“It’s a radio!” I said excitedly, “My own radio!” I turned it on.

“Let’ see if there’s a game on!” Henry suggested.

Juliette warned Henry, ”Let him listen to what he wants.”

I tuned to a local rock station and started to do The Twist.

Henry reached for the volume knob, “Hey! Not so loud!”

“Honey, it’s his birthday,” Juliette said. “Let him enjoy it.”

To I, she said, “Would you like to see your birthday cake?”

“Yeah! What kind?”

“It’s your favorite. Chocolate!” She pulled it triumphantly from the pantry shelf.

“Oh boy! Let have some!”

“No, no. It’s barely past breakfast. We’ll wait until after dinner. Why don’t you go out and show your radio to your friends?”

I ran outside to see Spike, Isaac and Osgood playing ball in the street. “Hey look what I got. A radio!”

“So what!” yelled back Spike, “Get outta here. We’re playin’!” The fight of a few weeks before had not yet been forgotten.

“Can I play?” I inquired, willing to bury the hatchet.

Isaac boldly stepped up. “No, we already started. Go away!”

Once again, Osgood was emboldened to add, “Yeah, go away!”

As the boys ran off, I headed back home in despair.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

### *1963 - I-Day revealed*

I entered his house and threw his radio on the sofa. Juliette noticed that I's tears were ready to break forth, and stopped to comfort him.

“Honey, what’s wrong?” she asked.

“The guys don’t want to play with me,” he complained. “I don’t understand!”

“Well, they don’t know what a good friend they have in you,” she assured him. “They don’t know how special you are.”

Henry looked up from his newspaper, wondering where Juliette was going to go with this. Juliette met his eyes. “Henry, I think it’s time.”

Henry nodded and went over to the closet, he pulled a box down from the top shelf, and I got all excited again. “Another present!” he exclaimed.

“Well, yes... and no” his mother said cryptically.

In the box were newspapers from December 5, 1953. The headline read “President Establishes I-Day.”

“Darling, do you see this headline?”

“Yeah, so what? It’s I-Day. We celebrate every year,” I replied.

“There’s more to it than you realize,” she said. “It’s called I-Day because of you!”

“What?”

“That’s right,” she continued and she and Henry began pulling mementos from the box from that first celebration. I saw pictures of some bald guy, some hairy guy and some really old guy. They were all looking at a tiny baby. “That’s you!”

“Who are those old men?” I asked.

“We came to know them as Ike, Bert and Chuck. They were very important at the time.”

“Why are they there?” he prodded.

“They brought you some special gifts in honor of your birth, ten years ago,” Henry answered. He picked up a framed certificate and showed it to I.

“Here’s the Presidential Proclamation establishing I-Day as a national holiday.” He reached into the box again, “and here’s your Honorary Doctorate degree from the University.”

“And this,” Juliette pulled out sheets of paper in a sweep of majesty. “This is your destiny!”

“A little melodramatic, don’t you think?” offered Henry.

“You remember what he told us, ‘Don’t do anything with them for at least ten years’” she added.

Juliette handed I the paper. “What is it?” he asked.

“It’s music! It’s a special piece by a famous composer that was given to you. It’s never been performed anywhere!”

“What am I supposed to do with it?” as he looked it over. It didn’t make a lot of sense to him.

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Henry and Juliette glanced at each other. “Chuck didn’t say, and now he’s gone” she said wistfully. “He never revealed the secret. But I think you were meant to study it. It’s important. He said as a result your name would be shouted from hills and steeples.”

She turned to Henry, “Come to think of it, he was a bit of an odd duck.”

I was a bit confused with all this new information, something he didn’t expect on his birthday, but the implications of it began to set in. Maybe he was meant for greatness!

I picked up his radio and put it in the box with everything else. He took it into his room and looked again at the newspapers, the certificate, the degree, the sheet music. He turned on his radio and began to hum along with the song. Suddenly, his mood began to brighten as he thought: “*I’ve discovered a way to help me get through the day. Music!*”

I thought some more, “*I’d go stark-raving mad if I never had music.*” He imagined himself outside.

“*It would sound so sweet with my radio to my ear, blasting out loud!*” he imagined.

“The beat won’t stop, and I will be at the top of the mountain hearing the bells and people shouting out my name!” he exclaimed out loud.

He looked again the Doctorate, “You can have your equations” and then at the Presidential Proclamation, “and the power of the nations. Music is my life! It will take me away from it all, and I’ll never look back!”

He glanced out the window and saw his so-called friends playing. “With those other guys gone, I’ll go on and leave them all behind. I’ll be famous!”

“I’ll play that guitar just like guys on the radio. He turned it up more, “I’ll be a star. I’m already famous! Everyone will know my name!”

“I’ll turn it up and blast the crowd, my records will sell millions, and I’ll retire when I’m 25. My music will go on forever.”

“Yes,” he declared prophetically, “Music will be my life!”

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

### *1964 - The Sound of Music*

I rummaged through his parent's closet and found his father's old guitar, the one he used to play as a member of the Scuffling Scrappers. He pulled it out and strummed the strings. A slightly dissonant sound emerged. Even though the instrument had been neglected for more than ten years, it was surprisingly still in tune. Although Henry no longer played, I had seen his father's friends play, and tried to pick out a few notes.

Placing a finger on the frets, he found the sensation painful to his tender young fingers. Despite the pain, he pressed harder and plucked the string. A single note rang out. He moved his finger up one fret and plucked a second note. He continued up the guitar neck, picking out one note at a time until he reached the highest.

He moved to the next string and repeated the actions. He noticed that some of the notes were the same as what he played on the other string, though they started at a lower place. He pressed on the fifth fret of the sixth string and played the note, then plucked the fifth string without

pressing on the fret. It was the same note!

He continued his experimentation, moving to the next string. When he reached the third string, the pattern broke. The note that matched was the fourth fret. Something must be wrong with that one, he thought. The pattern returned for the second string.

I reached up to the tuning peg and twisted the one for the second string, to make it match the 5<sup>th</sup> fret on the third string, just like the other. Now the first string didn't match the second, so he made a similar adjustment to the first string.

He once again worked his way from the sixth string to the first. Now they all matched. He strummed the strings again and they sounded worse than before. Maybe the way it was before was how it was supposed to be? He retuned the first and second strings. Still, a strum didn't sound much like music.

He went back to picking notes. In school they had studied scales, singing "Do-Re-Mi" for practice. He started again at the sixth string. He tried to sing "Do" along with it, but it was too low for his young voice. He tried the fifth string. It was still too low. Finally, the fourth string was a note he could match with his voice. He plucked it and sang "Do." He pressed down on the first fret and played "Re." It didn't sound right. He took his finger off the fret and played the open string, then back down on the first fret. Still not right. He tried the open string again and this time selected the second fret. "Re" rang out. "Do-Re" he sang as he struck the strings along with his voice. He added "Mi" and found the same problem. The note on the third fret didn't match. He moved to the fourth fret and it was a match. He didn't

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understand why they put an extra fret between the notes, but figured out the pattern pretty quickly and laid down his finger on the sixth fret to play “Fa.” It wasn’t right either. This time the note was too high. He moved down to the fifth fret and played “Fa.”

“That’s weird,” he said to no one in particular.

He went back to the open string and in turn played it followed by the second fret, fourth fret and fifth fret. Recalling that the fifth fret was the same as the next open string, he tried again, this time substituting the open third string for the fourth note.

He moved along the third string in the same fashion then stumbled when he jumped to the second. The open string sounded the same tone as the note he had played on the third string, fourth fret. He tried the next fret, but still too low. Finally, he was back on the second fret. The next note he played was the fourth fret, but again, too high. He backed off one and landed on the third. Success! Thinking about how the string was tuned differently from the rest, he decided it made some sense. He finished the scale on the third fret.

Going back to the fourth string, he played the scale from the beginning and sang along “Do Re Mi Fa So La Ti Do.”

His finger was beginning to get sore. The strings of the guitar were making a line on the tip and it was red. But he wanted to explore some more.

He carried the guitar over to the family piano. He remembered his teacher talking about “Middle C” and pointing to its location at the middle of the piano keyboard. He pressed it and the tone sounded. He once again played his scale from the fourth string and found

that none of the notes matched the one on the piano. The seventh note of the scale he played was a little too high and the sixth a little too low. He hit the final note of the scale on the guitar and found the note on the white key next to Middle C. The elusive note on the guitar had to be the black key in between the two. Once again, success!

He lay down the guitar and started playing with the piano keys. Starting at Middle C, he hit the white keys, one by one, singing along with “Do Re Mi.” This time, no surprises; everything sounded fine. He moved back up to the white key next to Middle C, the one that sounded like the fourth string on his guitar, although a little higher. He noticed the pattern of the keys repeated itself and counted backward from “Do Ti La So Fa Mi Re Do.” The lowest key matched that of the guitar. Again he ran through the scale on the piano, but the third and seventh notes didn’t sound right. He had to play those notes on the black keys instead.

Since the note from his scale was “Do” he figured the piano key played the note “Do” as well. Since it was next to Middle C, he figured, maybe it was called “D.” But that didn’t make much sense; the key his teacher called “C” should be “T” for “Ti.”

I decided to go with “C” and “D” and went backwards to “B” and “A.” He got stuck at the next key and decided it must be “Z.” He kept going down “Y”, “X”, “W”, “V”, “U”, and stopped. He was back to the key that looked like the same pattern around Middle C. He kept going down but ran out of letters before he ran out of keys. He started over again at “Z”.

When he reached the bottom of the keyboard he went back to Middle C and moved upward, “D”, “E”, “F”,



“G”, “H”, “I”, “J” and stopped once more. It would make more sense if that were a “C”, like Middle C; it would fit the pattern better. But that would mean that “H” and “I” would be “A” and “B.”

He realized that he had forgotten the black keys, and started over again. Starting at Middle C, he went backwards and got to “B” and “A,” the previous black key. Then, counting up again, “A”, “B”, “C”, “D”, “E”, “F”, “G”, “H”, “I”, “J”, “K” and then back to “A.”

Well, he thought, that works, but why would “A” start on a black key? It made more sense to him that the white keys were bigger, so they must be more important. He started over once again. With the “A” before middle “C.”

“A.” He hesitated as he hovered his finger over the black key, and then pronounced it “A plus!” He continued, “B”, no black key after “B,” so he continued onto “C,” “C plus,” “D,” “D plus,” “E.” Again, there was no black key. “F,” “F plus,” “G,” “G plus,” and he was back to “A.” Going backwards he decided to change it up. “A,” “A minus,” “G,” “G minus,” “F.” No “F minus.” “E,” “E minus,” “D,” “D minus,” “C,” “C minus.” Oops, that was a white key. “B” he corrected. “B minus” and back to “A.” The patterns made some sense. He couldn’t quite figure out why two black keys were missing, but at least he had a way to name the notes.

I stopped playing the piano and went back to his room. He picked up the sheet music, the gift from Chuck, and placed it up on the piano. He looked it over, and started to see a pattern of the notes. There were two stacks of lines, with a single line between them, right in the middle. “Middle C!” he exclaimed. He looked over the music and noted that some of the markings were on the line, some

were between the lines, some had a “#” next to it, and some had a small “b” next to it. He figured that the “#” symbols were what he had termed “plus” and the “b” was what he called “minus”.

Within an hour’s time, I had figured out almost everything he needed to know to start playing music.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

### *1965 - The Clarinet*

By the time I entered seventh grade he was an expert in all things musical. He could sit down at the piano and play by ear any piece of music he heard. He sang beautifully, and his parents encouraged him to take up an instrument in the school band. He chose the clarinet.

The instrument was much different than playing the piano and held a distinct advantage over his attempts to play the guitar: it fit his hands. For no matter how much he tried to finger chords, the fact was this: his fingers were too short. He really wanted to play the guitar, and would listen for hours to guitarists on the radio, but couldn't get past his physical limitation.

The clarinet was hardly a challenge for him, it seemed nothing was, and he took to it very quickly. Before long, the other kids in the band would stop when he played and just listen. His technique was mesmerizing. When the occasional brave soul chose to challenge him to a playing contest, I would pretend that he was not good enough, and expressed fear of losing. But in the end, he would play

perfectly, and the challenger would sulk away, much like a dog with his tail between his legs.

I's band teacher entered him in competition after competition and he always walked away with the first prize, and usually a sizable cash prize as well, generally earmarked for the school. The I Mall Appreciation Trophy Cabinet was dedicated in his honor just to hold the many awards he brought home.

But while his teacher was proud, I's new attitude of superiority began to alienate him from his friends. I was certain it was simple jealousy and he ignored it. If they couldn't handle his greatness, then that was their problem.

While I thought it was their problem, he didn't realize that loneliness was beginning to take its toll on him. When he got home from school, he went right into his room, turned on the radio and worked on his homework, and then he practiced on the clarinet, and occasionally would compose some music on the piano.

Henry and Juliette were concerned about the changes they'd seen in I. They spoke to Dr. Orson about it.

"He's at the age where all kids are beginning to change," he advised. "This is something he'll grow out of in time."

Henry accepted the doctor's assessment, but Juliette was not so sure.

"I've seen him come home, day after day, and he just sits in his room and sulks," Juliette explained. "It's not healthy for him to be so isolated all the time."

Dr. Orson offered yet another assessment. "Your long separation four years ago may have finally taken a toll on him as well. There is likely some deep seated resentment left over from that experience, possibly towards the both

of you.”

“But we’ve given him everything,” Henry protested. “All his needs have been met, we revealed his ‘destiny,’ we provided him a way to experience it through his clarinet. What more?”

“Do you spend time with him?” Dr. Orson probed.

“Of course we do,” Juliette was upset at the implication of the doctor’s statement. “He always has our full attention. Both Henry and I spend as much time as possible with him.”

“Perhaps, then, it’s the opposite,” the Doctor explained. “He’s retreating to his room because otherwise he does not have any personal space of his own. Maybe you need to back off a little on the attention, and the situation will improve.”

Juliette was taken aback. “I don’t think I can do that. I vowed at his birth that I would always be there for him. I don’t want to see a time come where he feels he has to come to me pleading for attention.”

“But you must,” the doctor advised. “The consequences are unpredictable, but the pattern does seem to be established for failure.”

“Failure?” Henry was surprised at the seriousness of the doctor’s statement. “He can’t fail. He’s the best there is!”

“I’m sure you’re proud of your son’s accomplishments, but you must not let them take over his life. He must have balance.”

“And how do we do that?” Henry asked.

“Get him involved in sports, help him to meet other kids, find him a new hobby. Music can’t be his whole life.”

Henry agreed that they would give it a try. Juliette secretly kept it to herself that she thought the doctor was a

quack.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

### *1966 - Pool*

Henry considered his disability as he tried to engage I's interest in playing a little baseball. Wearing a glove on his left hand wasn't a problem, but throwing with his right was nearly impossible. And while Henry had developed ambidextrous abilities, switching the two fared no better. Henry considered revisiting his mechanical hand invention, which had been neglected since he first demonstrated it to Sam, but he realized that technology still hadn't advanced to meet his vision. It simply wasn't practical.

Football and basketball weren't any better choices. But what Henry recalled from his time spent in the Stomping Grounds was that he could play pool. Holding the cue was still a bit tricky, but balanced with his other hand, he was able to master it. He had spent many an evening playing for quarters, and he took home his share of pocketfuls of them.

I, at twelve, had not been able to play the game, banned by age from the Stomping Grounds, but Henry thought he

might find an interest in it. He bought a table to place in the spare bedroom of their house, and began to show I how the game was played. I took to it as naturally as his father.

Before long, I had mastered the game. The mathematics and physics of the game were well within his understanding, and the precise action necessary to line up and sink several balls simultaneously was an accomplishment of his that had previously been limited to the professional players. Before long, I exceeded Henry's ability, and was beginning to find the lack of challenge to be an issue.

Henry mentioned I's ability to Buddy. Buddy felt that pool could possibly be an outlet for Adrian's (he still couldn't come to call him "Spike") anger issues that had surfaced in the past year. Adrian had spent more time in the principal's office than in the classroom, always picking fights with some of the younger kids in the school.

One afternoon, Buddy brought Adrian over to the Mall home and young Angela was in tow. Buddy had suggested trying to mend fences with I, their falling out three years earlier had been a source of embarrassment to the two fathers.

"Adrian, I has a new pool table," Buddy told him, revealing his master plan. "He's supposed to be pretty good. Why don't you ask him for some pointers?"

Adrian grimaced at his father calling him "Adrian" and complained, "Dad, it's 'Spike.' I don't go by Adrian anymore. Nobody calls me that except you and mom."

"OK, 'Spike'", he emphasized the importance of the name. "Just give pool a try, and see what you can learn. You might have some fun at the same time."



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I actually welcomed Spike to the poolroom. As far as he felt, Spike's absence was self-imposed. He had no problem with Spike or any of his "former" friends. They just didn't want to spend any time with him. Teaching Spike to play pool could give their prior friendship a boot.

The years had softened Spike as well, and he seemed receptive to trying this out. I showed him how to rack the balls, explained the placement in a specific order, and demonstrated proper cue handling and preparation.

Spike finally had had enough of the lecture, "Let's get on with it and play!"

I took the cue ball, placed it on the table a squared up his shot. A clean break, and two balls were knocked in the pocket. He moved the scoring beads indicating the points he had just won, but rather than continue, turned to cue over to Spike.

"Give it a try," he said. "Try to knock that seven ball into the corner pocket."

Spike had watched I line up the initial shot and tried to follow his technique. Balancing the cue between the fingers on his left hand, he aimed for the white cue ball. With the thrust, he struck the ball off center and it careened to the right, missing its target altogether.

"Shit!" he cried.

"I'll give you another try," I said and relocated the cue ball to the original position.

Spike's attempt this time was a little better, but sent the cue ball sailing into the pocket.

"Goddammit!" he cried. I was a bit surprised. He did not hear that kind of language around his parents.

Taking the cue, I said. "Watch what I do." He carefully lined up the shot, slowly moving the cue back and forth to

ensure he would strike the ball at its precise center. The seven ball slid easily into the pocket.

“See? Easy as pie. Go for the thirteen,” indicating with the cue its position. “You should be able to send that right into the side pocket.”

Spike took his time, lining up the shot as he’d seen I do. He checked the angle several times. He stood up and reviewed the whole table, just to see if there were any other shots that would actually be easier. None could compare to the straightforward method required to sink it.

He bent over, handling the cue expertly; it slid naturally through his fingers. He backed it up to send the ball forward and struck it just below center and with such force that the ball became airborne, striking the window and shattering the glass.

“Oh, Ffff,” but suppressed it before the evil word got passed his lips. Henry and Buddy rushed in when they heard the glass breaking, spied the guilty Spike and couldn’t help but laugh when they saw the predicament the boys had gotten into.

“Maybe pool isn’t your game after all,” advised Buddy.

Spike laid down the cue, shaking his head in disbelief at the mess he’d made. But for a brief instant, his father’s calm reaction and levity of the scenario were enough to suppress any anger he might have felt.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

### *1967 - I and Henry*

I's excellence as a musician continued to grow. Despite his innate skill, Juliette insisted that he practiced daily and I resented it. He stared out the window with the clarinet lying in his lap. After an extended silence he heard his mother calling from the other room "Are you practicing in there?"

"Yes, mom" he sighed and played a few notes on the clarinet.

Once again he stopped and mumbled to himself. "I don't know why I have to practice. I'm so good now, I can't see any use." He called out to his mother, "Mom, how long do I have to practice?"

Juliette replied again from the other room, "Just a few minutes more. Remember, you have a challenger tomorrow."

I was frustrated that he continually had to defend his position as first chair. The second chair player was constantly challenging him, as if in a duel, and briefly took his seat once, and only once, when I had given up for

a time. His parents were extremely upset at the outcome, and forced him to respond with a new challenge the following week. The constant effort to remain the best was tiring.

I wistfully looked out the window again to see the neighborhood guys playing basketball over at Spike's house. "Gee, I'd rather be playing ball with the guys but they never let me do anything. I wonder why they don't like me?" He played a few more notes on his clarinet. "I got nothin' but this darn clarinet. At least I'm good at it."

He started playing a complicated solo, which took him up to the highest notes of the clarinet's range. "Take that second chair!" he challenged. "I'm undefeatable!"

I decided he'd had enough for the day, "Mom! I've finished practicing!"

Juliette called back, "Now do your homework!"

I groaned and lay back on his bed. "This place is a jail," he grumbled just under his breath. "I'm gonna relax first." He turned on the radio and listened for a few minutes.

As he became entranced with the music he dreamed out loud, "Man, I'd junk this clarinet any day for one of those guitars!"

Henry, noting the radio was on, stepped into I's room. "Shouldn't you be doing your homework, son?"

"I was taking a break."

"Don't take too many breaks or you'll fall apart, heh, heh." Henry's attempt at a little humor failed to impress I. He reached over to the radio and flipped the volume knob. "Do you have to have that radio up so loud?"

I reached to turn it back up, "I wanted to hear the guitar."

"You practically had the guitar sticking out of the

speaker.” I winced at his father’s habit of pronouncing guitar as “geetar.” “How’s the practicing coming along?”

“I’m finished for today,” I pronounced. “It’s starting to bore me.” He looked up at Henry and flatly stated, “I want to learn to play the guitar.”

“Guitar, huh?” I winced again. “I used to play the guitar when I was younger. I could play any Country-Western song you could name.”

I had heard the stories of his father’s musical exploits but remained unimpressed by his favorite musical genre. “I can’t name one. Besides, I don’t want a Country-Western guitar.” I purposely used his father’s pronunciation. “I want an electric guitar.” He pretended to play an imaginary guitar, scrunching up his face as he played an imaginary solo.

Henry was secretly elated, but wanted to test I’s resolve. “Those things are pretty dangerous. You can get a bad shock from ‘em,” he warned.

“I think I’ll take my chances. Can I have one?”

Henry had never spoken to I about his big dreams of playing bass guitar, of owning that Fender Precision Bass. But in fact, the dream had never left him. Perhaps I, he thought to himself, would carry on that dream from him.

“How about a bass guitar?” Henry suggested.

“A bass? No, I don’t think so. It takes no talent to play a bass. Who becomes famous playing a bass? Nobody even hears the bass,” he challenged. “I want an electric guitar. Just listen to those leads.” He cranked the radio up again.

Henry was taken aback as his dream was shattered once again. He didn’t even seem to notice that the radio volume was too high. He swallowed his pride and turned his outlook positive. Remembering his “rainy day” fund,

he thought this might be the right time to dip into it. “Maybe we’ll take a ride to the music store tomorrow.”

“Great! Thanks Dad!” I’s respect for his father rose, if only momentarily. “I need an amp, a fuzz box, a wah-wah pedal, the whole works!”

“Hold it a minute, let’s take it slow,” Henry warned.

I’s respect dipped again. “OK, OK,” his own brief dreams seemingly shattered as well.

“Well, tomorrow’s tomorrow and today’s today,” Henry urged I. “Now finish your homework!”

## CHAPTER THIRTY

### *1968 - Betty*

Henry had finally gotten his wish. After years of supporting Richard Nixon as Vice President and in his failed 1960 presidential and 1962 gubernatorial bids, he had pretty much given up that Nixon would ever rise to national prominence again.

When Nixon announced he would once again seek the presidency, Henry was the first to say “I told you so! We have not seen the last of Richard Nixon!”

The tragedy of 1963 was still fresh, and the war in Vietnam occupied many voters’ minds. As a fresh start, Nixon was a candidate who would end the war and get our men back home. That’s all we wanted, right?

At fourteen, I wasn’t interested that much, but couldn’t help but see his father’s enthusiasm. But Juliette was wary of it. “Don’t go overboard, you don’t want to be disappointed again.”

Henry was absolutely sure that Nixon would win in November, but his loyalty was torn when Governor Reagan entered the race. When it came to the primary,

only Reagan, California's favorite son, was on the ballot. Henry reluctantly cast his vote for Reagan. Juliette, of course, supported Kennedy.

With Kennedy's victory, Juliette was certain that he would easily take the national election, whether it was Reagan or Nixon. But when Kennedy was shot, that hope faded, and she found only a condescending support for the new front-runner, Vice President Humphrey.

Henry's hopes turned when Nixon took the nomination, and he practically danced in the street when in November, Nixon took the White House, even if it was one of the closest elections in history.

I held a bemused detachment to the entire affair. In his second year of high school, he was more interested in making friends, and more importantly, meeting girls. The expectation that Spike would become a good friend again failed to materialize, and Spike kept his distance from I, establishing his own circle of friends.

I first noticed Betty Stone, a freshman at the high school, when she was in the marching band. He admired her from afar for the first few weeks before he finally had the nerve to talk to her in person. The opportunity arose when they were about to take the school bus to a parade competition. She was ahead of him in line and turned, giving him a smile.

The first words out of his mouth were awkward. "Hi. I'm I. I think..." He trailed off.

What a Bozo, he thought. *She's* going to think I'm an idiot.

"You think?" was her response. "You mean you don't know?"

"I mean, I think we're in band together." As they stood



there in their uniforms, that point should have been fairly obvious. I wasn't going to win this one no matter how hard he tried.

"The uniform sort of gave it away," she replied.

"I play the clarinet," he offered as an explanation why he was holding one.

"Again, that's somewhat obvious." She smiled at his discomfort. "I'm Betty. I play the flute."

"Yeah," I looked down at his feet and shuffled them a bit. "I know. We're in band together." Oh, jeez, I said it again.

The brief encounter was not getting any better. Betty tried to smooth things over. "We're about to get on the bus. Would you like to sit with me?"

"Uh, sure, OK. You probably think I'm a moron," I conjectured.

"No, but I do think you're a little nervous. That's OK; I don't bite. Hard, at least," she gritted her teeth.

As they boarded the bus, some of the other band mates looked at I with awe, some with fear, and some with disdain. No one other than Betty had shown him any sign of friendship.

Betty's attention was calming I's nervousness. "Until this year, I hadn't seen you around here before," he said.

"We moved into town over the summer," she indicated. "My father used to live here when he was younger, and when he came back from Vietnam, we moved back here."

I found a bit of commonality, at least. "My uncle was in Vietnam. He used to write my mother about it, but stopped a couple of years ago. She's worried about him, but can never seem to get any new information."

"My mom was very worried during the time he was

away,” Betty revealed. “I was only eight when he was sent over there. When he came back, he wasn’t the same. I think he figured a return to his hometown might help.”

The band mates lapsed into silence as Betty looked out the window. The day was overcast and a bit chilly. She moved a little closer to I, and leaned her head on his shoulder. I was in Heaven.

As the bus moved down the road, the bus driver did not realize that the turn ahead was the one he needed to take. The students called out to him that he missed the turn. The road was not wide enough to make a U-Turn, so he continued on until he could make another turn, figuring that he would be able to circle back.

The next road up was a right turn, and the driver took it. As the road narrowed, he knew it was a mistake. The pavement gave out, and he was left on a bumpy dirt road. Ahead lay another right turn, so he took it. The road led into a grove of trees, and the branches brushed along the bus roof as they passed. As they continued through the miniature forest, they finally came upon a small house, where the road seemed to end.

The house was being used as a private school, and many young children were in the area. The bus driver slowed to a stop and got out to survey the situation. It looked like the turnabout ahead was the only possibility of reversing direction.

By this time, the students had gotten off the bus and were watching the driver as he tried to figure out what he was going to do. I and Betty stood next to each other, and Betty reached and grabbed I’s hand. I grasped back, and they were interlocked in a digital embrace.

The driver ordered everyone back on the bus as he

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decided to make his move. He inched ahead, carefully avoiding the school's fence. A planter of flowers in the center of the roundabout made the maneuvering particularly tricky. Every once in a while, the bus bumper would strike the brick planter, shaving a bit of masonry from it. Forward – reverse – forward – turn – the small steps were having a successful effect and finally, after thirty minutes, the bus cleared the final obstacle and was back on the road, this time heading in the right direction. The students let out a cheer and Betty leaned over and gave I a big kiss. I kissed back, and then broke off the embrace. Both looked a little embarrassed by their compulsive action, but settled back into their seats, quite happy.

When the bus finally arrived at their destination, the parade was already started, and the band took their place near the end. Because of their tardiness, points were deducted from the overall performance, and they failed to place in the top three.

The excitement of the trip to the parade, and the parade itself, was muted by the results and the quiet drive back home. But for I and Betty, time was passing at its own pace in their private world. Snuggling against the chill of the evening they passed the remaining time in silence.

Arriving back at the school, I gave her another kiss, and headed over to his parent's car.

“How was your day?” Juliette asked.

“It was OK,” I offered in his own non-committal way. He wasn't sure he wanted to tell her about Betty, just yet.

“I have some wonderful news!” Juliette was so excited. I actually stopped to pay attention. “My brother Arthur called me today. He's home from the war! That scoundrel

has actually been home for a few months, and he didn't let me know! He's bringing his family over for Thanksgiving. Oh, I've missed him, I haven't seen him for so long!"

I barely remembered his uncle; he figured he was probably about five years old the last time he saw him. But his mother's excitement failed to bubble over to him. He had Betty on his mind.

The days leading up to Thanksgiving were a bustle of activity, with shopping, cleaning and decorating for the holiday. When the day finally arrived, it was almost a letdown, but the smell of cooking turkey brought new warmth to the day's celebration.

The doorbell rang and Juliette rushed to answer it. Flinging it open, she embraced her brother. "Arthur! How dare you wait until Thanksgiving before coming to see me. You've always been full of mischief." Calling to I, she said, "Come here, I, and see your Uncle Arthur!"

I came in the foyer and saw his uncle. He could see the rest of the family somewhat hidden behind him. His mother re-introduced them. "This is your Uncle Arthur! And your aunt Jenny, and come out, girl!" she called to Arthur's daughter. "This is your cousin Elizabeth!"

I stared at the girl. "Betty?"

## CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

### *1968 – I-Day*

After the Thanksgiving meal was finished, I retreated to his room, listening to his records and making a sincere attempt at avoiding Betty. To think she was his cousin and what he'd done... He couldn't think of it and had to keep his mind elsewhere.

He pulled out the latest copy of *Circus* magazine. It was one of his favorites because it let him read about the latest groups of the day, told about the glamorous lives of the rock stars, and most of all, all the advertisements about guitars.

I could lose himself in reading for hours, and when he was interrupted by a knock on his door, he didn't respond right away. A second, harder knock got his attention.

"What?" he called out.

It was Juliette, "Your uncle is leaving. Come and say goodbye."

I wanted to avoid Betty at all costs, but it seems there was no avoiding it. He came in to the room, gave his Aunt a hug, shook his Uncle's hand, and waved goodbye to

Betty before retreating to his room.

A few moments later his mother returned. “You didn’t treat Elizabeth very nicely today. I thought you’d be excited to see her after all these years.”

“I see her all the time,” I revealed. “She’s in the band. I didn’t know who she was until today. She’s always hanging out with the snooty girls.” He had to find some excuse for his seeming disinterest.

“Well, I think you should make an effort to get to know her better. She’s a very nice girl.”

I had known her better than he ever wanted to again.

A few days later, another I-Day had rolled around. Like so many other holidays, it had been an appreciated day off from work and school, but falling so close to Thanksgiving and the Christmas holidays, its importance was diminishing. A number of schools and businesses no longer observed it, and even the Mall family focused more on birthday activities than on the national holiday. A late session lame duck congressional vote nearly succeeded in removing it as an official holiday, but enough votes weren’t mustered to pass the legislation. Some say it was in deference to President-Elect Nixon, as it was under the administration where he served as Vice President that the holiday was first established.

As it was I’s fifteenth birthday, he was becoming a bit disinterested in it himself. With the Christmas holidays rapidly approaching, and the thought of time off from school, away from Betty’s presence, he wished the days in between passed even faster.

When Christmas did finally arrive, I was delighted to discover that Spike’s family was coming over for dinner. He had wanted to renew his friendship with Spike, which

had seen better days. But when they did arrive, it was just Buddy, Annette and an eleven-year old Angela.

I asked, "Where's Spike?"

Annette looked to Buddy, and then simply said, "Adrian is spending Christmas with his grandparents."

Henry and Juliette were well aware of the relationship Annette had with Buddy's former in-laws, and did not press the question any further.

The families sat down for dinner, and Angela was seated next to I. I did not appreciate having this little girl next to him, but he didn't really have any choice. Angela told him, "My brother told me you have a girlfriend."

I tried to ignore the implied question. "I haven't talked to your brother for a long time. How would he know anything about me?"

"He said the other kids at school were talking about it." Angela was determined to keep the conversation going.

"What's this about a girlfriend, I?" Juliette asked. "You didn't tell me you had one."

"I don't!" I was emphatic. "They just probably saw me talking to someone and are trying to spread rumors. Some kids at school are just plain mean."

"I'll be your girlfriend," Angela pursued.

I stared at her, "You're just a little girl."

"I'm not a little girl!" Angela protested. "I'm almost twelve. I got my period last week!"

Annette nearly spit out the coffee she was drinking, and Buddy started to chuckle.

"Angela!" Annette cried. "That's not proper dinner table talk."

Angela deferred to her mother's manners correction and dropped her interrogation of I. A few snickers from

the parents gradually faded into general conversation, and the whole “girlfriend” matter was dropped.



## CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

### *1969 – Spike*

When school resumed in the New Year, I noticed something missing: Spike. Although he no longer had the once-close relationship with his old friend, he still would occasionally see him at school, and had him in one of his classes. At first he thought maybe he was just out sick, but when it was a full week back, there was still no Spike in sight.

I remarked about it to Juliette. She responded evasively, “Maybe he’s still at his grandparent’s house.”

“But what about school? He missed a whole week!”

“There are schools where they live. He’s probably going there instead. Don’t worry about it.”

Juliette’s inability to shed any light on Spike’s situation was curious, but it seemed useless to pursue it. She just didn’t seem to want to reveal any more information. I let it drop.

Spike was not at his grandparent’s house, as Juliette had claimed. What I didn’t know was that Spike had taken up residence at the Preston School of Industry, the “juvie.”

During the week leading up to the Christmas vacation, Spike had apparently fallen in with a bit of the wrong crowd. The group of four thought it would be cool to take a joy ride, and hot-wired a '66 Mustang. During their escapade, with Spike behind the wheel, they managed to crash it into a fence. While no one was seriously injured, they quickly left the scene, leaving the still running car across the sidewalk.

The homeowner wasn't able to identify any of the "punks" as he called them, but there was one telling piece of evidence left behind: a leather jacket. Across the back of the jacket, in metal studs it spelled out SPIKE.

It didn't take investigators long to make the connection and pay a visit to the Jones' home. Buddy and Annette had noticed Spike's seeming reserve the past couple of days, but couldn't quite place a finger on it. The accusations made it clear: Spike had stolen a car, taken a ride, crashed into private property and fled the scene. To top it off, he was an unlicensed driver and a bag of marijuana was found in the car.

At his hearing, Buddy and Annette pleaded for leniency, but the multiple crimes were serious. Authorities were unable to gather information regarding the remaining culprits, and Spike was unwilling to implicate his "friends." Spike's sentencing was swift: he would spend the years until he was eighteen in juvenile hall. His education was to continue on the inside.

Despite his lack of freedom and the enforced discipline, Spike adjusted to the regularity of his new existence. Most of the other wards didn't give him too many problems, as he was larger than many of them, but he gained a

reputation of someone to avoid, even if he rarely interacted with any of the others.

Despite his earlier “crimes” Spike tried to be a model student. But even concentrating on this wasn’t enough to keep him out of the occasional fistfight with the same wards that wanted to challenge the assumption of him being a tough guy. The fights would generally end up in a black eye or a bloody nose for someone, and usually a period of enforced isolation on the part of everyone.

Spike’s counselor called him in to discuss it. “Mr. Jones.” Everyone was “Mr.” here. “This constant fighting is getting out of hand.”

Spike protested, “I’m not responsible. I’m just trying to defend myself.”

The counselor was bemused, “A big guy like you being picked on? I hardly think so!”

Spike continued to raise his objections, “It’s true. I try to keep to myself, but they come on like they’ve got something to prove. I don’t want any of it! I get pissed off, though, and can’t help but take a shot back.”

“Therein lies the problem,” the counselor pronounced. “It’s your latent anger. You need to find an outlet for it. Let it go, and the fighting will stop.”

“Do you like music?” the counselor continued. “Music hath charms to soothe the savage beast,” the counselor misquoted.

“My dad is a musician,” Spike revealed. “I’ve been around it all my life.”

“Then maybe we should see about getting you into the music program here at the school. That may be just the incentive you need to curb your anger.”

Spike discovered that he did have an interest, and that

that interest led to playing the drums. With music his constant companion during his early years, he had developed a keen ear for rhythm. Before long, the teachers began to take notice of his innate skill. And, best of all, banging on the drums all day gave him an outlet to work on his anger issues.

One side effect was that when it came time for the compulsory chores, Spike wasn't interested. Between studies and playing drums, he tried to get out of them at every opportunity. "I don't wanna work," he told his counselor. "I'd rather just play the drums. All day if possible." His obsession was a little problematic.

"Mr. Jones," his counselor told him. "Everyone has to carry his weight around here. You've been a good student, and you've developed some good skills as a musician. I don't think you want to endanger your situation by refusing to cooperate."

The warning was clear, but the counselor sweetened the deal. "With your good cooperation, I can see that some time can be shaved off your sentence. When you finish your high school studies here, you'll be allowed to go home."

Spike began tending to his proper chores.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

### *1970 - Isaac and Betty*

I was in his last year of High School and had successfully been able to avoid Betty most of the time. Betty was hurt by I's inattention, but had her group of friends for support. Betty was also dating Isaac Daly, but it wasn't going so well.

"I like Isaac," she once told one of her girlfriends. "But he gets moody, and sometimes it's like he's not even there at all."

Isaac's home life wasn't too stable either. His mother had a succession of "houseguests" over the years. Sometimes they would stay for as much as three months, sometimes as little as three days. None would he want to call "Dad."

The one benefit that Isaac saw about his mother's boyfriends was that it kept him in cigarettes. Between his mother and her friends, there was always a pack lying around, and it was easy enough to get a smoke just about whenever he wanted to. By the time he was sixteen, he'd already become a pack a day smoker.

Betty didn't like Isaac to smoke, and refused to kiss him unless he chewed some gum at the least. But what Betty didn't know, and Isaac didn't share, was that he was also a pothead.

Sandy Daly's April boyfriend was a dealer, and always had a big stash with him. April was a busy month at the Daly home, there were sometimes more than one "houseguest" over, and cars coming into and out of the neighborhood. Isaac knew what the activity was, and managed to steal himself a bag and some papers. Lighting up, he was at first a little sick, then gradually as his system acclimated to the drug, he found he was getting high every morning.

When "April" left the scene, Isaac was fully engaged in the habit, and sought out some kids at the school who had their own connections. Some of them were handing out other drugs as well; there was no shortage of uppers, downers and acid.

Isaac saw the empty shells these others were becoming and refused to dip further into the scene, but kept up with his habit of smoking both grass and tobacco.

When Betty finally discovered a joint in Isaac's possession, she was horrified. "What's this?" she screamed at him.

"It's just a little grass," he said, nonchalantly. "What of it?"

"Don't you know how illegal that is? What if you got caught?"

"Ah, it's cool man. It's just one joint. Nobody's gonna catch nobody."

"Besides, I thought you'd be cool, too. I mean, your name is Stone, don't you want to get stoned?"

“I don’t want anything to do with it!” she cried.

Isaac was recalcitrant in his refusal to acknowledge the dangers of his habit, and Betty gave him a warning. “It’s either that or me, you’ll have to chose.”

“You know I love you, man,” he said. “I’ll be cool.” It wasn’t exactly a commitment, but it sated Betty for the present.

While Isaac was more circumspect in his practices, he certainly did not give it up. *What she doesn’t know won’t hurt us*, was his private thought.

Betty could not admit to her circle of friends about her boyfriend’s vice, and she finally decided to look to I for some advice. She wasn’t happy that their relationship had become non-existent, and thought that maybe this “crisis” could bring them closer again.

“I,” she began when she caught him the hallway. “Can I speak to you?”

“Oh, hi Betty,” he looked around to see who was watching. He did not want the tongues wagging again.

“Isaac’s your friend, isn’t he?” she asked.

“Not anymore,” I admitted. “Back in elementary school we used to hang out, but everybody went their own way after that. I don’t ever talk to him.”

“Oh,” she said with disappointment. “I wanted you to talk with him about his problem.”

“Oh, that,” I shook his head. “I wondered when you would find out.”

“You knew? And you didn’t say anything?” she accused.

“Everybody knows, and the word around is that you two are Mr. Stoned and Miss Stone. It’s a big joke.”

“People are so cruel sometimes,” she sighed. “I wish my parents had changed my name.”

“Changed your name?” I raised an eyebrow.

“When my mom married my dad, well I guess he’s really my step-dad, she changed her name to Arden, but left me with my real dad’s name, Stone. They didn’t think I wanted to go through life being named Elizabeth Arden. Kids are tough enough. Now Stone is a problem. It’s just not fair.”

I barely heard the full explanation after the word “step-dad.”

“Are you telling me that my Uncle Arthur is not your real dad?” I was astonished.

“No, dummy, I thought you knew that.”

“Then you’re not my cousin after all?” All of I’s tension in being with Betty was starting to disappear.

“Well, I guess not really. But it’s just like we are family. My dad is my dad, even if he’s not really my dad.”

I leaned over and gave Betty a kiss on the cheek. “What was that for?” she asked in surprise.

“Old times,” I said. “Just old times.”



## CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

### *1971 - I Gets Heavy*

I had mastered the clarinet, the piano, the guitar and a number of other instruments, but still felt something was lacking. He thought back of his pronouncement three years ago to his father that the bass guitar required no talent. But things had changed in music. No longer was the simple ‘thump, thump’ of the bass the technique that failed to get attention. Bass guitarists were using as sophisticated licks as the lead players, and many had stepped into prominence.

I realized he was developing a grudging respect for players such as McCartney, Entwistle and Jones, and knew that perhaps he had finally found the calling that had eluded him.

And so it was, in the summer of 1971, I bought his first bass guitar. When he came to Henry for advice on his purchase, Henry was quick to point out that I should get a Fender Precision Bass.

“There has been nothing finer ever developed,” Henry insisted. “It is the one instrument I’ve always wished I

had.”

I agreed, and laid out his hard-earned cash for an entry model. He did not have enough for an amp, though, and Henry fronted him the money.

“You just be sure to pay me back when you get famous,” Henry joked.

I spent the entire summer mastering the instrument. He could play fills faster than any he’d ever heard by any other bassist. He created lines of melody that would make birds swoon. He was as serious about the instrument as anything he’d ever tried in his life.

One day, a knock at the door interrupted his practice session. He answered it only to discover it was his former neighbor Spike. They had not spoken in years. Their prior relationship had broken down so completely he figured he’d never see him again.

“Spike!” he exclaimed, with some trepidation. “Where’ve you been?”

“I’d rather not talk about that, but I’m here with a proposal,” he said mysteriously.

“I’ve been playing the drums for a while, and I think I’m pretty good. Word around is that you’re playing the bass now. I was thinking about putting a band together, and a bass player is all we need to get it off the ground.”

“A bass player and a drummer aren’t much of a band,” I remarked.

“Well, I do have a couple of others ready to go for it as well. My cousin Ozzie does a fair job on the keys, and believe it or not, Isaac can play some pretty mean licks on electric, at least when he’s not stoned.”

Those were two more names that I hadn’t thought about in while.

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“And I’ve got a perfect name for us already,” Spike continued. “Golden Fingers. I bet we could go all the way to the top. We could be the World’s Greatest Band!”

It was obvious that Spike had been thinking about this for some time. It was no flash-in-the-pan idea.

I told Spike, “I have some songs I’ve already written. Maybe we could start with those.”

The two agreed to set a practice for the following afternoon. I checked with Henry and he agreed to let the guys use his workshop as a practice space. “Just don’t get too loud,” he told them.

Isaac, Osgood and Spike arrived the next day. There was a whiff of grass clinging to Isaac and I asked him about it. “Nah, man, I’m cool.” Isaac replied, “Had a quick toke, but I can still play fine,” and began setting up his equipment.

Osgood carefully laid out a colorful blanket in the ground, then set his keyboard and its stand upon it. “I like to be a little classy,” he explained.

Spike’s gear was the biggest surprise of all: two bass drums, four toms, three snares, a wood block, tambourine and seven different sets of cymbals. I wondered if there would be room for him among all the equipment.

It took nearly an hour to get everything set up and when Isaac struck the first power chord, the lights immediately went out and the silence engulfed them.

Henry came running out of the house at the noise and saw the predicament. “I told you not so loud. You’ve probably blown a fuse!”

He looked at the tangle of wire on the ground and saw the real problem. Everything was plugged into a single

outlet.

“Here,” he said. “Let’s spread this around some. I know power, and when I built this workshop, I made sure it could handle it.”

After replacing the fuse, they tried again. This time the results were much better.

“Please keep it down to a dull roar, at least,” Henry pleaded.

I pulled out some lyrics and chords and provided them to Isaac and Osgood. “Here’s something I wrote. Let’s give it a try.”

Isaac immediately hit a power chord and I protested, “Let’s start it off sorta mellow. It’ll build up as it goes along.”

Isaac strummed a simple “A” chord and I began to sing.

*All my life I’ve been so meek and mildly mannered*

*When I wanted to speak up I was always hammered*

*‘Til I made up my mind that the kid would get heavy*

*Kings may come and kings may go, but Rock will reign forever*

*Power lies in these bass lines, when the kid gets heavy*

I signaled the band to start picking up the tempo and intensity

*The clarinet was not the place for me to stay*

*So I picked up and learned the bass guitar one day*

*And I made up my mind that the kid would get heavy.*

*Kings may come and kings may go but rock will reign forever*

*Power lies in these bass lines when the kid gets heavy*

“OK, now bring it home!” I shouted.

*I’m down on my knees*

*But I’m not pleading*

## Only Golden Fingers Could Play So Heavy

*Playin' my bass if you please  
'til my fingers start bleeding.*

*Kings may come and kings may go but rock will reign forever  
Power lies in these bass lines when the kid gets heavy*

“That was wicked, man,” Isaac exclaimed. “We were cooking!”

They “cooked” for two hours.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

### *1972 - Studio*

Henry had been a Nixon man all his adult life, and when word came about the Watergate break-in, he was sure the whole thing had been cooked up to discredit his hero.

“There’s no way our fine President is involved in this,” he told Buddy. “It’s all a conspiracy. Time will tell. Time will tell.” He shook his finger, and then shook his head in disgust.

“Henry,” Buddy told him. “The press doesn’t lie. The facts are pointing straight to the President. He’s got it all over him.”

Buddy liked to goad Henry whenever the subject of Nixon came up, but this was getting a little too personal. It was putting a real strain on their friendship.

“Listen, Buddy. You’re full of it yourself. Nixon is not a crook. I’m telling you, it will all come out, and you’ll see I’m right.”

Buddy figured he’d better not push any more of Henry’s buttons, so he changed the subject. “Hey, what do you think of those kids of ours? They’re sounding pretty

good in that band they got going.”

Henry took a moment to adjust to the sudden change of subject and began to mellow a bit. “Yeah, they make a lot of noise, that’s for sure. It’s not the good stuff like we used to do.”

“Kids don’t want to play the ‘good stuff,’ Henry. They’re more interested in the new sound. Hard rock. Heavy metal. You know.”

“Well, that hard rock and heavy metal is about to break all the windows in my house. It seems I’m always after them to turn it down.”

“I’m a bit concerned about that Daly kid, though,” Buddy confided. “I think he might be some sort of pusher. Spike saw enough of that in juvie. I don’t want him to be tempted.”

“Spike’s a good kid,” confirmed Henry. “That stint in the hall was probably the best thing that could have happened to him. Look what it did for him, getting him playing the drums. I just wish he wouldn’t hit them so hard when they’re playing at my house.”

“Hey, remember the old hatchery place? They never rebuilt it, did they?”

“You’re asking me if I remember? How could I forget?” Henry held up his fingerless hand. “So what of it?”

“I think the land is up for sale. You know, you and I got some put aside. I was thinking that maybe we could build the band a practice space. It’s pretty remote, and wouldn’t bother folks as much as it does you.”

Henry pondered the suggestion and warmed to it. “I’ll bet we could make a nice little studio for about ten grand. We still got a lot of the old equipment from the Scrappers.”

Henry and Buddy engaged Sam to help them design the place. Sam had done some work as a carpenter, and knew a bit about building spaces. In a couple of months, their makeshift studio was complete.

“I’m glad we put in the extra insulation in the walls,” Henry said. “It will cut down the noise a bit. I just don’t want to be in there when they really turn up those amps!”

Golden Fingers moved their equipment into the studio during the summer. Their daily rehearsals intensified their desires to excel, and I was writing even more music. The four-track recorders that were installed were able to capture some of those new sounds, and a distribution of the tapes to some of Buddy’s contacts in the music business were beginning to get some notice.

Henry and Juliette’s 22<sup>nd</sup> anniversary was coming up in August, and he wanted to make a big deal out of it. “Everybody waits to celebrate their 25<sup>th</sup>,” Henry declared. “But I want it to be different. We’re putting together a big shindig this year. And we’re inviting all our friends.”

Juliette wasn’t sure it was appropriate to make such a big deal about their 22<sup>nd</sup>, but Henry was unconventional at times, and stubborn in his insistence. She finally broke down and got in the mood.

“We’ll rent out the Stomping Grounds and throw a big party,” he told her. “Invite everyone, it’ll be a great time!”

Buddy offered to reunite the Scrappers and asked Henry if he’d like to sit in on guitar. Henry declined, “That was long ago. That dream is over. But we’ll take the Scrappers.”

After a month of planning, everything was set for August 12. The Stomping Grounds was decorated like a



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wedding chapel, the stage was set up for the band, the drinks were on the house and everyone was having a good time. The Scrappers reunion was a big hit and the party went on late into the night. Two A.M. arrived faster than anyone expected, the drinks stopped pouring, but the fun never let up. By 6 A.M. the party was finally winding down, and the revelers were straggling out into the morning light to head home.

Golden Fingers had a rare day off from rehearsal, but the fact that they got to drink up with their parent's permission was reward enough for their break in discipline. After recovering on Sunday, they hit the studio first thing Monday morning.

As I approached the building, he could sense something was wrong. A shattered window first told the tale as he noticed the open door. Rushing in, to his horror he discovered the studio was empty. Burglars had wiped them out.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

### *1972 - Aftermath*

Henry had been inconsolable after the burglary. Insurance covered the losses, but he could only blame himself for not making the proper protections for the property.

“Dad, it’s OK,” I told him. “Some of that stuff was junk. I’ll be able to get better equipment.”

“All the more reason to protect it. If we don’t do something, those punks will be back for more.”

Henry set to work in his workshop and pulled out the old designs for the Rat Deflector. *If this can keep the rats away, it will keep the bigger rats away, too*, he thought to himself.

He got to working on modifications. A lethal electric shock was not his intent, but he decided to at least keep a mild one. In addition, he hooked up the circuitry so that it would trigger an alarm bell when it was activated. When installed, it was connected to the metal window frames as well as the door frames. Even the air vents for the cooling system were wired. No possible entrance was left unprotected.

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The first incident proved to be a false alarm. From all accounts, a stray dog had been nosing about the air vents, and set the system off. The police were called, but they were unable to disarm the system. Henry was awoken at 3 AM.

“Henry,” the police chief said. “You’ve got an alarm that’s going off down here at the old hatchery. You better come and do something about it.”

Henry was sure they’d apprehended the culprit and rushed down to the site. He turned off the alarm and spoke with the police chief. “Let me at him. I’m going to punch that punk right in the face.”

“Calm down Henry,” the Chief told him. “It’s a false alarm. As far as we can tell, there’s been no break in. It was probably just a wandering dog. You’ve got to back off on the sensitivity of that thing, or they’ll be more late nights like this. If this happens too often, I’m going to make you yank the whole thing out.”

Henry got to work on modifications. He disconnected it from the vents, putting reinforced bars over them, but left it on the windows and doors. It was two months before the next incident.

“I’m warning you, Henry,” the Chief said. “It’s a public nuisance. You’ve got to fix it once and for all, or that’s it.”

Once again, Henry revised his design. In order to disable the touch sensors, he had to lose the electric shock feature, which he considered the heart of his development. The only protection in place was now the door and window sensors. If they were disturbed, it was a sure thing a break in was responsible. Henry could finally rest nights knowing the equipment was safe and false alarms were a thing of the past.

The Golden Fingers band was steadily improving and had developed quite a local following. To celebrate their success, they scheduled their first big concert for I-Day. The Stomping Grounds wasn't big enough for their new popularity, so they set up in the High School football stadium. Three thousand gathered that night to see the new local phenomenon. The town had never had an event of that proportion, and certainly nothing as loud. The high schoolers were in complete awe, and even some of the cooler adults were enjoying what they were hearing.

What they weren't hearing was the fire sirens as they sped to the old hatchery studio. Like events nearly two decades earlier, the building was in flames.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

### *1973 - Sound bites*

The investigation into the cause of the fire revealed the culprit. An electrical short in the alarm system sparked a small flame, which quickly spread throughout the wooden structure. Although the band's concert equipment was safe, the studio console, tape decks and a library of recorded material had been destroyed. Once again, insurance covered the physical losses, but the loss of the early Golden Fingers sessions would prove to be incalculable.

The dream studio destroyed, the band resorted to practicing in each other's houses, despite Henry's protests to "turn it down."

The fire and its subsequent investigation wasn't the only thing on Henry's mind. The continuing investigation of the Watergate break in was having a troubling effect on him as well.

"This is not looking good for Nixon," he told Juliette. "I'm really getting worried that this is going to mark him badly."

“Don’t blame me,” Juliette lectured. “I voted for McGovern.”

“They’re all turning against him. All of his trusted aides, they’re only looking out for themselves.”

“Can you blame them? I told you, he’s a crook!”

“He is not a crook!” Henry insisted. “He’ll be cleared of any wrong-doing. I’m sure of it.”

I came in near the end of his parent’s conversation. “Dad, you’ve got to drop this thing you’ve got for Richard Nixon. It’s bad for my career.”

“Your career? What, are you into politics now? What about the music?”

“I’m talking about the music. If word gets out that you are an ardent Nixon supporter, that doesn’t look good for me.”

“Well, your boy McGovern didn’t do that well against him.”

“McGovern,” I revealed, “was not ‘my boy’. I voted for Spock.”

“You Trekkies are all alike; no respect for the process.” Henry claimed.

I shook his head as he left for the day’s practice.

He joined the rest of the band at the Daly house. Sandy was between men and the extra space gave the band a place to spread out. Her attempts to seduce Osgood were largely ignored. He wasn’t exactly a “ladies’ man.”

Spike was arguing with Isaac about his love for the weed. “You’ve got to quit that stuff, man. It’s not good for our image. We are trying to promote good habits, and yours is in contrary to the whole direction.”

“It’s just a little weed, man. It don’t hurt no one, and no one is going to care. I don’t do the hard stuff.”

“Still,” Spike insisted. “You need to clean yourself up. It’s not going to work for us.”

Isaac assured them he would clean up. He’d made that promise before.

I got after the others to start with the practice. “I’ve got a new song we need to learn.” He grabbed Isaac’s guitar and proceeded to show him some licks.

Isaac told him, “I got it. I got it. I ain’t no dummy, you know.” Isaac fell into the groove, not only picking up the leads, but also improving them with his own additions.

Osgood started adding the keys and Spike laid down a beat. It was up to I to do his part, and he joined Isaac in echoing the lead part on the bass. He began to sing:

*We’re the World’s Best Rock ‘n’ Roll band*

*Listen to what I say...*

Spike stopped and protested, “What are those lyrics? People won’t buy such effrontery.”

“Effrontery?” I came back. “Now there’s a ten dollar word if I ever heard one. What’s with ‘Effrontery?’”

“Hey, I went to school like the rest of you,” Spike returned.

“Yeah, about that,” I still had never gotten to the bottom of Spike’s absence a few years earlier.

Spike just started beating the drums and called out. “OK, let’s take it from the top. Let’s see what else you got.”

*Music fills every ear.*

*Its presence is never in doubt.*

Spike stopped again. “Now that’s something I can get behind. I’m just not sure about the arrogance of the first verse.”

“What are you, Roget’s Thesaurus? Listen: if we want

to make it to the top, we have to believe we're already there. You're not going to hear me sing 'Hey, Hey, Hey we're crappy, but listen to us anyway.' Huh?"

"I'm just saying people aren't going to buy it," Spike protested.

"They'll not only buy it, they'll eat it up. Look how much crap is out there now. Don't tell me you don't skip songs on the radio. But people are buying them because they've been told they're good. The thing is, with our stuff, it is good. It's the best there is, and so are we. We are giving them what they really want. There's no sense in not telling the truth."

He laid into the final verse, "This is going to be our theme."

*Now you've seen and heard the best.*

*Can't believe your eyes.*

*So much better than all of the rest.*

*Stick with us if you're wise.*

Spike wasn't fully convinced, but he had to agree. It had a good beat and was easy to dance to.



## CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

### *1974 - Golden Fingers*

By early 1974, Golden Fingers were the top band in the world. Everyone knew the names of I, Spike, Isaac and Ozzie. But within the band, I's overt egotism was putting cracks in the façade. I was still writing new material, but the band was not giving it their full effort, at least in I's opinion.

The band was preparing for their biggest world tour event and practicing their new material. Despite their ability to secure a practice space anywhere they wanted, they still preferred the comfort of one of the band member's home to a sterile studio. I suddenly stopped and yelled out, "Alright, hold it! That was terrible!"

Spike was incensed. "Whady'a mean, terrible? It was perfect. Just the way you wrote it."

I countered, "I didn't write that 'pop.'"

Spike was confused. "What 'pop?'"

I explained, exasperated, "Isaac's finger popped. I heard it when he barred that 'C' chord."

Isaac defended himself. "Hey, man, it was an accident."

“Well, don’t let it happen again,” I threatened. “OK, take it from the top.” He counted off, “1, 2, 3, 4.”

They started over, played for a while, and then Isaac stopped, Osgood pulled off the keys but Spike and I kept going. Finally they gave in and stopped.

“What the hell are you doing now?” I yelled.

Isaac complained, “My fingers are beginning to hurt. And I’ve got to take a cigarette break. I’m about to have a nicotine fit.” He lit up a cigarette.

I was disgusted and gave Isaac a dirty look, but relented. “All right, five minutes, but then we’ve gotta go non-stop. We do have a show tonight.”

Spike called into the other room from his drum kit, “Hey, sis! Bring me a beer.” He looked at the rest, “You guys want a beer?”

Osgood scrunched up his face. “I’d like a lemonade. Can’t stand beer.”

Spike turned to I and Isaac, “What about you two?”

I wasn’t happy with the delay, and knew a refreshment break would make it even longer. He grouched, “I don’t want anything.”

Isaac patted his pocket, “I’ve got my own.” I shot him another dirty look.

Osgood reminded Spike, “Don’t forget my lemonade.”

Spike replied, “Yeah, Yeah,” and yelled out again. “A lemonade, too.”

Angela entered with the beer and lemonade. He gave Spike his beer and Osgood the lemonade.

Angela winked at Osgood, “There you go, sweetie.”

Osgood was clearly embarrassed at the attention given to him by his younger cousin, “Aw, c’mon.”

Isaac, without a drink, pulled out some paraphernalia

and began to roll a joint.

Spike accused “Hey! What’re you doing?”

Isaac replied, “Just some grass, whady’a think?”

Spike warned, “There’s none of that in this house. Put it away.”

Isaac stashed his stash and grumbled, “I should’a got a beer.”

I looked at his watch, “Well, time’s up anyway. We gotta get under way.”

Spike suddenly recalled, “Just a minute. The news is on in a few minutes. I gotta see what they say about us.”

He turned on the TV. The familiar electronic introduction was playing and they heard the news introduction voiceover.

*Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. This is the six o’clock news, with Hardy Rochester. Brought to you each evening by Fender Guitars. "Fender: The most trusted name in guitars."*

The electronic introduction continued, but didn’t cut off as usual. Hardy Rochester was on camera, and was clearly getting annoyed.

“Alright, already, turn it off” he yelled out. It was an uncharacteristic representation for the Emmy award-winning journalist. He shook his head and below his breath he uttered, “Sheeze.”

Regaining his composure, he began the segment. “Headlining tonight’s news is the Golden Fingers rock band, who are currently breaking all records in the music industry. Tonight is their opening appearance for their 1974 world tour. This morning we had the good fortune of speaking with I Mall, bass guitarist for the group.”

On the screen Hardy and I are seen conversing. Hardy asked, “Tonight you’re starting what looks to be your

biggest world tour ever. From all accounts, it is the biggest undertaking by any group. You'll be playing in fifty-seven countries and will be out on the road for nine months. Where do you find the energy?"

"Hey," started I, "we're all supermen. We feed on the crowds and are actually regenerated with the traveling between."

"Feed on the crowds? What do you mean by that?" Hardy inquired.

"Well, not literally. I mean, we're not vampires." I laughed. "But the crowd's energy feeds us. Standing up on the stage with thousands calling out your name, screaming, clapping, dancing. It's all there is."

Hardy continued, "Few have been able to account for your unprecedented success. Can you?"

I replied, "We strive for perfection in every musical selection. Hey," he paused and stroked his chin thoughtfully, "That sounds like it could be a song in itself."

He recovered from his reverie and explained sincerely, "Each individual note is plucked from the piece and practiced for a solid three minutes until we achieve what is called 'The Golden Sound'."

"That sounds like a strict regimen. Your rehearsals must extend for hours," Hardy said.

I replied, "Well it's only on new songs. Once we've mastered one, we move on to another. There's no need to revisit it again."

Hardy posed the next question, "You've written all of the Golden Fingers material. Do any of the other members ever contribute his own? How much of a group effort is it?"

"I haven't heard anything original from the other guys,

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so we only do my stuff. I write, arrange, score and play it out for everyone before we go into the rehearsal. Isaac once tried to write a song, but frankly, it was terrible.”

Hardy wrapped up the interview, “Could you sum up your career in one sentence?”

I pondered for a moment and pronounced, “Only Golden Fingers could play so heavy.”

## CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

### *1974 – Missing Fingers*

Nixon was in trouble. Everything pointed to a conspiracy that led right to the top. Henry had seen and heard enough evidence that finally convinced him that all of his previous support had been in vain. Nixon was a crook. He was going to be impeached. The American Dream had been shattered.

Juliette tried to reason with him. “You’ve had plenty of warning over the years. I won’t say I told you so.”

Henry’s response was, “I think you just did.”

Together they watched the President address the country on television.

*...Therefore, I shall resign the Presidency effective at noon tomorrow. Vice President Ford will be sworn in as President at that hour in this office...*

“Well, I guess that’s that,” Henry said resignedly.

The next day they watched the news reports as Nixon boarded the helicopter. Henry saw the ex-President holding up the familiar “Victory” sign. Henry raised his right hand and extended his remaining finger. This one’s

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for you, Tricky Dick. If I still had my middle finger, it would be up there instead.

From the road, the members of Golden Fingers watched the same set of newscasts. I remarked, "I'll bet this is eating my dad alive. He has been Nixon's man since before I was born. I don't know how he'll handle it."

Spike agreed, "Your dad's a good man, and he's been good to us. Let's dedicate tonight's show to him."

Isaac and Ozzie assented. I sealed it, "Tonight will be the Henry Mall Memorial Golden Fingers Show!"

"Uh, I," Spike interrupted.

"Yeah, what is it?" as I turned to Spike.

"Your dad's not dead. It's only a Memorial if someone is dead."

"Oh, yeah I guess so. O.K., try this." I puffed up his chest. "The Henry Mall Appreciation Concert!"

"That sounds a lot better," agreed Spike.

That night, I quieted the crowd as Golden Fingers made its way onto the stage. "Ladies and Gentlemen, tonight is a very special night and we want to dedicate this show to a very special person. He's been there though thick and thin. Bought me my first guitar, built us a rehearsal studio and was responsible for destroying it..."

Laughter rose from the audience. Golden Fingers rough beginnings were etched into the annals of rock history.

"To the man who gave me everything," I was being uncharacteristically sentimental, "I give you the Henry Mall M.," he stopped and checked himself, "The Henry Mall Appreciation Concert! Thanks, dad! Now hit it!"

Spike's drums rose alone, where the accompanying guitar chords should have rung out. I spun around and surveyed the stage. Isaac was nowhere to be seen. He

looked to Spike and Ozzie and they both shrugged their shoulders.

The crown began to get a bit ugly, as they were used to perfection. This was not perfection. This was disaster.

I threw down his bass guitar and ran off the stage. There, sitting among the empty equipment cases was Isaac, stoned out of his mind and crying streams of tears.

“Isaac!” I yelled at him, “What the hell are you doing? You need to be on stage right now!” I was about ready to head over the edge himself.

“I’m sorry, man,” he blubbered through the tears and smoke. “I can’t.”

“Why the hell not?” I tried to drag him to his feet.

“You go out and honor your dad. I just can’t do it.”

“You got a problem with my dad? Get it out, man. We got a show.”

“No, your dad is cool, man. Spike’s dad is cool. Ozzie’s dad is cool. My dad is missing. I barely knew him.”

“Twenty-one years and you picked this night, of all nights, to start on this? Buck up, man. We got a show. The crowd is getting restless. C’mon, strap on this axe, get out there and play!”

I pushed him out on the stage and the crowd started to cheer again, but when Isaac hit the first chords, they were a disaster. It was almost as if Isaac had forgotten how to play.

I signaled the sound tech to cut off Isaac’s guitar and went over to consult Ozzie. “You’re going to have to carry the leads tonight on the keys. Don’t screw it up!”

I positioned himself back on center stage, the stage lights focused on him as he counted out “1. 2. 3. 4!”

Ozzie caught the cue and came right in with the closest



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sound the keys could make to the heavy guitar chords needed, and Spike hit the skins hard as well. I's booming bass joined, while sad Isaac's broken frame languished in the back corner. A Finger was missing tonight, and the critics were not impressed.

## CHAPTER FORTY

### *1975 - The tour ends*

The 1974-1975 world tour had been a great success for the band, with the exception of Isaac's meltdown, and especially for I. As the only songwriter, I received vast amounts of royalties from the sales of their records, and a larger take of the tickets sales for their concerts. Every show was sold out, and 275 performances after their first show of the tour, they were wrapping it up in their home town.

Traditionally, they liked to introduce themselves with the Golden Fingers Theme.

*We're the world's best rock and roll band*

*Listen to what I say.*

*If you came to see what was planned*

*Don't expect it to turn out that way.*

*Music fills every ear.*

*Its presence is never in doubt.*

*The sweet melodic lines you will hear.*

*Will seem to never run out.*

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\* \* \*

*Now you've seen and heard the best.*

*Can't believe your eyes.*

*So much better than all of the rest.*

*Stick with us if you're wise.*

As the final chords died down, the tumultuous applause continued. I signaled the crowd for quiet.

“That song pretty much sums it up, don't you think?” he asked them. Applause broke out again, and it was a full five minutes before I could get the crowd quiet again.

“Well, you've just heard about the World's Greatest Band,” and the applause starts up again, crowds frantically trying to rush the stage, kids filling the aisles. I once again called for quiet, “Don't make me come out there!”

The comment had the opposite effect, with the crowd pleading for him to join them, so they could touch their god, as they might classify him. I yelled out, and it reverberated through the hall. “Quiet!!!!”

A hush fell over and I continued, “Yes, you've just heard the World's Greatest Band,” a swell began, but I suppressed it by holding up his hand. “But now you get to hear the World's Greatest Me!”

The group started to rock into the new song “Today,” which had hit the charts at number one earlier in the year. The crowd was so loud, they could barely hear the lyrics:

*Today*

*Is your lucky day*

*You get to hear me play*

*Declare a holiday!*

*Today*

*You just can't just get away  
I have you in my sway  
Not just another day*

*And now you'll hear  
As you draw near  
It's my year!*

*Today  
Is a special day  
You got to hear me play  
You'll never get away*

*Today  
Is not just any day  
It's a holiday  
Now let's just slip away*

*And you've just heard  
The one true word  
When I appeared*

The crowd could not get enough. Fans all the way from the back of the hall were pushing though, some even climbing over the tops of the crowd to get near the stage. The frenzy was overwhelming, and rather than trying to calm them down for more patter, Golden Fingers launched directly in the next song “A Most Amazing Man.”

A fan cried out from the first row. “Where’s the story? We need the story, man!”

The fans knew every aspect of the show, even the patter between, and they did not want to miss even the smallest

part of the experience. Isaac hit a final chord, and the crowd, quieted.

“You know,” began I. “I’ve got to tell you a little story. I’ve seen many bands in my time and they all have one thing in common: a bass player. Some don’t have a guitarist, some don’t have a singer, some don’t have a keyboard man or a drummer, and, believe it or not, some don’t even have a cello player. But I’ve never seen one without a bass player.”

The crowd went wild again. When the roar subsided, I closed in on the microphone, lowered his voice, and said conspiratorially, “Keep your mouth shut if you have.”

The crowd could not contain itself, and pandemonium nearly broke out. I once again expressed his calming influence.

“Anyway, the bass player is the most important member of any group. Therefore, since this is the World’s Most Amazing Band, I must be the World’s Most Amazing Man!”

This time, the band launched into the song so powerfully that the crowd immediately silenced in complete awe. The words rang out:

*Am I not a most amazing man?*

*Am I not a most amazing man?*

*Here I am at the top of the world*

*And to me all the flags are unfurled*

*And I always have first choice of girls*

*What a most amazing man!*

*I’m a most amazing man!*

*Am I not a most amazing man?*

*Am I not a most amazing man?*

*Watch my fingers fly as I play my guitar.  
Watch me at a party and I'll be a star.  
Watch me come in first place when I race my car.  
I'm a most amazing man!  
I'm a most amazing man!*

*I have to agree when I look at myself  
I know that I'm the best  
And comparing myself with somebody else,  
I leave behind all the rest.  
How can I be so perfect?  
I'm a most amazing man!  
I'm a most amazing man!*

## CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

### *1975 - The breakup*

Golden Fingers world tour had broken every sales record established, and they had truly claimed their role as the number one attraction ever, even more so than the seemingly limiting “World’s Greatest Band.” After nine months on the road, they were home.

The energy required to maintain a nine-month tour schedule was trying, and when it was finished, the band members preferred to go their own way and limit their communication with each other. I could not escape the press, and the pressing business of accounting for all the wealth he accumulated as a result of the tour.

Rod Manger, his personal business manager, related to him, “You are personally worth over three million dollars. You can buy any home you’d like; you can have any woman you want. You are truly a most amazing man!”

“Yeah, that’s great,” I responded, not really sounding like that was his true impression.

“Problem?” prompted Rod.

“Yeah, there’s a problem.” I did not elaborate.

Rod waited a few minutes before responding, “And...?”

“It’s the band. They are not giving 100%. Night after night, I’m carrying the whole show on my shoulders. Why do I even need them?”

“Well, I,” Rod began. “You can’t go out there and play all of the instruments, can you?”

“I can play them all, you know. Maybe not all at the same time, but I can play them all.” He sunk again into thought.

He sprung up, animated once more and exclaimed. “We can hire some random monkeys to play, and I’ll go out solo.”

“Monkeys?” Rod was puzzled.

“Not literally monkeys, you dumb ass,” I retorted. “But just some hired players. Nobody cares about those other guys. We could just put up anyone as long as I’m there and the crowd will eat it up.”

“Rod,” I looked at him sincerely, “fire the band.”



## CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

### *1976 - The solo year*

I's decision to go solo caught the press by surprise and Rod was overwhelmed by requests for interviews from *Rolling Stone*, *Circus*, *Creem* and all manner of major news magazines. I refused every one.

"There's no better publicity than no publicity," I stated. "Keeps 'em curious."

The former members of Golden Fingers were not equally silent. Spike, once I's closest friend, was now his most vocal opponent.

"It may have been I that was the star of the band," he told *Rolling Stone*, "but it was I, meaning me, that got the band going in the first place. That ungrateful bastard had no right to do what he did."

Harsh words even came from the keyboard playing Osgood, "I joined the band to support Spike. I never even liked I." Harsh words indeed, coming from the normally meek Osgood.

I did not let the negative press affect him. "It's just sour grapes," he told Rod. The fans are all that count, and they

are as faithful as can be.

“Tell you what,” said I. “Throw them a bone. Put out a press release that I’ve got a new solo album in the works. That should silence the naysayers.”

“But you don’t have any such thing,” protested Rod.

“You know that and I know that, but they don’t know that,” claimed I. “But like I said, keeps ‘em curious.”

Rod left to work on that, and I considered his options. He could rely on the older group material, or he *could* release a solo album and really bring in an even larger audience, with him playing everything. On tour, he could use a band, but would rotate among all the instruments. That day, he started writing his first solo album.

During the next month, I wrote and laid down the basic tracks for twelve new songs. When it came time to record, Rod hired some session musicians to fill out the arrangements.

During the first recording session, it was clear that it just wasn’t going to work. The session players weren’t getting into the groove, and I kept firing them, one by one, until no one was left in the studio besides him and Rod.

“Now what are we going to do?” asked Rod. “There’s no one left in town that wants to play with you. You’re all on your own!”

“That’s not a problem, Rod,” I explained. “I can multi-track everything and it will truly be a solo album. It’s not like it’s the first time anyone’s done it. But it will be the best time!”

I had dipped into his assets, and funded yet another rebuilding of the Henry Mall Studio on its original site. Despite his father’s care in constructing the first one, this time he made sure that it was professionally designed and

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constructed, and that the latest equipment was not only in place, but was adequately protected from fire, theft and natural disasters. He left his father to oversee the project, which likely contributed to its successful conclusion. He hired a full time security agency to protect it, and made sure that it was always ready for his every need, whenever he wanted to use it.

I's recent attitude towards others was not reflected in the care he gave his music. He carefully laid down track after track after track of licks, fills, rolls, solos, riffs and everything else musical. He overlaid vocals on top of vocals, brought in every horn he had mastered, and even included a clarinet feature. In two months of extraordinary effort, I had completed his greatest work, perhaps the greatest work of all time for anyone: *The Real Golden Fingers*.

Sales were through the roof, and the album was still weeks from release. Advance copies to reviewers were in agreement; this was easily the finest recorded moment of all time.

Only a few months after Golden Fingers successful world tour, I was on the road again, but this time, he was the only star.

The arrangement was this: Rod had hired stage musicians, but I insisted that they not share the stage. They would be set up off stage, but with their amplifiers on the stage. A full ensemble of additional instruments was at I's command. It was an effort to faithfully replicate every sound on the new album. I even brought in a twenty piece orchestra, again, sequestered off stage. Every empty instrument space had its own spotlight, and there were runways built into the audience so that I could share his

greatness with the crowd at an intimate level.

The arena on opening night was beyond capacity. Press and cameras packed the first rows, the equipment for the worldwide simulcast was in place, and I was backstage.

Rod was amazed at the success, “You’re really big time now, I.”

“Yeah, I never realized how much that band could hold back my full potential.” He looked out from the wings. “Imagine, just me on the stage and those people are just gonna eat it up.”

“It’s your biggest show ever, tonight,” Rod said. “If this one’s a success you’re home free. Your album has already sold nearly a million copies and it’s still two weeks from release. Capture this one tonight and we’ll ship gold!”

I held up his hand, “You can depend on these golden fingers for sure.” He reached into his pocket and with a magician’s flourish, produce some M&Ms. “Like one?” He popped a couple into his mouth.

“No, thanks.” Rod held up his hand in a stop motion. “I’m trying to diet.”

I seemed surprised. “You? Diet? I thought you were underweight.”

“It’s a new thing I’m trying,” Rod explained. “If I diet now, I won’t have to diet if I get fat later. Some old doctor told me about it. Says he read it somewhere.”

I was perplexed. “Sounds crazy. Who is he?”

“His name is Orson,” Rod revealed.

His eyes widened. “Dr. David Orson? From California?”

“Yeah, that’s right,” Rod confirmed. “Why? Do you know him?”

“I sure do,” replied I. “He delivered me!”

It was Rod’s turn to be confused. “Where to? Did he

used to be a cab driver?”

I couldn't believe Rod's dimwittedness. "Come on now. He's a doctor. What are you thinking?"

Rod mulled over I's statement before the light bulb flashed. "Oh!"

I let it slide. "Sure you don't want an M&M? Melts in your mouth."

Rod defensively replied, "Yeah, I know all that garbage. I do watch TV, you know." Finally, he relented. "O.K., I guess I'll fudge on my diet."

I warned, "Better watch it. Those things are habit-forming."

Rod assured him, "I'll watch my step." He took a glance at his watch and extended a second warning. "You're due on stage in a few minutes."

I replied, "I'm up. Although I gotta piss first."

Rod glanced again at his watch, worriedly. "Save it for the stage. It'll set them on their ear to do something like that out there."

I wasn't so sure that was a great idea. "Naw. My dad always said 'When natures calls, don't refuse it.'"

Rod took yet another glance at his watch. "Make it quick. Two minutes to show time."

Without warning, calliope music began to play, and two clowns suddenly began marching in front of Rod and I. One of the clowns was carrying a sign that read *2 minutes to show time!* The "2" was in a big red circle, and there was a picture of an animated hot dog and a bag of popcorn marching in their own parade.

Rod was taken aback. "What the hell was that?"

I was similarly affected. "I don't know, but it sure scared the piss outta me!"

Rod glanced at his watch once again. “Good thing, because you wouldn’t have time now. Just one minute to show time.”

Once again the clown parade appeared, seemingly out of nowhere, accompanied by the calliope music and carrying a new banner claiming *I minute to show time!*

Rod yelled out, “Who hired these clowns, anyway?” He looked around and nobody admitted their guilt. Turning to I, he asked “Are you ready?”

I was pumped. “Yeah, they’re gonna eat it up tonight.” He picked up his bass and headed for the stage. “Here I go!”

I’s appearance on the stage caused the crowd to go into a roar. I called for the crowd to quiet down, and he began his own introduction.

“Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. I’m glad you came to see the World’s Greatest Musician” The crowd started in again. I again called for calm. “I know I deserve your applause, but could you hold it back for just a minute?” The din finally subsided. “O.K., tonight’s the first show of my new solo tour and it’s gonna be great!” The crowd noise began to swell again. I yelled out, “Just give me your undivided attention with liberty and justice for all!”

His booming bass began the song. Those in the first row caught the full brunt of the deep sonorous experience. After thirty seconds of bass intro, the brass section began with its intro. The audience seemed a bit surprised when they saw no additional musicians on the stage.

I began to sing:

*I first picked up my bass guitar at the age of seventeen.*

*I really wanted to be a star and I was playing clean.*

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*After the first few notes, I could already tell that I'd be playing steady*

*'cause only golden fingers could play so heavy.*

The crowd began to cheer at the words "Golden Fingers." The anticipation, the possibility, that Golden Fingers would now join I on stage brought the crowd to a frenzy. I kept playing the bass part until the crowd noise diminished, and the off stage orchestra began to swell. I began the chorus:

*Crowds would gather when I played.*

*Sometimes so many they even paid.*

*They hadn't heard music any finer*

*Than that which came from my golden fingers.*

The crowd once again reacted to "Golden Fingers." Surely now we would see the legendary group? I had to solo again for a while before the calmed down.

He continued singing;

*I played in my first rock and roll band at the age of seventeen.*

*It didn't come off the way I had it planned, and so I split the scene.*

*I wrote some songs and I sang some tunes, and I knew that I was ready*

*'cause only golden fingers could play so heavy.*

The realization began to set in that Golden Fingers would not make a surprise appearance. The Isaac fans in the front row sat down, disappointed. He sang the chorus, again.

*Crowds would gather when I played.*

*Sometimes so many they even paid.*

*They hadn't heard music any finer*

*Than that which came from my golden fingers.*

Then I took an unexpected mellow turn:

*But life can't always be heavy;  
Sometimes you've got to take it light.*

*But if I had my way*

*I'd play those heavy lines all through the night.*

*I returned to a heavier groove.*

*And now I've got it made, there ain't a cat alive who doesn't know  
who I am*

*And I play every night doin' my funky jive in a concert or a jam.*

*And if I wanted to, with my powerful sound, I could break down  
the levee*

*'cause only golden fingers could play so heavy*

*Crowds would gather when I played.*

*Sometimes so many they even paid.*

*They hadn't heard music any finer*

*Than that which came from my golden fingers.*

The disappointment of an imagined, yet failed appearance by Golden Fingers had the crowd a bit subdued in their final response to the new song. I knew he had a big hit on his hands, but this was not the response he was expecting.

"You're a bit foolish if you were expecting something else," he told the crowd. The crowd murmured, but I went on. "But we're all fools, aren't we?" The crowd warmed a bit at the self-referential joke. "Well, I'm a special kind of fool!"

A fifties style beat began from the sound system, a piano keyboard banging out the introduction to I's next song. I switched to electric guitar and began wailing. After an extended solo introduction, he began to sing.

*I'm just a rock and roll fool.*

*Never went to rock and roll school.*



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*Always breaking the rock and roll rules.  
When I play my guitar  
I become a rock and roll star.  
I know that fame and fortune can't be very far.*

*Jump up, Jump back, give it a chance.  
If you know how, get up and dance.*

*I is my name;  
Rock and roll is my game.  
They tell me that a crowd like this is so hard to tame.  
But I just call to the mass,  
"Quit smoking all that grass,"  
So that you can witness what has come to pass.*

For no apparent reason, I stopped, and the offstage musicians gradually faded out.

"Did you hear that last lick?" I called out to the crowd, "I surprised myself with that one. I guess nobody knows how good I really am. Not even myself!" He resumed singing and playing, after a leap in the air.

*Jump up, jump back, give it a chance  
If you know how, get up and dance*

*So you can call me your rock and roll king  
Playing guitar with that rock and roll ring  
It's something you'll remember, that rock and roll thing  
Now here's a rockin' goodbye  
To get you rock and roll high.  
Rock and roll will live 'til I die.*

*Jump up, jump back, give it a chance  
If you know how, get up and dance*

I finished up with another blazing solo, then stopped abruptly.

“Whew! Really burned up my fingers on that one,” he explained. “Hold it while I go back and get some water.”

I left the stage, and the crowd was puzzled by his behavior. It was a full five minutes before he returned. Some responded with “Boooooo” and not a few even gave up their seats and started to leave.

I moved into the classic Golden Fingers song “A Most Amazing Man” but the new arrangement and the feel with full orchestration and brass did not conquer the crowd. More boos and hisses arose from the audience. When the statement of I’s greatness was sung, many in the crowd raised their rancor even higher. I couldn’t understand why everything had turned so ugly. If these were fans, he wouldn’t want them either.

## CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

### *1976 - The end*

Word had swept rapidly through the press, and ticket sales were plummeting. I Mall was washed up as a concert draw, the stories said. One story quoted his most public outburst, “This may be one small downfall for I, but one great downfall for I-kind! They’ll be sorry they lost the greatest thing they ever had. You won’t have I Mall to push around anymore!”

I wanted to keep touring, but new bookings were few and far between. Due to the stress of the situation, I had been prescribed some tranquilizers, although he had yet to take any. He mulled over his calendar and was incensed when he saw a dual booking on the schedule.

He yelled at Rod, “How am I supposed to be in two places at the same time? There’s no way in Hell that I can play a concert in New York City and Miami on the same night!” He was sure his manager was playing mind games on him. There could be no other explanation. “Just fix it and get out!”

Rod looked at the schedule and said defensively, “The

Miami and New York dates are ones we were pursuing. They both fell through. You have nothing on that date.”

Rod left I alone, and I opened his guitar case, strummed a chord and started a new song of pain. As he sang and wrote down the lyrics that flowed from his soul, it calmed him a bit:

*There's no time to live  
There's no time to love  
I can't see the sky when it's cloudy above*

*The rain in my life  
The chain of a wife  
It drags me below the surface*

*A train of thought lingers and I reach for some relief  
It's beyond belief*

*A ride in the car  
No place for a star  
Like me who deserves satisfaction*

*And when I'm asleep  
I just cannot keep  
Away from the same old reaction*

*Life. It's over it's over and done.  
It's not worth the living without you  
Over and over I turn in my head  
It's not worth the trouble.*

*Pain. My daily companion.  
Pain. Enemy of my soul.*

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*Pain. The end of my action*

*Death. The end of it all*

I stopped and threw his guitar into the corner. He ripped off the sheet of paper from the pad where he had written the lyrics. He re-read them, then ripped the paper to shreds. He grabbed the bottle of pills and downed them with a glass of rum. "Maybe this will end the pain," he said to no one in particular. "Maybe when I'm dead people will know what they're really missing!"

I fell to the floor, holding a scrap of his final song.

## CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

### *1976 - The Beginning of the Beginning*

The headlines ran the next day:

#### **I Mall A Suicide**

Eyewitnesses confirmed today that legendary bassist I Mall, of Golden Fingers fame, was rushed to the hospital after an overdose on tranquilizers and alcohol. A suicide note was found in the singer's grasp, which read, "Life. It's over it's over and done. It's not worth the living without you. Over and over I turn in my head. It's not worth the trouble."

A recent slump in ticket sales for his first solo tour since the disbandment of his former group was suggested as the primary reason for this tragic outcome. It was estimated that the failed tour cost in excess of two million dollars, as contracted musicians demanded full payment, even though the tour dates were generally cancelled around the world.

\* \* \*

## Only Golden Fingers Could Play So Heavy

Former members of Golden Fingers Spike Jones, drums, Isaac Daly, guitar and Osgood “Ozzie” Martin, keyboards, were unavailable for comment.

I read the story from his hospital bed. “What’s this shit? They’re saying I’m dead!”

Rod tried to calm him down. “Quiet, I, you’ve been through some trauma. They’ll get the story straight in the next edition.”

“Rod, I wasn’t in my right mind. I have no idea about what I was doing. Rod, you know me, I don’t even do grass. Why would I try to kill myself with pills?”

“I know, I,” Rod assured him. “We will spin this to a more positive outcome if we can.”

Spike and his sister Angela rushed in the hospital room. Even though Spike and I had had a rather public feud in the music press, he still cared for his old friend. Seeing I sitting up in the bed, he decided to play it cool.

“You don’t look so dead to me,” Spike said.

I responded sharply, “Hey man, it’s not a laughing matter. This could destroy my career!”

Spike gave his retort, “I think it’s too late for that.”

Sometimes I was clueless when it came to his public behavior. “What do you mean by that?”

“You can’t say that you haven’t noticed things have been tough for you these last few months.”

I slumped his head and nodded, “I know.”

“The fans just couldn’t take it anymore. They were fans of Golden Fingers. They didn’t see you as anything more than a successful frontman. When you took the act solo, all they got was an overdose of your ego, and sub-par musicianship.”

I began to react to that slight, and even Spike

acknowledged that the instrumental contribution on I's solo album were of the highest quality. "The problem was that it did not translate to the conceptual presentation you created for the tour. Fans like to see action, and a single player on the stage is not action. They got tired of your ranting and raving about yourself. Face it, I, with an attitude like that, you can't go far. For now, you've got to face it. The press is hard. They're calling you washed up. You've lost the golden touch." He broke into song, "You've lost that lovin' feelin'..." before stopping himself. "Sorry, got carried away."

"But the press just wants to sensationalize," I retorted. "There's little truth there. The fans can't leave. Where will they turn? I'm the modern Messiah! I'm an Amazing Man!"

"Amazing man?" questioned Spike. "That's just a another song, man. And when fans really try to understand the lyrics, they see right through them. You're no amazing man, no more than any of us."

Spike continued, "The press may overreact. Certainly, today's headlines confirm that fact. But the fans do say that success has gone to your head. Some of them are actually responding positively to the news of your suicide. It's a fringe group, but it's telling. They are actually engaged in their commentary."

If I's mood could have sunk deeper, it would have.

Spike kept on, "They're already moving on to other acts, other 'stars'. Those are the ones that don't take their fans for granted. They know how to keep their egos in check. Now *they* are the amazing men."

Spike picked up the hand mirror at I's bedside. "Take a good look at yourself. You need to find your way on your



own. Nobody can bring a change to your attitude but yourself.”

I couldn't let go of his opinion that he was rock's ruler of all things. “But I'm the King.”

Spike returned with “Elvis is the King. You're just one of his many subjects.”

“But we were bigger than Elvis. We were bigger than the Beatles!” I protested.

“We were big, that's true. But will we have the legacy that they have? Who will remember us in a year's time?”

“How will we be remembered? What will it take to save us?” I pleaded.

“You must be their servant, rather than pretend to be their leader. You must fall as a slave to their feet,” Spike suggested.

“Maybe I was trying to find an end to my pain,” I admitted. “Maybe my actions last night were a last desperate attempt at a reconciliation with myself... and our fans.”

I's eventual recognition of his failings may have been the first small step towards that reconciliation.

## CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

### *1976 - I and Angela*

Angela had sat silent while I and Spike had had their discourse. Tears had come to her eyes as she listened, and she dabbed at them occasionally with her handkerchief.

Spike got up to go, “C’mon, Angie, let’s let him think about things for a while.”

“I’d like to speak to him for a bit, Spike,” Angela said quietly to Spike.

Spike turned up his eyebrows quizzically. Angela responded to the unspoken question, “Give us some privacy. Come back for me in an hour.”

Spike left the room, leaving Angela behind. I looked up at her, curious.

“You’ve been quiet all this time,” he said. “Are you going to beat me up as well?”

Angela spoke sweetly and tenderly to him as she patted his hand. “Now, now. Your world’s not coming to an end. If you’d only open your eyes, you’d see the answer right in front of you.”

I looked back at the set-aside newspaper, and scanned

the headlines again. “I don’t see anything.”

“Look at me,” Angela told him. “You’ve never paid much attention to me, but I’ve always been there. Think about it. Who was there to help out at rehearsals? Who helped run the Golden Fingers fan club? Who designed your most famous band poster?”

“Of course I’ve noticed your role in all of those. I did appreciate it. But weren’t you just helping out your brother? And you’ve always had an eye for Ozzie, haven’t you?”

“Ozzie?” she responded, “Don’t be silly. Sure, I’ve spent most of my life with Ozzie. After all, he’s my cousin. We played together when we were kids. But romantically? Be serious!”

“I,” she said as she took a hold of his hand. “It’s all been for you. I could see through that persona you developed and saw beneath it the tender man that I’ve always wanted.”

I lost himself in thought for a few moments, “You know, when I think about it, there was something that I felt when I saw your attentions on Ozzie. It may have been a pent up jealousy, something I saw that I wanted, something I knew I could never have.”

“The fact is,” he continued. “I need someone, and maybe that someone is you. It’s got to be. You *have* been there all along, that presence in my dreams even. Maybe it’s true, after all.” He paused again. Her silence was golden for the moment as he collected his thoughts.

“If it weren’t for you staying behind today, I may never have seen it. I don’t think I could make it through my life with all of the past month’s events suddenly unraveling everything.”

Angela gripped his hand tighter as the revelations continued.

“Your love is true; truer than any I’ve ever seen. If I could match that love, I wouldn’t hesitate a minute to ask you to share it with me in my life.”

“I,” stammered Angela. “Are you asking me to marry you?”

“Well, I haven’t asked directly, but I sure would be interested in your answer.”

Angela answered with another question. “Are you ready to make real changes in your life? Would you change for me? I think you can; I think you must. It’s life. It may be inconvenient sometime, but with positive change, I think you’ll understand.”

I confided, “I was without any real friends, except for those guys in the band. I took advantage of them, and when I caused the breakup of the band, I was lonely. I didn’t feel like a star, despite everything that was being said. Because I tried to be stronger and overcome it all, I was brought down even lower.”

“I need someone, Angela, and it’s got to be you. I realize that now. Will you marry me?”

“I will, I will.” She leaned over, hugged him about the neck and they kissed passionately.

“I’m beginning to see where my faults lie. I need your help to pull me out. I’ve got to try to change, that’s clear. Do you know what the key is?”

“The key to change,” Angela told him, “is that you need to recognize the need in yourself. You’ve done that, or have begun to. You can change!”

Neither Angela nor I had noticed a new guest in the room. It was Isaac, hovering in the background, and

catching a bit of the last of their conversation.

“Did someone mention change?” Isaac asked. “I’ve run into some hard times lately and could use the extra cash.” He held out his hand.

Angela laughed and gave Isaac a hug. “We’re trying to be sentimental and serious here, and you come in trying to be funny. Shame on you!”

“There goes the mood of the moment,” I complained.

“But Isaac does have a point,” Angela prompted.

Isaac turned quizzically to Angela, and I countered, “What? The one on top of his head?”

“Ever the statesman, I, ever the statesman,” Isaac came back, and then turned to Angela. “What do you mean?”

“Look at the world, today.” Angela’s gesture took in the room and indicated the larger world outside the window. “There are people out there for which panhandling is a way of life. The only life they know. Things are bad, and I think they’ll only get worse. Why can’t you do something about it?”

“Me,” I said defensively, “What can I do? I write, play and sing songs. How could that help?”

“You still have fame, and you still have money,” Angela explained. “You could write a song to unite us in the fight. Maybe sort of a ‘World Theme Song.’ Love. Peace. Togetherness. Action. Something that would inspire the world’s masses to get up and do something.”

“Did you forget already? I’ve already inspired the masses to stand up and march right out of my concerts and I wasn’t even trying.”

“You don’t understand the power you have, I. If channeled properly, and with sincerity, those ‘masses’ will flock back to support you and a new positive cause. Write

your song. You'll see what I mean."

"World's got to change, and I'm gonna change it," I mused. "I like the sound of that."

## CHAPTER FORTY-SIX

### *1977 - World Reform*

The new reform movement was in full motion. I kept his vow to create his ‘World Theme Song’ and the momentum for change sent it to the top of the charts.

“Pretty good results for a wash out, “ I told his new wife. “You can hardly go anywhere without ‘World Reform’ coming out of a radio, or being played in a record shop.”

I turned on his radio, and recognized the familiar strains as the song came up again in the rotation.

*World's gonna change and I'm gonna change it.*

*Turn out the old, rearrange it.*

*We can't get by on what they dictate on high.*

*Reform! Be reborn!*

I couldn't help himself as he jumped up on the table and started in on a little guitar improvising, without the benefit of a guitar. He took a couple of Townshend-style swipes at the air, and sang out with the radio.

*Look out the window and what do I see?*

*L.A. smog coming after me.  
My eyes are burning and heads are turning to me.*

*Reform! Be reborn!*

I took on the solo with a vengeance, and jumped off the table, barely missing cracking his head on the ceiling. He calmed down a bit as the music mellowed.

*I can't do it alone, help is on its way.*

*If you'll help me along, we'll see a new day.*

The main theme reintroduced, he belted it out:

*Political upsets are getting me upset.*

*Branding our minds so we can forget.*

*The situation that exists in our nation means:*

*Reform! Be reborn!*

Angela was so happy to see the positive changes reflected in I over the past few months. The music press retracted the stories of suicide, and embraced the new socially conscious efforts of this once over the top, but now down to earth version of “The World’s Greatest Musician.”

Their wedding had been a quiet affair, with a few friends and family in attendance. All four members of Golden Fingers were there, which fueled a few rumors of a reunion, but they were really there to support I and Angela. Buddy and Annette and Henry and Juliette were overjoyed, never thinking in a million years that there would be a matchup between Angela and I, and amazed that their friendship of more than twenty years would produce such fruit. Spike served as I’s best man, and Isaac and Ozzie were groomsmen.

Angela’s maid of honor, was I’s “cousin” and her best



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friend Elizabeth Stone. Betty was her good friend from high school, and a confidante in Angela's secret crush on I. Elizabeth was a couple of years older than Angela, and had never revealed to her that she had been briefly involved with I back in High School. Her bridesmaids, Marilyn Spencer and Marie Jordon had been fast friends themselves, known as the "M" girls in the Golden Fingers fan club. They were realizing one of their own private dreams by being involved in an event such as this.

Sam Martin and his wife, Samantha, sat in the special guest row, and even Sandy Daly had sobered up long enough to make a presentable appearance.

I had even composed a new song for the event, based on his own transformation, and the couple used it for their vows.

I began:

*I need someone and that someone's got to be you.*

*Though you've been there all along you're just like a dream come true.*

*If it wasn't for you*

*I know I couldn't make it through my life*

*If it wasn't for you*

*If it wasn't for you*

*You have a love that is true*

*And I know you'll make me a fine wife*

*You have a love that is true*

*You have a love that is true*

Angela, unaccustomed to singing in public, was a bit nervous, but she continued the story:

*Change*

*Change your life, change for me  
You can if you try  
You must to get by*

*Change  
Life is change, understand  
Yes, I'll be your wife  
Yes, I'll share your life  
I resumed his vows:  
Friendless, lonely, there I was,  
A star no longer.  
I'd been brought down all because  
I wanted to be stronger*

*I need someone and that someone's got to be you.  
Though you've been there all along you're just like a dream come  
true.*

He continued his confession, with Angela joining in counterpoint:

*If it wasn't for you  
I know I couldn't make it through my life  
If it wasn't for you  
If it wasn't for you  
You have a love that is true  
And I know you'll make me a fine wife  
You have a love that is true  
You have a love that is true*

*Change  
Change your life, change for me  
You can if you try  
You must to get by*

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*Change*

*Life is change, understand*

*Yes, I'll be your wife*

*Yes, I'll share your life*

I resumed a solo vocal:

*Now I've seen where my faults lies*

*You've got to help me.*

*It's clear to me I've got to try.*

*I need the key, so tell me.*

Angela responded with her solo call for change

*Change*

*Change your life, change for me*

*You can if you try*

*You must to get by*

*Change*

*Life is change, understand*

*Yes, I'll be your wife*

*Yes, I'll share your life*

Their vows concluded, there wasn't a dry eye in the house.

## CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN

### *1984 - Todd*

I had settled into his life of retirement at thirty, five years later than he had originally predicted on his tenth birthday. He still remained busy, and enjoyed the fresh air of his estate, walking the dog, and feeding the wild birds. After a particularly nice afternoon out, he returned home. Angela met him at the door.

“There was a phone call for you while you were out,” she told him.

I was a bit surprised. He preferred the experience of direct contact, and most whom he knew made it a practice to drop by, even unannounced. Everyone was welcome.

His curiosity was raised, “Oh? Who was it?”

“Some fellow by the name of Todd Rundgren. He called about an hour ago,” Angela revealed.

“A hint of recognition crossed I’s face. “Todd Rundgren ... Hmm.... Seems I’ve heard of him before somewhere. Wasn’t he a record producer several years back?”

“I think so,” indicated Angela, “I think he had a

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musical career on the side as well, though he was never particularly successful. I remember reading that he released an album that pretty much destroyed his career.”

“That’s right,” I recalled. “He moved into a direction that did not sit well with the fans, and when he tried to go back to writing pop hits, he’d lost all credibility.”

Angela pointed her finger at I, “Don’t be so quick to criticize,” she warned. “You’ve been down that path, too. You were lucky to survive.”

I was a little worried, “I hope he isn’t going to try to get me to start playing again. That’s all over. Did he say?”

Angela gave I the message. “No, just left his number. He’s staying at the motel down the road. Why don’t you give him a call?”

I capitulated. “Yeah, I guess so. What’s the number?”

“It’s right there in your hand,” she said.

“Oh, yeah, right.”

I picked up the phone, punched out the number and waited for an answer.

Angela was curious as she heard the one-sided conversation.

“Hello, this is I Mall.” He paused. “Yes, Todd, I’ve heard of you.” He rolled his eyes. “Oh, I see. Hold on.” He covered the phone with his hand and spoke to Angela, “Are you OK with a visitor?”

“When have we ever been not OK with a visitor?”

I resumed his conversation on the phone, “Sure, come on over.” Yet another pause and then, “Alright, see you then.”

He hung up the phone. “He’ll be over in a couple of minutes.”

“That means he’ll probably stay for dinner,” Angela

surmised. “Or if he isn’t expecting it, we can at least invite him. I’d better get something ready.”

“What are we having tonight?” I inquired.

“I think it’ll be those steaks I bought last weekend,” she stated matter-of-factly. “He should be quite impressed since not too many people can afford them these days.”

“Now you know we’re not ones to show off our affluence and we’re not here to impress him. He’s been around. I’m sure there’s little that impresses or surprises him these days. He’s just coming over to talk business. But just the same, don’t burn them; I think that the usual ten seconds puts too much of a char on the edges. Try eight or nine.”

“Be glad to,” Angel admitted, thankful for modern conveniences. “You know how I hate to spend a lot of time in the kitchen.”

Angela left for the kitchen, and I stepped over to the piano. He began to noodle out a tune. Angela returned from her brief stint in the kitchen and inquired, “What are you playing?”

I was totally absorbed in the composition of a song. He replied without thinking, “The piano.”

Angela was mildly exasperated. “I know that, but what song?”

“Oh, just something that came out. Maybe I can work it into something.”

“It’s very pretty. But you’ve retired. Why are you writing?”

“Well, you can take the musician away from the music, but you can’t take the music out of the musician. Sometimes these things just happen.”

As if interrupting I’s thought train, a knock came at the

door.

“That must be Mr. Rundgren.” I was lost in his own formality and said, “I’ll get it.”

As I opened the door, there was Todd Rundgren. He sang out, “Hello, it’s me!”

“Ha, ha, yeah I get it. Your big ‘hit.’ Come on, come in.” He called over to Angela. “Angela, Mr. Rundgren is here.” That damned formality. What had gotten into him?

Todd could sense a bit of tension and asked I, “Please, just call me Todd. I’m just a real man like you.”

I introduced Todd to Angela, and as he did, he took her hand and kissed it elegantly. “A pleasure.”

“I’ve just made some dinner, won’t you join us?” Angela asked.

“Of course, thanks. I’d be honored,” replied I.

Angela shot a look towards I, “I was speaking to Todd.”

Todd chuckled and replied, “Yes, thank you.”

They sat down at the table and I was anxious to find out what this was all about. “Let’s get down to business. What’s on your mind?”

Todd began, “I’m sure you know this is an election year.”

I nodded. “Right. I’m already a registered voter. My parents were really into that election stuff. But sometimes it’s not too good to get involved. It nearly broke them up when I was young. They were split on the candidates. I guess my dad eventually got his way, though. Ol’ Tricky Dick made it to the White House after all. And look how that turned out. And I swore that if Reagan got elected, I’d leave the country for good. Well, unfortunately he did, but I’m still here. So much for commitment.”

Both Todd and Angela were surprised by I’s mini-

tirade. It was so out of character for him, but Todd continued.

“That’s good, but it’s not important right now. What I came to tell you is that I’m running for the president this year.”

“Why? Is it one of those pledge marathons?” I countered. “Well, you can count me out. Like I told you, he’s not even my party and I wouldn’t consider supporting him in any way.”

His ire was unexpected, and Todd tried to calm down the situation. “No, no, no, no, no. I’m running for the presidency. I want to be elected.”

“So what does that have to do with me?” I protested. “I’ve got nothing to do with the election.”

“I’m looking for a campaign manager and you sound right for the job.”

“What makes me sound so good as a campaign manager?” I was intrigued, but unconvinced.

“You’ve got the notoriety I need to shove me to the top. I saw the results of your world reform crusade. If it wasn’t for you...”

I and Angela looked at each other with a smile, “He’s playing our song.”

Todd was confused, “What?”

I responded, “Oh, nothing. Go ahead.”

“Well, if it wasn’t for you,” another chuckle and Todd quickly corrected himself, “Alright. Excuse my bad grammar. If it *weren’t* for you, we might not be sitting here today. With the threat of a nuclear holocaust at the back door...”

Todd was surprised as I shot out of his chair and ran to the door, he opened it and peered out. He returned,



confused but relieved.

Angela asked “What’s wrong, I?”

“I thought Todd said there was about to be a nuclear holocaust at our back door!”

Todd assured I, “Just a figure of speech. I didn’t mean it literally.”

I responded, “Well watch it with those figures, I nearly flunked school math.”

Angela was getting a little flustered at I’s erratic behavior. “I, will you quit clowning!”

Todd tried to resume his decorum. “Anyway, I’d like to point out how with your inspirational ‘World Theme Song’ you caused the world to settle back in peace again. That’s what I need working on my side.”

“We already have candidates running in both parties. What party are you running for?” I asked.

Todd simply replied, “The Treed party.”

“Treed?”, I scoffed. “Never heard of it.”

Todd replied, “Of course not. I just made it up this morning.”

I was getting skeptical. “Why Treed?”

Todd explained. “Do you know what a cat does when he’s chased up a tree by a dog? He fights back! I feel that I’ve been treed by the politicians of this country and I’m ready to fight back. Will you do it?”

Todd’s explanation made sense, in an odd way. He was starting to get through to I’s suppressed political support leanings.

I conceded. “Looks like I’ve been Treed. Who’s your main opponent?”

“Well, besides the major party candidates, of course, there’s Senator Davis from Northern California.”

“Have you given any thought about a running mate? You have to think geographically as well as politically on that one,” I advised.

“I’m originally from Philly, but since I’ve relocated to L.A. it looks like my best bet is someone from the South.”

“What, you’re talking Mexico? Brazil?”

“No, I’m thinking more on the line of San Diego, but I don’t know anybody in San Diego.”

“Who does?” I countered.

“Maybe I should focus my attention on Alabama or Arkansas.” Todd considered.

“What’s so special about those states?” I asked.

“I’ve got some old musical acquaintances down there. Some fellows from Lynyrd Skynyrd and Black Oak Arkansas live there.”

I thought a moment, “Treed, hmm? I can see the headlines already Todd Rundgren Easily Eradicates Davis!”

Todd agreed, “It does sound good. Now all I need is a theme song. I’m hoping that’s where you come in.”

I moved over to the piano and started playing the song he’d earlier become lost in. The lyrics came out naturally.

*It’s 1984 and time to vote once more.*

*For once you really do have a choice.*

*A wizard, a true star has raised his voice.*

*In music and in song he has carried us along*

*And he’s conjured up a most devoted crowd.*

*Corruption in the states won’t be allowed.*

*On the sixth of November you’ve got to remember*

*To go to the polls and vote.*

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*I know you won't be sorry, with Todd there's no worry  
And your hopes won't be so remote.*

*Utopia it's not, but with a vote for Todd  
You'll find that it's one step nearer.  
We need something, anything to stop fear*

*In music and in song he has carried us along  
and he's conjured up a most devoted crowd.  
Corruption in the states won't be allowed.*

*On the sixth of November you've got to remember  
To go to the polls and vote.  
I know you won't be sorry, with Todd there's no worry  
And your hopes won't be so remote.*

Todd's election as president would have marked the first time a rock star had rocketed to the Oval Office, but it was not to be, at least for the time being. Todd's support by I raised his awareness as a household name, but ultimately failed to win the presidency, guaranteeing four more years of a Reagan administration.

## CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT

### *2015 - Reunion?*

I and Angela had enjoyed their many years of quiet retirement on their vast estate. Although the kids were grown and gone, their frequent visits with the grandchildren were the highlights of these soon to be twilight years.

But even with a beautiful wife and all the successes his career had brought him, I sometimes longed for a return to the glory days. His golden years had him longing for Golden Fingers.

As if sharing his thoughts, Angela remarked, “Have you ever thought of getting Golden Fingers back together again? Reunion was very fashionable a few decades ago.”

They knew each other so well; it shouldn't have come as a surprise. “I've often thought about it,” he revealed, “but always seemed to put it out of my mind. I really don't think it would work out. We had our share of troubles, and I think those wounds may still run deep.”

“The troubles are long behind us, and the road ahead is clear. Personally, I think it sounds like a good idea,”

Angela prodded.

“Well, we might be friends outside of a working relationship, but in the studio, I don’t think I could get along with the other guys. You know how we argued all of the time. Besides, I think they still harbor some resentment for breaking up the group all those years ago to go out on my own.”

Angela replied, “But we know you’ve changed, and they’ve changed. Remember what they say: absence makes the heart grow fonder. As a matter of fact, I spoke to my brother this morning on the videophone about it. He’s here for a visit.”

I was surprised once again, “Spike is in town? Where’s he staying?”

Angela told him, “He’s staying at the Century Motel, about a mile away from here. He’d said that he’d like to try a reunion. He came up with the idea in the first place.”

I stared wistfully before responding to Angela, “Did I ever tell you that Spike was the idea man behind Golden Fingers? I always liked to take credit for it, but he came up with the original proposal.”

“Of course, I know, silly,” chided Angela. “He was pretty sore for a while at some of those comments you made.”

“Yeah, I know he’s gotten over it,” I admitted. “I guess Spike is in, but there’s still Isaac and Osgood. They’d never go for it. I don’t think they were into music all that much anyway. You remember how Isaac used to blow those leads all the time.”

“Spike’s already talked to them,” Angela responded. “They agree it should be given a try.”

“So Spike keeps up with them? I’ve been out of touch

with Isaac since the wedding, and only occasionally hear about Ozzie. Didn't he finally get married a few years ago?"

"Talk about out of touch! It wasn't a 'few' years ago, it was over twenty. And you were there at the wedding. You don't remember?"

"Oh, yeah. Duh. He hooked up with that odd girl from the record company. What was her name, Peppermint or Spice Drop or something like that?"

"It's Candance. They call her Candy."

"Don't they have a couple of kids now? Are they Peppermint and Spice Drop?"

"There isn't any Peppermint or Spice Drop!" Angela was getting exasperated.

"If you say so," I conceded.

"Ozzie's kids want to see him on stage. All they've got to see it is the old online video. It's not the same."

"But what about Isaac? He certainly wasn't in top form; he had a lot of vices."

"Isaac's really cleaned himself up and Spike says he's really worked on his guitar lately. Didn't you see that he released a solo album about five years ago? It wasn't a chart topper, but it was a respectable effort."

I remained unconvinced, "I still don't know. We were hot stuff in the seventies, but this is the twenty-first century. That was over forty years ago. People just won't accept us."

"Don't you remember what happened in the seventies, though? That was the nostalgia decade. People were listening to the music of the forties, fifties and sixties and liking it. We could start a new nostalgia craze!" It appeared that Angela was already sold on the idea. It

would still take more prompting to get I to agree.

“You know...” I paused as he considered the idea. “It sounds tempting...” Another pause, then a rejection. “But I’m too old. Besides, who wants to pay good money to see a bunch of senile old jerks trying to re-create the seventies? Leave it to today’s youth. I just couldn’t take it.”

“Come on, now. There are plenty of people who would want to see the reunion of the ‘World’s Greatest Band’. They don’t want to see imitators and tribute acts, they want to see the real thing. You could attract all the old fans and even new ones. You may have retired years ago, but you can’t leave the scene completely without a big comeback. That’s what everyone is doing. You owe it to the world to appear again.”

“Comeback? And how successful has that been for all the rest? Their comebacks have them playing in small towns and tiny venues. What kind of success is that?”

“It’s not about success at this point. You’re already successful. Look around you! Don’t you agree?”

“Maybe it would be nice to get out among the people again,” I mused. “I’ve missed the road; the excitement of touring. Waking up in a bus or a different hotel room every night. Well, maybe I haven’t missed that. But playing is the thing, I could do that.”

I stood up. “Alright, you talked me into it. Get a hold of Spike and we’ll start to arrange the details.”

Angela picked up her phone and punched in a few characters. “I let Spike know and he replied that he’ll transport here in about fifteen seconds. They still haven’t perfected the wardrobe machine at the motel and it seems he still has to put on his own coat or else risk serious injury.”

It was more like twenty seconds by I's watch. The door chime announced Spike and opened. To I's surprise, Isaac and Osgood accompanied him. While Osgood carried his age well, Isaac was a bit worn more than his years would merit. Even though he was clean now, it was obvious that the years of abuse had taken their toll.

As they walk through the door frame, a buzzer sounded. I held up his hand, "Hold it. The security alarm says there's something fishy going on. Have all of you been registered for clearance?"

Isaac's admission, as he reached into his pocket, was a bit of a surprise. "It's probably because of my pet hamster. I take him wherever I go." He stroked its fur.

I turned to Angela. "I thought you said these guys had straightened out?"

Angela giggled. "I didn't say anything about senility," she whispered.

I turned back to the trio. "Okay, come on in. Hmm... You guys look as slick as a guitar lick."

Spike replied for the group, "We've all been doing pretty well out there."

Isaac remarked, "I can't believe it's been almost forty years since we were last together as a band!"

"Let's see how well we can do together again," I remarked. "'Reunion is total communion of souls.' Isn't that how the old saying goes?"

Isaac looked at him with a question in his eye, "Never heard that one before."

Osgood defended Isaac's statement of fact. "He ought to know. He was the head of the English Literature department at the Multiversity."

It was yet another item that had escaped I's attention.



“Well, it looks like we’ve got a lot of catching up to do, but we’ll get on with that later. First we’ve got to plan this reunion.”

Spike was all business. “One thing we’ve got to do is tip off the music magazines. They’re always hot for a rumor of reunion among old groups.”

I concurred. “We also need a promoter for the tour, someone who knows his way around.”

Isaac offered “How about William Graham III? That type of thing seems to run in his family.”

I agreed, “OK, I’ll leave it up to you to get a hold of him.”

Osgood suggested, “We need a few new songs. The public might not settle for all the old ones.”

I didn’t quite agree. “Maybe we can pen one or two, but the purpose of this reunion is to bring back the era of the rockin’ seventies.”

There were nods of assent all around.

Angela was curious. “What will you charge for the concerts?”

“That would be up to the promoter,” I said, “but I would imagine that tickets would run about thirty to fifty dollars each. That seems pretty reasonable.”

Osgood suggested, “Maybe we could make it a benefit tour.”

Isaac agreed, “That’s right. We really have no need for the money ourselves.”

I thought it was a good idea, but asked, “Who will benefit from it?”

Spike jested, “William Graham III, for one.”

Isaac made his suggestion. “How about the Los Angeles Home for Aging Rock Musicians? I’ve heard the royalties

from the old rock records are really slowing down and they're in need for some financial assistance."

I agreed. "That seems like a good cause. Besides, we may end up there ourselves, someday."

Spike also concurred. "It's true that it's the most popular home in the United States. It gets pretty loud there sometimes. The musicians all get together and jam on Tuesdays. At their advanced age they're near deaf and they have to turn up their amps to full volume to even hear themselves."

I took mock offense, "What do you mean 'advanced age?' Most of them are no more than five or ten years older than us. At sixty-two, I resent being called an old man!"

Everyone got a chuckle out of that one.

Isaac continued brainstorming. "Maybe we can even have a re-issue of some of our old hits to remind people of the music of the good old days."

Osgood started doing some calculations. "We can figure on a good total for the home. At an established world population of just over seven billion, we can figure on a twenty-five percent turnout, and at an average of forty dollars a ticket, that means about seventy billion dollars for the home. That should keep them out of the red for another five years."

"We're gonna need a lot of practice," I confirmed. He held up his hand. "I'm afraid these golden fingers have tarnished a bit."

Spike agreed, "We'll really have to come on like a lion. We can prove again that only Golden Fingers could play so heavy!"

## CHAPTER FORTY-NINE

### *2016 - Reunion!*

Like his father before him, Hardy Rochester II was a respected journalist. Once only the scion and heir apparent of the I.B.C. broadcasting dynasty, HR2, as he was commonly known about the newsroom, was now in a role that exceeded even his own father's accomplishments. He had traveled the world over, conducted interviews with most of the world's leaders and covered nearly every major news story of the past thirty years.

Wars – military coups – catastrophic weather events – famines – genocide – earthquakes – if it was major, then HR2 was on the scene. But despite the enormity of the stories he had covered, none was as personally fulfilling to him as the opportunity to interview the reunited members of Golden Fingers.

Finger Frenzy, as the phenomenon was known, was at its highest the night before the legendary reunion tour was to begin. Heightened security surrounded the hotel where the four friends were sequestered. Without being oppressive, police presence was in full force, and throngs

of anxious fans were present, hoping to catch a glimpse of their musical heroes should they choose to exit the building.

The odd juxtaposition of fans in their seventies together with fans barely into their teens made for an amazing sight. Women of all ages swooned at the possibility that their long-gone, but never forgotten idols would soon be performing again.

When HR2 arrived on the scene, he was treated as a rock star as well. It was well known that he would be interviewing the band members, and the crowds shouted out questions they'd like asked. "Tell them to come to Podunk, North Dakota!" one ardent fan yelled out. HR2 acknowledged the fan with a wave and was allowed to pass through the security cordon. Several fans tried to force themselves through with him, but they were successfully repelled without incident.

HR2 was directed to the high-rise elevators and was whooshed up to the 18<sup>th</sup> floor where each member had been given his own suite. The band members had gathered in I's suite for the interview.

HR2, the proper, staid and sometimes stone-faced newsman was nervous. As a young man, he had been a big fan of Golden Fingers. He had attended three concerts during their first world tour, but despite his father's efforts, never had the opportunity to personally meet the individual members face to face.

But the mutual admiration society was not one-sided. HR2 was as well known throughout the world as Golden Fingers, and they in turn had looked forward to meeting him as well.

Introduction and handshakes out of the way, HR2 got

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down to business.

“It’s been over forty years since you last toured together. How have you prepared for this most momentous of occasions?”

I was the first to respond, “We’ve spent most of the last two years directly preparing for this moment. But, you know, the seeds were sown forty years ago, even as we were breaking up.”

“How so?” HR2 inquired.

Spike took up the question. “It was necessary for us to leave the scene as a group and find what each of us could do individually. I’s choice was to continue in the business, but the rest of us chose to pursue different careers.”

“Popular history records the story differently. Are you saying the split was amicable?”

It was Isaac’s turn to respond, “There were tensions, to be sure, but in hindsight, it was the right thing to do, and the right time.”

HR2 turned to Osgood, “Some say that your contributions were minor compared to the rest of the members. How do you respond to that?”

Osgood put on an offended air. “Minor? Minor? I think the Ozzites would disagree with that assessment!”

“Truly,” he continued, “the keys are a background instrument. I don’t mind playing second fiddle to the others, and sometimes, depending on the synth settings, I am actually playing second fiddle!” The group laughed at Osgood’s joke.

I also came to Osgood’s defense. “Ozzie’s contribution to our sound cannot be underestimated. Without it, there would be a definite emptiness.”

“One final question: What do you think about reunion

and the prospects for tomorrow's first concert in over forty years?"

"That's easy," began I. "Only golden years could be so heavy."

HR2's report ran that evening on the 6 o'clock news.

*Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, this is the six o'clock edition of the I.B.C. News, with Hardy Rochester II, brought to you each evening by Fender guitars. Your local music store will show you their fine selection of Fender guitars, starting at only two thousand dollars. Here's Hardy Rochester II."*

*"Earlier this afternoon I had the distinct pleasure of interviewing the Golden Fingers rock band, famous for their hits of the nineteen seventies who are reunited tomorrow for the first of ten concerts in Los Angeles. They will play to a capacity crowd of three hundred thousand in the newly remodeled Forum, and are expected to visit their full catalog of classics as well as a few new gems to add to their treasury. The concert is expected to last four hours, although likely it will seem to only be a few fleeting moments. The enthusiasm of the crowds around their hotel this afternoon was but a glimpse of what we can expect as this tour continues to grow.*

*The group plans to tour the world, playing to an estimated five billion people, through live concerts and closed circuit appearances. The tour, planned to run for two years, will bring proceeds of seventy billion dollars, which will be donated to the Los Angeles Home for Aging Rock Musicians. And that's the six o'clock edition of I.B.C. News. Tune in at seven o'clock for an update of national and world news."*

## CHAPTER FIFTY

### *2017 - William*

William Graham III had a legacy to fulfill. As the grandson of the famed promoter, he certainly had the skills to manage a tour of such proportions as the *Golden Fingers Reunion Tour for the Benefit of the Los Angeles Home for Aging Rock Musicians*. GFRTBLAHARM. Or, as he would have it:

#### GFRTBLAHARM

He particularly liked to point out the coincidental, but highly prophetic (or so he thought) inclusion of his name in the tour title. In time, he took to just calling it GrahamStock, because the *Golden Fingers Reunion Tour for the Benefit of the Los Angeles Home for Aging Rock Musicians* was just too much of a mouthful to repeat.

William traveled with the band all over the world, and promoted himself as much as he did the tour. He was certainly going to become a rich man from the proceeds, because although it was a benefit, expenses had to be paid, and he was certain to include his promotional fee in the overall expenses. A one percent off the top of the

proceeds seemed minimal in perspective, but seven hundred million dollars wasn't too bad for a couple years of work.

No one would deny that William wasn't important to the overall success of the tour, although there were those who would argue that the tour sold itself, there was no need for actual promotion. William's organization was large as well. More than three thousand of his employees were involved in the various aspects of promotion. One of the most effective was the Neural Syndication Network, where human brainwaves were used to transmit proximity messages to fans who had registered their preference for information about the tour. This nascent technology was enjoying its first major test on a worldwide basis.

The way it worked was this: a seed message was programmed into an Internet Distribution Device and sent out to a microcell vicinity, where it was guaranteed to reach at least 100 people. The message was encoded to correspond with the frequency at which the human brain performed its own micro-transmissions, a discovery that had only been fully understood beginning in 2014. Brain Micro-Transmission Technology was first exploited during the 2016 U.S. elections to ensure the populace had access to current information about the candidates, but had not spread to the rest of the world.

The ubiquitous presence of the Internet worldwide guaranteed transmission to every continent, but the specialized transmission devices needed to seed micro-transmissions had not become cost effective until after the U.S. elections. When GrahamStock was announced, BMTT was one of the first media elements to be discussed.



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William programmed the first message himself and hit the transmit key which distributed it across the 39<sup>th</sup> floor of his office building. Since most employees had registered themselves for tour information, they were informed directly. Then, as they went about their business of the day, attending meetings, going out to lunch, shopping and spending time with family and friends in the evening, the message began its distribution over the NSN. Messages were exchanged by human proximity, generally a radius of twenty feet. Over the course of a single day, the message had been distributed to over a million people.

It wasn't so much that the recipients had the experience of a direct transmission. It was more of a general sense, a memory they had always known. If someone mentioned the Golden Fingers tour to him or her, they would automatically have access to the tour information, and relate it at will.

Worldwide distribution had a similar effect. The IDD was present on all continents and even had a node on the newly settled moon base. Simultaneous transmission to all IDDs caused their own proximity network to be active. By the end of the first week, 75% of the world's population knew of the tour details.

Once a worldwide NSN was established, its operation was self-maintaining, as long as fresh content was available. William ensured that a daily distribution of tour news was published, and the NSN ensured that it was distributed. In only two weeks time, every human being on the Earth had received the first message. Even those stationed on the Moon as well as those in transit across the Solar System received it. The sole exception was the members of the Alpha Centauri mission, who would

receive the message after a long delay. That small segment of population was considered expendable, as due to distance limitations, they would be unable to attend any of the concerts.

William was proud of the first successful exploitation of the new technology. It was a turning point in future communication for years to come. I's prophetic statement of "*And now I've got it made, there ain't a cat alive who doesn't know who I am!*" had certainly come true.

## CHAPTER FIFTY-ONE

### *2018 – Fingers restored*

*Golden Fingers Reunion Tour for the Benefit of the Los Angeles Home for Aging Rock Musicians* dominated not only the music press, but also all forms of communication. Instant Messaging traffic during a show was higher than any time of the day, with fans clamoring to hear the latest from their heroes. Micro bytes of sound data streamed to electronic devices all over the world, and even in the remotest regions, the Golden Sound rang out. Church bells announced the group's arrival in each city; rocks echoed the strains of their music long after they'd left.

I truly did appreciate his father's contribution to his success, and lauded him at every opportunity. Tonight's show, though, was special. Henry and Juliette, both well into their eighties and beyond, were present in the front row. Special guests Buddy and Annette Jones and Sam and Samantha Martin were also present, and a memorial wreath was laid for Isaac's late mother, Sandy. I had designated this show to be "The Henry Mall Appreciation Concert – part II." He loved his father, and the first

attempt to honor him had not been the best example of what could be done.

This time it would be different.

His main concern, as it was over forty years ago, was if Isaac was up to the task. Over and over he tapped Isaac and asked “Are you going to be O.K. with this, man? It’s got to be perfect.”

“I am cool, man. Chilled to the bone,” Isaac quipped in the retro hip-speak making the rounds. “That phase is way behind me. Whatever I was missing from my father, I buried that years ago and recaptured it from yours and the other guys’.”

“That’s good, because tonight is going to blow everyone away.”

“What have you got planned?” Isaac was curious.

“Never you mind. It’s gonna happen, and it will be like nothing you’ve ever seen. This will go down in history!” I seemed especially ebullient. History was what Golden Fingers was all about, after all.

The hall, as always, was a sellout. Because of the significance of tonight’s show, additional audience members were packed into the Standing Room Only areas. Thousands of fans crowded outside; they’d been unable to acquire a ticket during the one hour availability period. For them, a forty foot screen had been erected, giving them a live look inside. A holographic 3D projection of the band enhanced the experience.

When the band took the stage, a tumultuous din greeted the group. They launched into the traditional set list and when it came to “Only Golden Fingers Could Play So Heavy,” I asked for the crowd’s attention. Rapt, they wondered what was up. The show had a flow, and this

wasn't in the normal flow.

I laid aside his bass. "Some forty plus years ago, I honored my father..." The crowd burst into cheers. I's reverence for his father had been a major topic of the news stories these days. He continued, "I honored my father with the first Henry Mall Appreciation Concert." I was proud he didn't stumble over the words this time. "You might say, it didn't come off the way I planned..." The crowd roared with laughter, to hear the lyric turned to describe that first disastrous attempt.

"Well, tonight we're going to try again, and this time do it right!" The crowd rose in applause.

I signaled them to sit again. "I'm afraid he isn't getting any younger, so we'd better do this now. Mom. Dad. Come up here and join me on stage!"

The crowd rose once again as Henry and Juliette rose from their front row seats. They made their way up the stage, with a bit of assistance, and the spotlight soaked them brightly. The crowd stayed up despite I's attempt to calm them and continue with the plan. Henry was a hero as much as anyone could be, and this was his night. He deserved the honor.

Finally, the noise subsided and I began his announcement.

"My father was a great musician in his day, and an even greater as a group manager. The Scuffling Scappers were the Golden Fingers of the time, and owed everything to him." *O.K., maybe a bit of exaggeration, but it is for him, I thought.*

"My dad had a dream, one he never fulfilled, and I want to help him fulfill it tonight."

Henry looked curiously at I. *What dream?* he thought.

*I've had so many, and they've all been fulfilled.*

I looked off stage. "Angela! Bring it!"

I's beautiful wife came on the stage, carrying a shoebox-sized parcel.

"Many years ago, my father was working on a invention to give him back something he'd lost, something that kept him from doing what he wanted most: the ability to play guitar. Oh, he had played guitar, and probably could have still if he wanted. But he really wanted to play the bass guitar. Tonight, I'm going to give him that dream."

I reached into the box and revealed a nearly perfectly formed human hand. As he touched the wrist, the fingers clenched, then released. A gasp drew from the audience.

"No, it's not as monstrous as it looks. Dad, come here and hold up your hand."

Henry had long ago lost any self-consciousness regarding his missing fingers, but he was a bit uncomfortable in the spotlight now. I took the hand, which turned out to be some type of naturally skin sensation glove, and pulled it down over Henry's thumb and index finger. As it closed over his palm and then over his wrist, a tingling sensation went through his arm. Henry reacted by making a fist and unclenching. He wiggled all four fingers, and much to the crowd's delight, flipped a bird, just because he could now do it for real. Henry laughed and turned to I, "But how?"

"Dad," he began, "I've spent millions of dollars with hundreds of research firms to perfect this. I took your original designs, which were primitive, but were proven to have merit, and this is the result. It's the Henry Mall officially authorized replacement hand!"

Henry looked at I quizzically, "Really? You've got to

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come up with a better name than that!”

The crowd roared once again, and I admitted “Well, more money has gone into development than marketing, I guess. We’ll have to work on that.”

Henry once again flexed his fingers. “It feels like a real hand. I can’t tell the difference!” Cameras began flashing as all recognized the significance of this invention. “Son, I can’t thank you enough!”

“There’s one more thing,” as I reached over squeezed a special area on the wrist. At once the individual fingers lit up in a yellow hue. “I couldn’t help myself. Dad, you’ve now got golden fingers!”

The crowd erupted in a psychotic frenzy which gave I time to retrieve his bass guitar from the stand where he had placed it. He took the instrument and asked Henry, “Will you join us?”

“But I haven’t played in almost seventy years!” Henry protested. “And I certainly haven’t played your songs.”

“Dad, you know you know every single one inside out,” I assured him. “But just to help you out, there’s still something else.” He pulled out yet another matching left hand glove. “You don’t normally need this, but I think you can use it now.” He pulled it over Henry’s left hand.

Pressing the hidden wrist button, a small area burst into additional light. “Run your finger along the screen,” he told him. Henry saw that it was a menu of the songs in the set list. “It’s programmed to guide your fingers to the correct frets and strings. Even if you’ve never played before, you can now!”

I turned back to the audience, and called out. “Now, the song you’ve been patiently waiting for, featuring Henry Mall, my dad, on bass. ‘Only Golden Fingers Could Play

So Heavy!”

Henry grabbed the neck as the complicated bass lines emerged from the amp. The band joined in and I took the mike.

*I first picked up my bass guitar at the age of seventeen...*

The song continued through the chorus

*Crowds would gather when I played...*

But when it came to the second verse, something had changed.

*I played in the greatest rock ‘n’ roll band at the age of seventeen.*

*My father made sure that we would have a plan, ‘cause we were pretty green*

*He built a studio, he bought us all our gear, we knew that we were ready*

*‘cause only golden fingers could play so heavy!*

Henry’s flashing fingers lit up as each note was played, and there was never a finer moment in his memory than the one night his dream was achieved, because of the love of I Mall.



## CHAPTER FIFTY-TWO

### *2019 - The end of the tour*

It was the final show of the tour. The group was back in Los Angeles, and many of the beneficiaries of the show's proceeds were in attendance. The first two rows were a who's who of rock stars from the fifties and sixties, who had themselves taken advantage of what the LAHARM had to offer. The forum was sold out again, as every venue on the tour had been.

William Graham III was a bit wistful that the tour was at the end. He knew that he would never experience anything such as this again, no matter how long he remained a promoter. He took a peek from backstage and saw the immense crowd, the din from their pre-show conversation rising to almost deafening levels. The anticipation of the band members was rising as well. There were no further plans to continue beyond this night. This was going to be it.

William took a deep breath and ran out on the stage as the house lights dimmed. The crowds cheer went up and his announcement was barely heard.

“Ladies and gentlemen, here they are in their final concert appearance, Golden Fingers!!!!”

The crowd went crazy, and immediately as one, they rushed the stage. I urged them to silence and failing that, began the strains of their classic “Golden Fingers Theme” and continued with staples like “A Most Amazing Man” and “When The Kid Gets Heavy”. They also covered I’s solo material. “Only Golden Fingers Could Play So Heavy” was especially appreciated, and it sounded better than any previous performance. Their closing number, the new song “Reunion Chorus,” encouraged full audience participation. As was their custom, this new song told their personal story.

*Back together again*

*Back together again*

*When we play, people say that we’ll win*

*Back together again*

*Back together again*

*Back together again*

*We make way to portray all we’ve been*

*Back together again*

*World’s together again*

*World’s together again*

*All are friends, wars now end we are kin*

*Back together again*

The rocking chorus captured the audience in a sing-along, and was repeat at least twenty times with various solos, pyrotechnics, lights and a whole array of special effects accompanying it.

Normally, that would be the end of the show, but

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tonight was different. The chorus began to fade out, and one by one, the band members waved goodbye and left the stage, except for I, who remained alone in the spotlight. The house hushed so that a pin dropped would be deafening.

I began to sing softly.

*King's don't reign forever, got to die.*

*Time is short, my river's running dry.*

*Flashbacks, comebacks, laid-back I is through.*

*In my life I hope I've entertained you.*

*And now the time has come*

*To step out of the light.*

*The band has all gone home,*

*Finished for the night.*

*My reign is through, it's true,*

*I've reached the end.*

*But rock will carry on*

*And goodwill it will send.*

The spotlights focused on a mirrored ball, a popular fixture in the seventies, and it shed its light on the crowd.

I began to tear up when, as one, the audience rose and began chanting in perfect four-part harmony their Homage to a King. He wasn't The King, just a king, but he was their king, for the final time.

## CHAPTER FIFTY-THREE

### *2019 – Epilogue*

I left the stage in humbled silence, the strains of the crowd's homage still echoing in the arena. Backstage he spotted a small boy playing with a guitar.

"Hi there, pal," I offered gently. "What are you doing here?" The boy didn't answer. He couldn't have been more than a couple of years old.

I looked around, "You must have wandered away from your mother."

He heard a frantic "Hello, hello! Has anyone seen my son?"

He looked back to the young boy, "That's probably her, she's coming now." He was assuring the boy, but he didn't seem to be upset.

"You found him! Thank God! I lost him in the crowd!" the mother was grateful.

I tried to calm her down. "He was just here backstage, playing with the guitar. Cute, huh?"

The mother laughed, relieved. "I should have known. He seems to have been interested in music since he was

born. I'm so sorry to bother you."

"That's entirely all right. I love children. I have a grandson who's not much older than him."

The mother suddenly realized to whom she was speaking. In her concern for her son, she did not at first recognize I.

"Oh... My... GOD. I didn't know who you were! I'm so sorry, I shouldn't be here." She turned to her son. "Come on, now. We need to get back to where we belong."

"No, no. Please. Everything's all right. Did you enjoy the concert?"

"Oh, yes. It was fantastic. My mother was a big fan of yours in the seventies."

"Your mother..." I was slightly dejected.

"Oh, I am too!" she corrected. "I just wasn't born back then."

"Well, it's nice to appeal to a new generation, too, I guess. You have a fine looking boy there. What's his name?"

"Rocky."

I was silent for a moment, and a tear formed in his eye.

Rocky's mother looked at him and said. "Are you OK?"

"Yes," I replied. "I've just had a revelation. This is the future of rock."