

Monday

Chapter 1

The Provost of Thornton University sat alone in his corner office. He was second in command, after the President, in the University's academic administration. Part of his job was to supervise Thornton's staff of Vice Presidents. He saw himself as the ringmaster and expected the Vice Presidents to do his bidding when he cracked the whip.

The position carried with it the responsibility for developing Thornton into the preeminent academic institution in the region. It also provided unlimited opportunities for self-aggrandizement, for visiting retribution on enemies, both real and imagined, and for whatever treacheries his devious mind could invent. He was very good at all aspects of his job.

Brother Bohuslav surveyed his command post. The room was a cross between an award-winning example of interior decorating and a fine arts gallery. It was three times as long as it was wide. The wainscoting was gray with accents of Tyrian purple. The carpeting was sand in color, with a pile sufficiently deep to swallow small children. Visitors sometimes wondered if they should remove their shoes before wading in.

Near the door was a round conference table and four chairs, all of dark cherry. An oversized desk, with matching chair, and two side chairs, also of dark cherry, dominated the other end of the room. The sidewalls featured niches with superb oriental porcelain and glass on pedestals. In the unlikely event that these pieces were ever submitted to professional appraisal, they would be found to be of museum quality. Bohuslav's favorite painting hung on the wall opposite his desk. It was "The Gloating Brigand" by Frans Hals. Some rated it superior to Hal's much-admired "Laughing Cavalier". The original of the "Gloating Brigand" had hung in The Hermitage in St. Petersburg, Russia, until it went missing in 1945. It would take an expert many hours of close scrutiny to determine whether this painting was the original or merely an outstanding copy. Bohuslav was never going to give anyone that opportunity.

In the middle of the wall on Bohuslav's right was an alcove with a table bearing an elaborate coffee maker sufficiently complicated to intimidate all but a Chemical Engineer. Thick dark drapes were drawn over the large windows in the walls behind and to the left of the desk. Compensating for the absence of natural light, intense overhead floods bathed the room. They were overly bright and gave visitors the feeling of being on a microscope stage.

Bohuslav was savoring his first cup of coffee and his first cigar of the day. The coffee was Turkish, strong, black, and vile enough to make the EPA's list of hazardous materials. The stogie was misshapen and fragrant from a Cognac marinade. His desktop was clear except for an ashtray, his demitasse cup, with saucer and small spoon, and a sterling silver sugar bowl with matching tongs.

He stared down through the window in the desktop, at the projection of the display on his computer monitor, and read the summary of his schedule for the day. His first appointment was not for another fifteen minutes. As he anticipated the encounter, a warm glow spread through his entrails. The games were about to begin. The other participants were not even aware that there was a game, much less what the rules were. These would hardly be fair contests. God, how he loved this work!

Brother Bohuslav, an ordained priest in the Order of the Sons of Bedric, had, of course, taken the traditional three vows, including that of Poverty. He knew that state well; he had grown up in its brutal grip. He also knew that he never wanted to be that way again. And he never would. He already had enough money invested to fund a modest retirement. But, modesty was not his style, so he kept working and adding to his portfolio.

However, he had plans. One day soon, he would engineer a radical career transition. He would hang up his robes, Brother Bohuslav would disappear without a trace, and then he would start a new life, under a different name, where it was sunny and warm all year round.

How did he get around the Vow of Poverty? What did his brethren do when they found a vow troublesome and restricting their life-style? Some rationalized that the object of the vow was an ideal state that could not possibly be attained in this world. No one could seriously expect you to do the impossible. It was sufficient to keep striving for the ideal, even if one failed miserably each time. Bohuslav recognized this as a clever cover up. This was not his way. The other approach was to redefine the object of the vow, from what it was originally, to something more reasonable, more practical. So, Bohuslav had redefined Poverty as having a net worth less than that of Warren Buffett. From that time on, this vow was no problem for him.

Bohuslav's birth name was Gabriel Cromwell. When he took his final vows in the Order and became Brother Bohuslav, Gabriel Cromwell ceased to exist as far as the order was concerned. While in the seminary, a member of his class, Wesley Ruston, had died of spinal meningitis. He, too, in his own way had ceased to exist. However, Bohuslav had made sure that there were bank accounts, credit cards, driver's licenses, and passports in the names of both Gabriel Cromwell and Wesley Ruston. Curiously, the identifying pictures all were of Bohuslav.

The intercom chimed to announce that his first appointment had arrived. He was early. Bohuslav decided to make him wait. Early meant that he was eager. Eager implied that he had his own agenda that he would be promoting. Let him stew for a while and raise doubts about that agenda. In Bohuslav's view having an opponent who was both eager and naïve was the ideal combination. It made them much easier to deal with. The only way to improve on that would be for them to be stupid as well. Bohuslav believed that most of the faculty and almost all of the staff qualified.

At precisely 9:00 a.m., he signaled his secretary, and he pressed the button that released the catch on the office door. On cue, Harvey Froelichstein surged in and bounced across the room, leaving no trail in the deep plush of the carpet.

"Good morning, Father," he greeted.

Bohuslav groaned. "Harvey, have you forgotten the Gospel According to St. Matthew, Chapter 23, Verses 8-9? 'Call no one on earth Father; for one is your Father, who is in heaven, and all of you are brothers.'" He had not gotten the text letter perfect, but he had captured the intent. Matthew was not around to correct him.

"The correct form of address is not 'Father', but 'Brother'. While we are all ordained priests, we do not use the designation 'Father'. We are all spiritual sons of Bedric. Thus we are all brothers, spiritually if not biologically. Cryogenic equipment and sperm banks did not exist in 964."

“Yes, Brother” he conceded, even though he thought that ‘Brother’ was an affectation, as well as a monumental conceit. However, getting off to a bad start with the old man would not get him what he wanted. He dropped into the chair that Bohuslav indicated.

Harvey was only 5’8” but was muscular and fit. He worked out regularly and was proud of his conditioning. The curly hair was his, but the blond color came from a bottle. He had a B.S. in Speech from Indiana University. While his diction was quite good, he usually had very little to say unless he was reading from a script someone else had prepared. When forced to invent his own dialog, he was often repetitious. He had a wife and three children. Yet, down deep, he was Peter Pan, and he would never grow up.

“How are things going over in Admissions?” Bohuslav knew the answer, but he wanted to get Harvey relaxed and feeling in control.

“Very well indeed,” Harvey replied. “Even though it’s only my first year as Director of Admissions, applications are up, and so are acceptances. The first-year class is ten percent larger than last year, and the Board Scores are also up year-over-year. We are already ahead of schedule in recruiting next year’s class.” Harvey was at his best in inflating his own meager accomplishments and in taking credit for those of others.

Bohuslav knew that enrollment trends had been headed up before Harvey arrived from the west coast. His response was a soft lob, “So, you think that you might be staying with us for awhile?”

“Maybe, but I think that you should make me Dean of Student Recruitment, with a substantial raise in salary.”

Bohuslav remained outwardly impassive. Inwardly, he was smiling. So that was his game. It explained the eagerness. Why was it that, with every step up in rank, the title had to get more grandiose? It was time to get serious, and to take the offensive.

“Harvey, there is a small problem. It seems that you were less than forthcoming in the resume you submitted when you applied for your present position.” He watched Harvey intently, looking for a tremor in the façade of confidence. He saw none. Had he misjudged? Was Harvey a better player than he had expected?

He reached under the edge of the desktop and manipulated several controls. The door to the office locked with a sound so faint that had you not been listening for it, you would have heard nothing. The lights dimmed. On the wall to Bohuslav’s left, a panel moved aside silently to reveal a large television screen. A DVD slid into place and the set winked into life. The film was hard-core pornography. It featured an energetic, and well-hung young stud simultaneously servicing eight generously endowed young women in an unbelievable display of athleticism.

A brief nervous spasm passed across Harvey’s features. “Brother, I don’t share your taste in entertainment.”

Bohuslav gave a dirty chuckle. “Oh, don’t you now? I would think that you would be only too willing to take credit for your imaginative, and...um...acrobatic performance.”

“That’s not me in that film. It’s disgusting.”

“Disgusting is not the word I would have chosen” Bohuslav replied. Meanwhile, he paused the film, and zoomed in on the male lead. Harvey started to sweat. Bohuslav was beginning to enjoy Harvey’s discomfort. “It sure looks like you.”

“It’s not me;” he responded, “It’s my twin brother. People confuse the two of us all the time.”

“Harvey, you never had a twin brother. There was just you and your sister.” As always, Bohuslav had done his homework thoroughly. “Surely you have noticed this fellow’s very artistic tattoo.” It was that of a coiled rattlesnake, in glorious color. The picture began with the rattles on the front of the right leg just above the knee. It wound up and around the leg onto the lower abdomen. The head of the snake, with its gleaming eyes, and threatening fangs, covered his member. Impressive.

“We could settle the identity question very easily. Just stand up, drop your pants, and show me that you do not have this tattoo.” Bohuslav’s face registered a grin that the Cheshire cat would have been proud to lay claim to.

“You are a dirty old man.”

“That, and many other things.” Bohuslav was enjoying himself immensely.

“Alright. I made that film. But there’s no crime in moonlighting to pick up a little spare cash.”

“Crime, no; but public relations disaster, yes. Think what would happen if the parents of our prospective freshmen got a look at this. What about your staff colleagues? And, of course, the members of the University’s Board of Overseers would not be amused. As a group they tend to be less than broad-minded.”

Harvey seemed to have diminished in size as he sat. He was subdued, defeated. “Alright, you will have my letter of resignation this afternoon. I will clean out my desk and be gone by the close of business today.”

Game, noted Bohuslav.

“No, no, no, that will not do at all. You are not going anywhere just yet.”

Harvey’s look was one of confusion, seasoned with the first glimmering of fear. “But, you said...”

“So long as you behave yourself and do as I wish, I am not going to tell anyone. It will be our little secret.”

Harvey’s agitation became more pronounced. He was beginning to sense where this was leading and he did not like it.

Boguslav observed the reaction. Surreptitiously, he reached into the knee-hole of the desk and lifted his handgun from its mounting. It was a .45 and fully loaded. It was registered and, since he often moved about with large sums of cash, he had a permit to carry. He made sure the safety was on as he casually laid it in his lap.

He turned off the television, closed the panel, brought up the lights, and tried to calm Harvey.

“That really is a very artistic tattoo. Was it very painful?”

“Some, but it was worth it. One has to be prepared to suffer for one’s art.” Harvey lied. It was done while he was under general anesthesia, and for six weeks the level of pain made him regret that he had ever elected to have it done.

Bohuslav had never found anything worth suffering for. If there was any suffering to be done, he made very sure that he delegated it to others.

“What kind of snake is that?” He was still trying to distract Harvey’s attention from his problem.

“It’s a timber rattlesnake. They are rather unpredictable and nasty companions. If you like, I could get you one for a pet.”

Not in this life, he thought. *The menagerie I have working at this University is quite enough.*

He eyed Harvey warily. "Here is how it is going to be. You will continue in your present position and do, if you will excuse the expression, a bang-up job."

Harvey appeared skeptical. "What if I leave?"

"That would not be a shrewd move. If you bolt we will come after you. Our intelligence network is exceptional, so we shall find you. When we do, we will have to punish you, as an object lesson." Rarely had they needed to inflict physical violence. Usually the mere threat of it was sufficient. "If you still choose not to come back, then we will reveal all of your secrets to your new employers, your family, your mistress, your in-laws, the media, and anyone else in a position to ruin you."

He was rewarded to see a tremor run through Harvey's body. Harvey did not want to ask but he had to, "What do you want me to do?" He tried to put a little defiance in his voice and did not quite succeed.

"Ah, that's more like it. You will not do any more moonlighting; you will not make any more porno flicks." *Unless, of course, we get a good piece of the profits!*

"And for your penance, you will say three Hail Marys and you will enroll in The Fellowship of St. Matthew."

"What is this Fellowship thing all about?" Harvey knew that there had to be a hook in here somewhere.

"The Fellowship imposes on you only one obligation. By the 15th of each month, you will deliver to my secretary, in a sealed brown envelope, twenty percent of your monthly income in cash. Gross, not take-home. Remember that I determine salaries at this institution. So I know how much you are making. You may think of this as tithing. On your income tax reports, list it as a charitable contribution."

"What happens to the money?" Harvey was a practical man.

"It is earmarked for the Caribbean missions to ameliorate the plight of the poor. It is a most worthy cause." Bohuslav lied with a very straight face. Of course, with Bohuslav's definition of poverty, everyone in the Caribbean, with the possible exception of a handful of drug lords and fugitive financiers, were impoverished.

"What happens if I miss a payment?"

"That, my son, would be most unwise. A while back we had someone do this. We sent some people around to see him. They removed one of his redundant body parts. He has not missed a payment since. But, the poor fellow now only hears half of what is said to him."

Harvey was beginning to turn green. His breakfast was not sitting well.

"You will tell no one of your membership in the Fellowship. Do you understand?"

Harvey nodded. He understood only too well. No matter how you dressed it up, and no matter what you called it, blackmail was still blackmail. His agitation had reached its boiling point. He was mad as Hell.

Bohuslav wanted another sip of his coffee, but he decided it would be prudent to keep both hands free until this business was settled.

Without a word, Harvey reached into his right boot for his knife. He flicked it open as he uncoiled from his chair and began his strike across the desk at Bohuslav. Only then did a savage growl break from Harvey.

Bohuslav had anticipated an attack. With his left forearm he deflected Harvey's knife arm wide of its mark. Then, his right hand, and the gun, came up above the plane of the desk, and moved forward in a tight, but powerful backhand. The barrel of the gun caught

Harvey squarely across the bridge of his nose. The contact was accompanied by the very satisfying sound of breaking bone. The growl was transmuted to a howl of pain.

Set, he noted.

The knife had missed Bohuslav, but his chair was not so fortunate. There was a six-inch gash in the leather, with the knife still imbedded up to its hilt at the end of the cut. Padding was starting to ooze out of the cut. It would leave a nasty scar.

Blood dripped from Harvey's nose onto the desk as he slid back in the direction from which he had come.

"Yu bruk mi nus!"

"I'll break more than that if you ever try a damn fool trick like that again." He reached into the top left desk drawer and pulled out a hand towel. With the towel, he removed the knife from the chair, being careful not to smudge any fingerprints it might bear. Without taking his eyes off Harvey, he dropped the knife in the towel drawer. He closed the drawer and then he threw the towel at Harvey while admonishing him "Don't bleed on my carpet if you want to live to see another day."

"Yu bruk mi nus."

"You are being repetitious. You slashed my chair. Perhaps I should have shot you instead."

"Yu bruk mi fukng nus."

"You can do it with your nose, too? My God, what a talented fellow you are."

Harvey was once again coiled up in his chair. He held the towel gently to his nose and tried to staunch the bleeding. His eyes shone with a mixture of fear and loathing.

"I hope that you are not carrying a blood-borne pathogen. If you are, you had better tell me now. If you don't tell me, and I later find out that you are a carrier, I will send someone around to skin your rattlesnake."

Harvey shook his head and the bleeding started again.

The Provost activated the intercom. "Agnes, Mr. Froelichstein has a nose bleed. Can you get someone from the janitorial service up here right away." It was not a question, but an order.

"As for you, Harvey, I now own you. You are mine: mind, heart, and soul. I have your knife with your fingerprints on it. Suppose that, one day, a local porn figure is found dead, stabbed with your knife. You, of course would not have a convincing alibi. Execution is by lethal injection in this state. What a shame, we would have to find another Director of Admissions."

He enjoyed watching Harvey realize the hopelessness of his situation and begin to squirm. It was not Virtue, but Sadism, that was its own reward.

"Be careful not to get blood on the carpet as you leave. I suggest that you head over to see Brother Antonine in the Infirmary. He will take care of your nose."

Bohuslav unlocked the door to the outer office and gave him a genial dismissal, "Go in peace, my son."

There was no spoken reply but the message sent by those burning eyes was very articulate: *Rot in Hell*.

Once Harvey had gone, Bohuslav relocked the door, poured himself a fresh cup of coffee, relighted his cigar, and rewound the tape. He considered his time constraints. He knew that housekeeping moved with the speed of a reluctant glacier. There was plenty of

time. Again, the panel slid aside and the television screen blinked into life. He played the videotape of Harvey's ill-fated lunge across the desk. The tape gave unmistakable evidence of an unprovoked assault on the Provost. The close-up left no doubt that the assailant was Harvey Froelichstein. With judicious editing of the sound track, it would make a compelling piece of evidence. Bohuslav admired the technique of his backhand smash. *Not bad for an old fart!*

Game, Set, and Match!