

Let the Crumbling Begin

By Wes Ishmael

It was just too easy.

Myron was always amazed how the most elaborate plans, carefully implemented, ticking along as reliably as a newly-tuned Swiss watch could be unraveled so simply.

On the one hand, he and his clandestine minions had purloined the records and personal business diaries of Vernon and Marsha Caterwauller and Ernest Nimblewimp. Between these records and Roy Bean “Benny” Wilson’s encyclopedic command of corporate law, Hooter McCormick could prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that Vernon had siphoned money from the Pet Protection Society (PPS) for years, laundering it through the People for the Ethical Treatment of All Animals (PETAL) directed by Ernest and then through the Gentle Peace and Balance Institute owned by Vernon and Marsha. Subsequently, these vultures that had haunted Eunice Nickelcock would be exorcised, thereby eliminating Eunice from Hooter’s life. He hoped.

So, all systems were a go whenever Hooter decided it was time to pull the final trigger on Operation Bald Coyote.

It was just as easy for Myron to send another associate—called Claude Dickens—to Vernon and Ernest with a thumb drive containing some of their own business records.

“That Nickelcock woman you had working for you has these,” Claude explained. “Fortunately for you, she was trying to make sense of them and came to me. Even more fortunately for you, I can make her disappear for a price and just a little of your help.”

The embezzlers never bothered to ask Claude why he was willing to help them. They were that secure in their arrogance. Plus, that same arrogance informed them that they could outwit Claude.

Still, as Claude casually tossed the thumb drive from hand to hand, Vernon and Ernest watched it rise and fall like puppies following a dog biscuit.

“All you have to do is bring the cash with you, and show up at the appointed time,” Claude explained a second time. “Remember, knock three times and then come in.”

Trying to Kid A Kidder

Besides being easy, Myron explained to Hooter that folks like Nimblewimp and the Caterwaullers were more predictable than disagreements among in-laws.

“That’s why Eunice needs to go to Orlando,” Myron explained. “I told Claude to let slip that she’d be at Universal Studios theme park on the 23rd. They know she’s a Harry Potter fan, the type to ride that Hogwarts Express train all day. Thanks to your Sherry introducing Eunice to common human behavior, we know that, too.”

“She’s not MY Sherry...” Hooter started.

“Of course, Vernon and Ernest will send their own folks to find Eunice, figuring they can save paying Claude,” Myron interrupted. “So, when their henchmen show up and lose sight of Eunice again, Vernon and Ernest will be more than ready to bring the cash to the appointment. By the way, you never did tell me what you want me to do with the cash?”

“That’s part of the trust fund for the new chapter in Eunice’s life,” Hooter explained. “Go on.”

“In the meantime, Claude has established himself as the reliable inside source for Cornelius and his assistant as they mount their offense,” Myron explained.

Cornelius Highbottom III didn’t know until recently that two of his family corporation’s charitable trusts were key funders of PPS and PETAL.

“The fact that Cornelius will be with Eunice in Florida adds an extra layer of authenticity. We’ll need your magician buddy, though.”

The magician in question was Squeak Jablowski, the one-time bull rider and bull fighter who had developed an unfortunate phobia about rodeo bulls, which led him to a sterling career as a kid’s show magician.

“I assume you can figure out a way to make this happen,” Hooter said, when laying out the basics for Squeak.

Squeak was genuinely insulted. He held up an ace of spades for Hooter to see. The card vanished in a split second. “I can make whoever you want disappear any time, anywhere, and then reappear anywhere inside or outside of these continental United States whenever you’d like.”

Squeak Jablowski’s Masterpiece

This added subterfuge designed by Squeak wasn’t necessary, really. Pulling the slack on the noose knitted for the Caterwaulers and Nimblewimp was assured. But, like a basketball player bringing the ball around his back on the way up to dunk, or a baseball player pointing to where he plans to lash the ball, Myron and Hooter agreed this touch provided a bit of artistic closure.

“I’m trusting that you’re putting a kibosh on that potential PR disaster with the animal rights groups,” Billy Jim Hurstknob—founder of the nascent Wildcat Racing Series—told Cornelius a.k.a Flash.

Previously, Billy Jim—on Myron’s instructions—had informed Flash that one of his many companies was sponsoring the Wildcat series.

“However, a little birdie also tells me you have another company, or branch, or something that gives money away to charitable organizations,” Billy Jim explained.

“My same little birdie tells me there are a couple of organizations you fund with some executives who have been up to all kinds of no good, including embezzlement. The legal hammer is supposed to fall on them soon. Sounds like it will be a plumb public mash-up,” Billy Jim continued. “Bad as I hate to say it, Flash, I don’t know how we can keep you as a driver without taking all of that bad press from this fiasco right along with you, what with your company funding these organizations that are fixing to be drug through the brambles.”

That’s when Flash first understood the connection between his company and the animal rights groups. That’s also when Flash developed the backbone that had him giving orders and taking names rather than hiding in the corporate shadows as he had always done.

Flash didn’t know that the groups had once employed Eunice, though, or the misery they had caused her. If Hooter had anything to say about it, Flash never would know.

“Before this is done, I want those people behind bars, and I want our corporation and the Wildcat series to have the credit,” Flash demanded. “I will not have petty thieves stand between me and my destiny as a race car driver.”

Though it was a conference phone call, Flash could sense the jaws dropping at the ends of various lines: “That’s right! A racecar driver. Any questions?”

There were none.

“You’re a good driver, and doggone it, I like you,” Billy Jim said. “While your folks tie the knot on these animal rights nabobs, my own PR folks say they want to film a promo of you at Universal. We’d like Eunice to go along and provide a fan’s perspective...if you’re agreeable to it.”

Flash needed no convincing. Though equal parts awkward and promising, there was no question that a romance was blooming between Eunice and him.

Platform 9¾

If you’re familiar with the Harry Potter books and movies by J.K. Rowling and their massive cultural popularity, then you will recall that Platform 9¾ is located at Kings Cross Station in London. That particular platform is available to only the witches and warlocks of that world for the purposes of catching the train from London to their fictional school of witchcraft and wizardry. To get to the platform that is invisible to non-magical folks, those with magical powers basically walk through a wall.

The real-world magicians behind Universal Studios’ Wizarding World of Harry Potter created the illusion for park goers, so that it appears they in fact walk through a wall.

All the two agents Vernon and Ernest sent to Orlando knew was what Eunice was supposed to look like, where they were likely to find her and that their payment depended on their taking Eunice back to the Gentle Peace and Balance Institute.

They wouldn’t have been sure of Eunice’s identity, so complete was her transformation, thanks to Sherry and Auntie Marie. There was no mistaking Highbottom, though, gamely escorting her on and off the Hogwart’s Express. So, they connected the dots and...

The agents planned their move. Armed with walkie-talkies, one would make sure Eunice was there when she walked through the wall at Platform 9¾. The other, stationed on the other side just a few steps away would make sure Eunice came out.

When the time came, Eunice and the smitten Flash did in fact walk through the wall. What emerged on the other side, though, was something entirely different.

“Get your hands off me!” screamed Hooter in a high-pitched voice. With a wig, lipstick and similar clothes, he was dressed as a thinner, uglier version of Eunice. “Help, Help!” Hooter screamed while blowing one of those pocket-sized air horns.

By the time park security arrived—in the wink of an eye—the two would-be kidnappers were handcuffed to a colorful metal rail. Hooter would scream periodically and rap one of them over the head with an umbrella.

“I’ve got it all on tape,” said Myron calmly; he was dressed the same way Flash was when the subdued criminals had seen him walk through the wall.

Meanwhile, oblivious to the commotion, Eunice and Flash were following Sherry and Auntie Marie to the cotton candy stand.

To be Continued...