

THE BLOODLETTING

BOOK I

By

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Blood'let'ting, n. Med. Act or process of letting blood or bleeding...phlebotomy...

Phle-bot'o-my ----- 2. The drawing of blood; bloodshed; **rough or violent method of remedying**; bleeding.

--- Webster's *New International Dictionary*
1922

THE GENERAL STOOD in the doorway; there was a slight grin on his face as he watched the technicians do their work. He was a large man with graying hair, perhaps 55 years old. The room was located in the basement of a warehouse building near the air base.

The room was large with a low ceiling and brightly lit by many bare light bulbs in open fixtures at the ceiling. The walls were painted a drab green color, and the floor was covered with well-worn green tile. There were three desks in one corner of the room; each had a chair and filing cabinet. The rest of the room was bare except for one single chair; that is where the General's gaze rested.

Seated in the chair was a young girl, perhaps 23. She had been stripped of her uniform; it lay on the floor, the stripes on the sleeve indicated the rank of NCO3. She had been strapped to the chair and her face was covered with dried streams of blood that had come from several gashes on her cheeks and forehead. The blood was mostly dried except where recent, shed tears had moistened it.

The two technicians busied themselves at a table that was near the chair. The small box on the table was an electric generator plugged into a wall outlet. Two wires left the box where they were connected by clips to the nipples of the girl's small white breasts.

The air in the room had a foul odor, but the technicians did not seem to mind as they adjusted the box. The older of the two technicians spoke to the girl. "You know we enjoy this, surely you do; we can just go on forever. You might as well make it easy on yourself and tell us where you got the cigarettes."

The General looked down at his own left hand ---- he was smoking an American Marlboro. He thought how ironic it was that this girl was being punished for doing no more than this. He had acquired a taste for American cigarettes when he had visited the States. He was especially fond of Marlboros. He considered it to be a privilege of rank, and this girl had no rank.

The younger technician slapped the girl hard on the face to get her attention. "Who gave you those cigarettes?" he spoke in a commanding voice. She looked up at him with a look of hate in her eyes. She knew she was stronger than he.

The older man stepped to the console and flipped a switch. The machine hummed and the clips at the girl's nipples sizzled. The air was filled with the smell of burning flesh and she screamed.

Fresh tears made new paths down her cheeks, and she voided on the chair. This would account for the foul smell in the room. The older technician allowed the current to flow for ten seconds; the girl's body slumped into the chair thankfully unconscious.

The older man walked past the girl and past the General and into the hallway. "This girl is tough," he said. "She won't give up the answer."

"That's all right," said the General. "Play with her another hour or so if you like, then let her go, just don't kill her."

"Don't worry," said the doctor, "you have used my skills many times before."

The General left the building and walked to his office two blocks away. The sidewalk that led to his office passed beside the large runway. He looked out upon the expanse of concrete to the 10 large planes parked in a row. Workmen on lift trucks were removing the large red painted stars from the tail sections.

The base was designed to resemble an American airbase. American cars, American clothing, American billboards, and only English was spoken here. The thing most lacking was shrubs or trees. They would not grow in this harsh climate. It was not necessary to waste the extra time or expense for decorations.

As he neared his office, he passed a young lieutenant who saluted. "Good afternoon, General," said the young man.

"Your English is improving, Chen-Yo," complimented the General.

"It should, General," said the young man, "I have been watching American television. I am especially fond of the show 'Friends.'"

"I wouldn't know," answered the General, "I can never seem to find time to enjoy the American pastimes, but perhaps there will come a time when I can."

He entered the side door of a large three-story red brick building. As he entered the door, an NCO3 who had been nearly napping snapped to immediate attention and saluted. The General walked past the man without returning the salute.

He walked briskly across the tiled floors and up the three steps to his office. He had to pass through a large room that was filled with desks behind which were seated men and women in uniform. They were all reading American newspapers and listening to a country western radio station that was being broadcast in real time from Lubbock, Texas.

The station was playing a Charley Daniels song. Each side of the long room had windows all along the side, and the atmosphere was bright and airy. It was a stark contrast to the room he had just left.

He walked quickly to his office without saying a word to anyone. His door was locked; he produced a key to unlock it and closed the door behind him.

The office was large and well lit as befitted a man of his rank and years. In one corner was a desk with a large leather chair. This was one of the few luxuries that he allowed himself in an otherwise Spartan existence. Along one wall were three chairs, straight-backed and uncomfortable. This was to discourage guests from overstaying their welcome. He had no friends.

The walls were painted yellow and were bare except for two pictures. There were two large windows with no shades behind his desk; he opened one, sat in the leather chair and placed his shiny black boots on the edge of the desk. He leaned back in the chair and looked at the pictures on the wall. The one picture had been taken from this very window; it was of the parade ground filled with marching soldiers. That view was the reason he had chosen this office.

He opened the lower drawer of his desk and produced an ashtray. He stood up from the chair and opened the other window; lit a cigarette and took a long deep drag. That was the best part of the cigarette; that first hit.

He stepped over to the other picture on the wall. This one was an aerial photo of an Iowa farm; the picture included several hundred acres, with a large two-story white house, a detached garage, a large red silo and large red barn. He removed a magnifying glass from the top left desk drawer and used it to look more closely at the picture. Two

tractors were sitting outside the barn, one pulling a large trailer filled with large bales of hay. Below the picture was a plaque. The plaque read: "George Taylor Farm, Timberlake, Iowa."

As he stood before the picture, his mind wandered.

He had visited this farm three years before when he had gone on vacation to the states. He had acquired a travel visa, using another name, through his connections in the government. This had been his second trip to America, and he had grown fond of the country. He had traveled to Des Moines airport, rented a car and driven himself to Timberlake. Previous intelligence had taught him that the Taylor family were Baptists, and that every Sunday morning at precisely nine o'clock a.m. the entire family went to church. Mom and Pop, who were approaching retirement age, would load up the girl and boy and drive into town and pick up her aged mother and take her to church. After church they would always eat lunch at the Bonanza Restaurant.

His plane had landed at 6:30 a.m., which had given him time to drive to the farm before church. As he neared the farm, he had passed the Taylor van on their way to church. He drove past the farm and parked his rental car at the mile intersection past the farm and waited half an hour to assure that the Taylors had not forgotten anything.

When he was convinced that they were not coming back, he drove into the farmyard and was greeted by two black Labrador Retrievers and several lesser dogs, all barking. He was not afraid of the dogs and would only hurt them if they appeared dangerous. Once he had gotten out of the car, the dogs appeared to be friendly and only wanted to be petted. This he didn't mind doing.

He walked briskly to the back porch of the home. The back door was unlocked, and it opened onto a porch with an upright freezer and coats and overalls and boots lining one wall. He walked through the spotless kitchen and into the dining room, admiring the tall oak cupboard with the rounded glass front that held the fine china. This was an old house and the floors were made of shiny wood. He walked back into the kitchen; beside the sink were two coffee cups, recently used and well rinsed. The coffeemaker beside the sink was unplugged but held a half pot of warm coffee. He took one of the cups and poured himself a cup of coffee.

He made sure that his feet were clean as he walked up the stairs and down the hallway looking into each room, making a memory. He took his time, knowing that he had several hours. He slowly walked down the stairs and into the front room. Like most farmhouses, this one had a front door that led to a front porch that was seldom used.

He walked to the mantelpiece and looked at each picture in its turn. There were many pictures of relatives, living and dead, young and old. The only picture that caught his eye was an aerial photo of this very farm, in an oak frame. That very picture was now hanging on his wall thousands of miles away. He would never know if the Taylor family missed the picture, and he had no way of finding out.

In his heart he knew that this farm, the Taylor Farm of Timberlake, Iowa, would be his, but only after he had eliminated the Taylor family.

The General shook his head to release the memory and thought again about the girl. She had been a pleasant diversion, low ranking but pleasant. She had undergone torture for nearly three days and had never told that she had gotten the contraband cigarettes from the General himself. Of course, he could have stopped the torture with a word, but this way he knew that she could be relied upon. She was loyal, and had proven

it. The scars would be a badge of honor for her. Within a few weeks he would be able to promote her. She might even bear his children to help him work his new farm. He would tell her later.

TOM BROWN HAD always been proud of his name, a simple name for a simple man. He was a large man and was well-respected in the community. He was one of the facilities managers for the local power co-op. It was a Saturday morning and he had had one too many beers the night before. It was nearly five in the morning, and he should have been able to sleep. He reached his arm across the king-size bed and it was empty; no wonder he had been unable to sleep. He never slept well when Mary was away from home.

His wife of 20-plus years had used a rare opportunity to visit her sister in St. Louis. Her sister, Ashlee, was in the middle of a minor family crisis due in large part to her inability to stop drinking. Mary had felt it her duty to go to help solve this problem.

She had left on Wednesday and had taken her car. She was expected to be home sometime Sunday afternoon, but this didn't help Tom. He tried to go back to sleep but just as he was trying the phone in the kitchen began ringing. His oldest son, Albert, was awake at this early hour; he had probably planned a fishing trip or something and had answered the phone after three rings.

Tom was proud of all his children, and he loved them all equally.

"Dad," Albert called up the stairs, "are you awake?"

"Yes," Tom replied in a voice weak from lack of sleep.

"Come to the phone, please, it's Mom."

"Is she all right?" Tom asked as he set his bare feet on the bare wood floor. The wood felt good.

"She's fine, Dad," said Albert.

Tom walked down the stairs and took the phone from Albert. "Thank you, son," he said.

"Hello, dear, and how are you this fine morning?" He lied.

"We didn't want to call and worry you last night, but I think we're having trouble with the car."

"Let's see," groaned Tom, "three years old, 80,000 miles, about time for it to break down. What are the symptoms?"

"There is a big puddle of oil on the driveway, I'm afraid to drive it home," she said in a worried tone of voice.

"Did you notice the oil pressure light come on last time you drove it, or does it have an oil gauge?" he asked.

"Bob had to catch a flight to Dallas last evening. He slipped in the oil and nearly fell in it. He told me about it and we checked the oil, and it was over two quarts low."

"So you parked the car and then it lost two quarts of oil?" he asked in a relieved tone of voice.

"Must have, we parked the car and brought our bags in the house and haven't moved it since."

"Thank goodness," said Tom. "If it was parked up a hill, there is a chance that the rear main seal in the engine went out."

"Is it serious?" she sounded worried.

“Just more money,” he said. “Don’t drive it – I guess it would be safe to move it out of the driveway and into the street. Put a big piece of cardboard or something under it though, and we’ll see where the leaks coming from. Is there any reason that you couldn’t stay there another day?”

“No, we could if we had to, but it would really foul up our vacation plans. Ashlee would love to have us for a few more days; we talked about it last night.”

“Well, I guess the good Lord works in mysterious ways. I was thinking about rebuilding that engine anyway. Jim Riley called me last week, and he has a new short block that would fit right in. He got a good deal on it, and I just about bought the dang thing just to have it around. I’ll call him later this morning and make sure he still has it. If you can stay there another day or two, I’ll load up the trailer and run down there real quick and pick up the car. It may take a little bit to get it all together, but don’t drive that car except to get in the street and I’ll let you know.”

“Could it have been something I did?” Mary asked.

Part of what he liked about Mary was that she was always ready to take the blame when things went wrong.

“It’s nothing you did, dear. It’s a design deficiency built right into the car when it was built that will guarantee a few hours work for a mechanic, or that will cause you to break right down and buy another one.”

“How is the daughter doing?” asked Tom.

Their youngest and only daughter was 13 years old this year; a bright child who took after her mother and was always on the honor roll. “She is behaving herself, no thanks to my sister who thinks she needs a boyfriend,” said an exasperated Mary.

The Browns had four children, three boys and a girl; Albert was the oldest, followed by Marshall and Edward, then came the girl. They had named her Mary Elizabeth, which turned out to be a big mistake. The boys had over the years begun to call her Mary II which was shortened to Mary Two, and that had stuck. Sometimes they called her Junior. As a further downside to this, the two younger boys had begun to refer to themselves as simply Two and Three, and those two names had stuck as well.

“So how are the boys doing?” Mary asked. She had taken little Mary with her and had taken her out of the last week of school. Everyone involved had approved her absence; therefore, little Mary got an extra week of vacation.

“The boys are fine, I think, “He had to think about it for a minute. “Albert was up early; either he just got in or he was going fishing early you know how he is. And I assume that the two younger ones are sleeping soundly in their beds, but I have no idea. I doubt someone came in and stole them in the middle of the night.”

Mary jumped in. “Don’t even think things like that; don’t even say things like that.”

“Okay, I’m sure they’re fine, stand by.” Sometimes Mary worried too much, Tom thought.

“Hey, Al,” he hollered, “go see if your brothers are okay for me, would you please?”

Al hurried down the hallway and looked into the bedrooms. “They are snoring like logs, Dad,” he called back.

“They’re fine, Mary. Everything is fine on the home front. The house is still in one piece. I did, however, drink one too many beers last night.”

“One too many, hah, I bet you drank just one too many, maybe one case,” Mary said in a scolding tone of voice.

“We had a little poker game last night. I came out ahead about \$30. I sure thought it was going to go the other way until the final two hands.”

“Well, that’s good,” she said. “You need a rest; you’ve been working too hard lately. Did you get that hay moved out of the south field?”

“Got about half of it until I broke a belt on the tractor. It knocked a big piece out of the radiator, but I got that fixed and we’re back in the farming business. Tell you what; if I can persuade Al to change the oil in Old Blue and hook up the trailer, I might get out of here late morning. If it gets too late, I’ll just wait ‘til tomorrow. I’ll get you know either way. Have you got plenty of money?”

“We’re fine,” she said. “My money’s no good around here, you know how that goes. We thought we might go to the zoo. If Al gives you any trouble about helping you, remind him that tuition is coming up and I gave him a lot of money he hasn’t earned yet.”

“Don’t you worry about the car; we can get it fixed. Love you, and give my love to Mary Two.”

“Love you, too,” she said and hung up.

Tom set the phone down on the counter and let out a deep sigh. Al came across the room and set a large cup of black coffee in front of him.

“Son,” said Tom, “I’m proud of you. How did you know that I needed this?”

“You were up kind of late last night, and I just thought you could use it,” said Albert with a smile.

“By the way,” asked Tom, “what are your plans?”

“I was planning on going fishing, but it sounds like I’ll be changing the oil in Old Blue first.”

“Thanks, son, help me get the trailer loaded and I can get out of here before noon. I would like to get that hay moved before it rains, and then I can go get your mother and sister.”

“What do you suppose is wrong with the car, Dad?” asked Albert.

“It’s probably a rear main seal went out of it; the darn things only got 86,000 miles on it. It should have made that trip with no problems whatsoever. They build them to fail, that’s what they do. If this country could have redirected all of the energy that has been wasted because of the auto industry, we could have cured cancer.”

“It’s called planned obsolescence, Dad, designed to fail. The auto industry learned they could make more money selling parts and labor than they could selling cars. That is one of the few things we learned in school.”

“Here is your classic situation I could have spent the next two days being productive around here, but instead I will have to spend two whole days and countless thousands of dollars to correct a problem that was designed into the car. There are so many things that mechanics know are going to break I’m surprised there hasn’t been a class action lawsuit filed against some automaker. This is not dangerous stuff, it is just aggravating stuff, like the Kevlar that was designed for tires, but have you ever seen a tire with Kevlar?”

“I’ll bet if she took that car into a garage in St. Louis we would be looking at \$1,500 to \$2,000 to fix it. By the time they got done finding the odd problem, the broken

ramus and framus, we would have to mortgage the house to get it out of there. We can drop a rebuilt engine in her and get another 50,000 trouble free miles out of it.”

“Tell you what, Al, when you’re down in there changing the oil, double check all the belts and hoses and stuff and look for any odd broken things that might cause us to have a breakdown. Check all the fluid levels, check the air in the tires, and give the tires a once-over to see if you can see any screws or what-not. Check the lights and turn signals, please.”

“You bet, Dad, I’ll get her ready for you,” Al said as he hurried out the door.

That’s a really good boy, Tom thought. Mary must have really shelled out the bucks to get this kind of service.

Al stuck his head back in the door, “You don’t expect me to go with you, do you?” He asked in a worried tone of voice.

“No,” Tom said, “I think you guys will be fine. That is, unless you want to go.”

“I gotta pass on this one,” said Al. He was obviously relieved.

“There will be no big parties while we are gone,” Tom said gruffly.

Al looked surprised. “You know, now that you mention it, we had been planning to have a big fish fry here. The channel cats are supposed to be biting, and we sort of expect to catch our share.”

“A fish fry sounds like a pretty good idea to me,” said Tom. “Keep the fire outside and the oil off the deck. And no beer.”

“You know me, Dad. Tried it, didn’t like it.”

“If those fish are really biting, save some for when your mom gets back. You know how she likes fried fish.”

“We expect to catch plenty; we’ll cook just enough for us and the girls and see if we can find some girls to make some salads and stuff.”

“Let’s see, I’ll be gone for a few days at least. What should we do about adult supervision during that time?” asked Tom.

“Well, Dad, lets see – how about Carl? Carl could be some real adult supervision.”

“That won’t work,” said Tom thoughtfully. “I was going to see if he wanted to come with me. He’s got a little relation down there in St. Louis. It would give him a little bit of excuse to get out of the house, and it would give me some pleasant company during the drive, and he could help a little with the driving.”

“What about the neighbor, Taylor?” asked Al. “I’ll bet he would love to come over and have some fish with us. He’s always said if we need anything to just ask him. Why don’t we check with him? He could come over from time to time; it would make you guys feel better and I kind of like the old guy.”

“You know, that’s a good idea. I’ll give him a call after bit and see what he says.”

Tom picked up his cup of coffee and walked across the polished wood floor to one of the two sliding glass doors that faced the east. The sun was shining brightly through the windows, and it lit the room with a bright light. He stepped out onto the deck and into the cool morning air.

It was a perfect morning, the sun was shining, the wind not blowing, and it felt like a morning in the hills of Arkansas. The birds were chirping, almost too loudly, and except for this nagging headache, life at this second seemed perfect.

As he looked to the east toward the rising sun, the trees were such a dark green that they looked almost black. Beyond the trees were cows grazing; animals always seemed to be eating. It didn't seem to matter what animal cow, horse, chicken or duck, animals always seemed to be eating.

Life was good except for the fact that he now knew he had to drive a thousand miles through heavy traffic. It could not be Mary's fault; stuff just happens.

He walked back into the room. It was a very large room, or rather several rooms with a common high ceiling. There was the large family room with the fireplace and large TV, and then there was the dining area and kitchen area all under the same high ceiling. The sliding door by the kitchen led to a large deck on the other side of the house. He walked across the large rooms and set his empty coffee cup on the table as he walked out the other set of sliding doors.

He sat in a chair on the rear deck and looked cross the large driveway covered with white rocks and past the large red barn to the hills beyond. The trees cast long shadows as the sun was rising; there was a slight mist in the air, like a fine fog that covered the landscape with occasional spots of moisture that were the beginnings of the fog. The fog lay heavy over the small water pools in the field.

He had built this house on the side of this hill on purpose. It offered a view in several directions, gently rolling terrain, trees scattered throughout. To the northeast was the Taylor farm. They owned several hundred acres and had planted much of it in fruit and nut trees.

The Taylors had been the best neighbors; the two families had been here for each other whenever a need arose. After the big windstorm of '96, their barn had been a mess. By the time the neighbors had finished pitching in; the barn was back like it had never been down. Farm folks stuck together. The insurance company had threatened to drop their coverage if they filed a claim, so the neighbors had saved the day. Funny thing how insurance companies were able to get away with stuff like that.

This was the kind of community where no one locked their doors; they left the keys in their cars and trucks, it was safe.

In two years he and Mary would own this property. Truth be told, they could pay off the property now if they chose to. Then they could quit working and sit back and enjoy their grandchildren, if their children would ever cooperate and have children. This is all that Tom had ever wanted, a quiet place in the country, a chance to sit back and enjoy the peaceful things in life.

Tom's solitude was interrupted by a noise that startled him. He heard footsteps on the patio and heard a pleasant greeting. "Howdy, neighbor, got any coffee?" Tom didn't even turn around.

"Not so loud, I'll thank you," he said in an overly gruff voice.

He recognized the voice of his best friend in the world. "Come on over and sit down," he said more cheerfully. "Glad you're here."

Carl Stoneman walked up to behind where Tom was seated on the deck and placed two large hands on his shoulders and gave him a friendly neck rub.

"I'll give you a half hour to quit," said Tom.

Carl Stoneman was an imposing figure. Six foot five and very strong, he was of African descent, and he was dressed in loose overalls with patches on the knees and well-worn work boots. He wore a red checkered shirt and a hat that looked like it was 100

years old and had never been washed. One would never guess that this man had a Ph.D. in Psychology and had been one of the best law enforcement people in the city of L.A. He had retired early, invested well, was a frugal spender, and was probably one of the richest landowners in this part of the country. You could not tell it by looking at him.

“I suppose if you have a headache it would be because you drank too much last night, and I sure wouldn’t want to make any noise.” Saying that, Carl stomped loudly across the deck and came close to Tom’s ear and said, “You know what would really sound good for breakfast? A greasy pork chop.”

“Oh, My God,” said Tom. “With friends like you, who needs friends?”

The sliding glass door opened, and out walked Al with two piping hot cups of coffee. “Holy Smokes,” laughed Carl, “you have this boy trained.”

“He wants something,” said Tom. “We’ll find out pretty quick.”

“Thank you, Al,” they both said in unison.

“So what’s the plan today?” asked Carl. “What do we do after we get that hay in?”

These two men were about as close as any two humans could be, since Tom had moved out here in the country. He knew about farming and ranching and shared his knowledge with Carl. Carl was a very pleasant companion, probably smarter than Tom, but he never let on or spoke of his superior wealth or education. Carl referred to himself as just another field hand; he just loved physical work. Years of dealing with people had burned him out. At the end of a hard day’s work a man could go to sleep fast and deep. Carl felt that the harder you worked, the longer you lived. He often expressed the satisfaction that he felt from looking out at the fields he had planted and the cows that he raised.

“Well, Bubba,” Tom started to explain, “Mary called a few minutes ago. I thought I was going to have a pleasant day in the fields. You remember that she was in St. Louis visiting her sister? The car broke down. I think it’s the rear main seal, and so instead of working in the fields it looks like I get to take Old Blue to the city and pick up the car.”

“Bet you wish you’d have bought that short block ol Riley had for sale last week, don’t you?” asked Carl.

“I knew I should have bought that thing last week. You ever get that feeling?” Tom asked.

“I did get that feeling, just last week, about that same engine – Riley sold it, to me,” said Carl with a smile on his face. “I haven’t paid him yet; he’s still got it over at his shop. Let’s run over and get it right now. Hey, you need some company, that’s a long old drive.”

“I hoped you’d ask,” said Tom, relief in his voice. “I wanted to get out of here by noon.”

“I see the boy’s out servicing Old Blue,” said Carl as he stepped to the railing and looked toward the barn.

“Well, I’m your man,” said Carl. “Let me call over to the ranch and check in. How long do you figure this will take?”

“I need to get that hay moved, then we’ll leave. It’ll probably take at least two, maybe three days.”

“There’s that big old steak house on the way. They’ve got that 64-ounce sirloin steak meal, free if you can eat it all. I never could get past the first 32-ounce steak,” said Carl with a gleam in his eye.

“I haven’t had breakfast yet, and you’re talking about a 64-ounce steak dinner, makes my mouth water.”

“Need any help with the hay?” asked Carl.

“We got the tractor fixed yesterday. Couple of hours should do it.”

“I’ll just finish my coffee, then run back to the house and get my shit packed. That reminds me of a joke, never mind,” Carl said with a smile on his face.

“What truck we taking, Old Blue?” asked Carl.

“Thought we’d take Old Blue, its running good, and that big old diesel will pull that trailer and get 23 miles per gallon.”

“You sure you don’t want to take one of mine?” asked Carl in a hurt sort of voice. “I just got that new little Chevy that isn’t even broke in yet.”

“I appreciate it, old buddy, but I’ve got tools in Old Blue that I might need and a Pronto Welder under the hood and don’t really want to screw with changing trucks. That Pronto Welder can charge a dead battery in about eight minutes.”

“You know,” continued Carl, “If you weren’t such a tight son-of-a-bitch you would buy your wife a new car. I know you could afford it.”

“We’ve talked about it several times, and she feels the same way I do. If they’d ever build one that was designed to last, we’d be glad to buy one. This one only had eighty-some thousand miles on it and should have made this trip without a problem. Don’t forget, we have plans to retire in a few years, and we’ll need that money to pay off the tractor and the truck and this piece of real estate. Besides, the way the prices are going up, by the time I retire it will cost 20 dollars for a candy bar.”

“There’s that pessimism again,” Carl shook his head. “The greatest problem with America, besides the fact that we’ve been scared to death, is that people can’t think positively. We’ll spend some time working on that.”

Carl stood up, finished his coffee in two gulps and placed the cup down on the table.

“How in the world can you do that?” exclaimed Tom. “That hot coffee would burn clear down past my stomach.”

“I just don’t know, I can do it with hot soup, too. Hot stuff never seemed to bother me. It might have been the lions,” explained Carl.

“The Lions?” asked Tom.

“You know; Darwin’s theory of evolution, survival of the fittest. Somewhere back on the plains of Africa, one of my long dead ancestors was being chased by a lion and his ability to drink boiling hot food kept him alive to procreate. Or it could be one of those traits that just naturally makes me a superior human being.” Carl stood back with a smile on his face.

“Better git,” Carl said, as he stepped off the porch. “I’ve got some packing to do.”

Tom finished his coffee and stood up, picked up the coffee cups and carried them into the sink, rinsed them and set them on the counter.

He walked into the bedroom and changed into a pair of work jeans and boots. He looked into the mirror and saw a man in his 50s, lean and fit, beginning to gray, but

needing a haircut and a shave. If his coworkers were to see him like this, it would cost him his job as director of facilities for Iowa Rural Power and Light.

As he walked out the back door, he paused for just a moment on the rear deck to look around. The house was separated from the outbuildings by a very wide driveway made of well-packed white AB3 rock. This driveway extended from the far east wheat field to the farthest west pasture. To the right were three large grain bins, one filled with milo, one with corn, and one with winter wheat. Ahead of him and to the north was a large silo with a winding staircase and a landing in the middle. Beside the silo were two barns with a white picket fence enclosing the space between them. To the left of the house was the white gravel driveway that led to the county gravel road.

Tom walked across the driveway to the first and smaller of the two barns.

A large green tractor was backed into the barn, and the loader part had a six foot long steel spike with two smaller spikes at the sides.

As he was climbing into the tractor, a thought came to him that something was wrong. He thought for a moment and concluded that the generator was running in the generator building. The generator building was the size of a large storage shed. It was located across the road from the house and across the road from the barns. Two large diesel tanks sat beside it. An earthen dam that was large enough to contain the diesel fuel in the event of a leak surrounded these tanks. He had triple insulated the walls of the little building and installed two mufflers on the engine because Mary hated the noise.

He was concerned because normally when the power went out the plant called him. Maybe it was because they knew he was taking a few days off.

It was probably just a blown fuse somewhere. He started the tractor, drove it to the other barn, and stopped it by the large door and let the engine idle down.

“Hey, Al,” he yelled, “how long has the generator been running?”

Al slid out from under the truck and said, “Well, it was like clock work. I noticed the lights flicker and the generator came on at precisely eight o’clock. You were in the back of the house. I was watching the weather channel and the TV station went off at the same time. I just thought it was a normal power problem.”

“What’s the weather supposed to do?” asked Tom.

Al thought for a minute, “Highs in the 50’s with no chance for rain.”

“Thanks, Al,” Tom said, as he jumped back in the seat of the tractor and drove it eastward. He wondered why the satellite signal and the power would be out at the same time. If it were a serious problem, they would have called him.

He drove into the field, and using the large steel point attached to the front of the tractor, he soon had moved all the big round hay bales.

He put the tractor away, and as he walked back to the house, he noticed that the generator was still running. He didn’t know for sure, but it must have been running for at least two hours. The small tank that fed the generator was only good for 16 hours; before it went dry he would have to transfer fuel from the big tank. He always kept several thousand gallons of diesel fuel in the big tank, especially during planting season.

He walked all the way to the house and called for Al, but there was no answer. He turned around and retraced his steps past the small barn and into the large barn. Al must have just finished the oil change because he was just closing the hood. Standing beside Al was his best friend Juan Delgado.

“Buenos Dias, Juan,” said Tom.

“Hello, Mr. Brown,” said Juan. Part of the reason that Tom liked Juan was because his parents had brought him up to respect his elders. He was always polite and respectful.

“How are your parents doing?” asked Tom.

“Just fine, sir, except Mom says Dad is working too hard.”

“He is,” said Tom in a matter of fact way.

“How is that algebra class coming?” Juan had come to Mary for a little help in his algebra class.

“Oh, shucks, Mr. Brown, I think I’ll pass, but I hate algebra. I can’t imagine what it’s good for.”

“You know, you never can tell, son. We use algebra in our daily lives all the time. Farmers use algebra often, not every day, mind you, but from time to time. Even if you don’t use the math right now, it is more the idea that you are building your brain. The brain is a muscle and the exercising of it is just like lifting weights. Algebra is just a bar bell for your brain.

“Don’t believe him, Juan,” laughed Al. “This man is a total lunatic; he is an embarrassment to his family, his friends, and all who dwell on this planet.”

Tom turned around and walked to the door and screamed at the top of his lungs, “Hey, world, I am this boy’s father!”

Both boys began to laugh.

Tom returned and became serious, “How was the truck, Al?”

Al responded in a serious voice, “Seems fine, Dad, the belts were a little loose but in good shape. The oil was black as pitch, but it’s a diesel. Checked the tires, no nails that I could find and no leaks. This baby should be good to go for another 8000 miles.”

“Thanks, boys,” said Tom with pride in his voice. “Seen Carl yet?”

They shook their heads.

“Have you boys noticed if the power has tried to come back on in the last hour or so?” Asked Tom with a note of worry in his voice.

“I think we would have heard those big fans in the grain bin come back on, Dad. They’re not on the generator and we’ve had them running pretty much full bore for the last couple of days,” answered Al.

“Damn,” said Tom, “excuse my French. I wonder if I should call out there and see what the heck?”

“If you do, Dad, you know you’ll end up going out there, and then you’ll be late and it won’t have mattered if you do go. Isn’t Charlie on board today?”

“Last I heard,” said Tom.

“Well, there you go, Dad,” said Al, speaking to Tom like a mother. “You may be good, but Charlie’s been there longer than you have, and even though you’re his boss he’s plenty able to handle whatever it is, just like before you got there. Besides, you need to go get Mom and Mary Two, and the sooner you leave the sooner we can start planning that party that’s not going to happen tonight.”

“Thanks, son, you have a way of putting things in perspective.” Tom was grateful sometimes. “Let’s get that generator turned off for a while, and fill that small tank up, please. While you’re at it, fill Old Blue and fill those jerry cans that will give us an extra 10 gallons just in case.”

“If I didn’t ask already,” Tom hated to ask, “would you please hook up the trailer and make sure the extra chains and come-alongs are in the tool box so we can get the car?”

“We’re on it,” said Al.

Tom ran back to the house, took off his work boots by the back door and walked stocking footed back to the bedroom where he undressed and jumped into the shower.

While in the shower, his mind went to the plant. Charlie was there and should be able to handle any situation, and Louise was working today. She would never hesitate to call Tom, night or day.

What Tom did not know was that Louise had gone by the post office on her way to work that morning. She had picked up the magazines and letters and one manila envelope addressed to the “Director of Facilities.” It was not addressed to Tom by name, so she opened it as she had done countless times before. It contained a set of revised maintenance instructions for a newly purchased variable speed drive. The papers were in a sealed plastic wrapper that was marked “VERY URGENT.” She felt that it might be important and that she should take the letter to Charlie to look at before she called Tom. She had hurried down to see Charlie.

Charlie was a short, gray-haired man who had been trying desperately to lose that 30 extra pounds for 10 years. He would be 63 next year, and he planned to retire and move in with his son in Las Vegas where it was warm. He had been the head of maintenance since the plant opened and had been resentful of Tom when Tom took over. It wasn’t long before they became fast friends. Very few problems had come up that Charlie couldn’t handle.

When Louise brought the papers to Charlie’s shop in the basement, he was a little puzzled. He did not remember a variable speed drive being purchased lately. He felt that if he opened the envelope it might give him a clue as to where the drive had been installed. He unfolded the four-inch Buck knife that he had carried for 24 years and opened the sealed packet. As he thumbed through the paperwork, he became light-headed, and suddenly the room went black. Louise had handed the envelope to Charlie and stood idly by as he opened the sealed package. As he began to read the document, she had looked away for a moment. When she turned back, Charlie had collapsed on the floor. She hurried to him, thinking that perhaps he had had a heart attack or something. As she bent down to help him, she suddenly couldn’t catch her breath and her dead body fell to the floor beside that of Charlie’s.

In all, 2,467 such packages were shipped in various ways --- UPS, U.S. Postal, Fed Ex, DHL, etc. The packages were all different and were sent to police stations, hospitals, clinics, power plants and seats of government. Some contained fast-acting chemicals; some would take many hours to show effect.

Tom stepped out of the shower, shaved and packed quickly. He always felt that if he got into a bind all he really needed was a little cash and he could buy whatever he would need. He picked up the packed bag, took three shirts out of the closet on hangers and walked down the hallway.

He set the bag beside the back door and stuck his head out the door. “Hey, Al,” he yelled.

“Yeah, Dad,” answered Al.

“How are you set for cash?”

“I’ve got about 50 bucks left,” said Al.

Tom turned back into the house and walked into the living room and moved a chair away from the wall. He grabbed the side of a large picture frame that was hanging on the wall behind the chair, and it swung out on a set of hinges.

Behind the picture was a wall safe. He used the combination to open it and took out \$2,000 in 20’s. He closed the safe and folded the money and put it into his pocket. He then walked out the back door taking his shirts and bag as he went.

He carried the bag and shirts to the truck, hung the shirts in the back and threw the bag onto the back seat. He then walked back into the house to the cupboard above the refrigerator and took down a nickel-plated Smith and Wesson 357 magnum revolver in a shoulder holster. He took the gun out of the holster, opened the cylinder and spun it to make sure that it was loaded. He reached back into the cupboard to get two boxes of ammunition. He carried these out to the truck and placed them under the back seat.

He stepped back for a short time to look at the truck. Not much to look at, several dents and scratches; he could tell you where almost every one had come from. New tires, new engine, new transmission, bearings and U-joints replaced every 50,000 miles. This truck was old, but Tom never hesitated to spend the extra money on the better parts. He was the epitome of the guy that Detroit hated. When people would drive up in their new trucks and ask for an opinion, Tom would tell them that he would be impressed with a new truck when it would go a million miles, get 50 miles per gallon and be built of aircraft aluminum and never rust. He felt that a person should buy a car when they turned 16 and be buried in it 80 years later.

He called his truck Old Blue, and had had extra sized fuel tanks installed so he could easily make it to St. Louis and back without a pit stop. He had a Pronto Welder under the hood, a fifth-wheel hitch for the trailer, a cutting torch and other tools. It got fairly good gas mileage and drove good down the road. If there was a downside to this truck, it was that it drove like a truck, sort of stiff, but that was the price you paid.

Tom had installed a special compartment behind the rear seat that was only accessible through the cab and that would only open with a special release. The boys used this truck more than he did, so he approached Albert to ask what they had left in it.

“What have we got in the box, Al?” he asked.

“Last time we used this we were deer hunting and had that Remington 30-06, with about three boxes of 150-grain shells. We cleaned it and just left it there. I just added that special little 12-gauge shotgun you like to travel with, the pump with the barrel sawed off just a half-inch over legal. There is a box of buck-shot and a box of birdshot for the shotgun. If you feel like you need a handgun, there is that Smith and Wesson in the kitchen.”

“Got it and thanks,” said Tom.

Tom had lived in the country all his life, where there was never anyone to take care of you or your family. He realized that this country was only a couple of generations removed from George Custer. He felt strongly that every American should be armed just like Switzerland, and that this was the key to a free America. He felt that marksmanship and gun safety should be taught in grade school and that marksmanship should be a part of the county fairs. He had seen to it that all of his children could use a firearm and that they knew how to be safe with one.

“Did you top off the tanks, son?” he asked.

“You bet, Dad. I put five gallons of unleaded in the back jerry can marked unleaded, just in case Mom needs it. I also put two gallons of drinking water in the tool box,” answered Al.

“Here,” he said, and gave Al \$100. “If you need more, it’s in the safe.”

“Thanks, Dad,” said Al with a grin on his face.

“Looks like we’re all packed and ready to roll, just waiting for Carl.” He turned to face the road and yelled, “Carl, where are you?” At the top of his lungs.

No sooner than the words were out of his mouth, than down the driveway came a big black Mercedes at a high rate of speed. Carl parked the car beside the rear deck and jumped out. He was wearing coveralls, a red-checkered shirt and work boots, all new. He had opened the trunk from inside, and he walked to the rear of the car. He pulled two bags from the trunk and carried them to the back seat of the truck. He returned to the trunk where he removed a smaller stainless steel case. He closed the trunk and put the case in the front passenger seat of the truck.

“We ready?” he asked, he was short of breath from the recent exertion.

“You bet,” said Tom as he climbed into the driver’s seat of Old Blue.

Carl tossed a set of keys to Al. “Take good care of my car while we’re gone; just treat it like you own it. Oh, and try not to get it shot full of holes,” he laughed like a crazy man as he climbed into the truck.

“You don’t mind if the boys use the car, do you” they might get some pussy with it,” Carl said in a joking manner to Tom.

“Isn’t that about \$60,000?” asked Tom in a worried manner.

“Full coverage, I get cheap insurance through the military. I want a new one anyway. I hope they wreck it without injuries, of course. Wish I had a kid just like Al,” he smiled.

“Wagons ho,” said Tom.

“Wait just one second,” said Al as he hurried back into the house. He returned in a moment with a large sack in his hand. “Figured you could use some snacks for the road.”

Tom took the sack through the window and passed it to Carl. Al held out his hand to Tom. Tom took Al’s hand and shook it.

Tom looked Al in the eyes and said, “Thank you, son, I’m proud of you.”

“Be careful, Dad I love you,” said Al.

“I love you too, son,” said Tom.

They drove down the lane to the main gravel road and turned to the left. They drove along the center of the gravel road, in the two ruts made by farm traffic, piles of reddish-colored rocks along the side of the road waiting for the occasional road grader to scrape them back onto the road. There were five-strand barbed – wire fences on both sides of the road, and this fence was separated from the road by a continuous drainage ditch that filled with water during rain storms. About a mile and a half up the road the two men could see a spot where trees were growing in a long line to the right and to the left. This was the spot where Simmons creek crossed the road. There was a low place in the road that was made of concrete that had large tubes in it through which the creek passed in times of low water.

Carl turned to Tom and said, "I guess you don't have to think very hard about how this got the name low-water bridge. When the water is low, there is a bridge, when the water is high, no bridge."

Tom replied, "People tell me that back in '51 there was a pretty good flood in these parts. A farmer by the name of Jenkins had a wife and boy and dog in an old '39 Ford pickup and tried to beat the flood waters. Guess the waters were only a couple of feet deep and he didn't want to drive all the way back to town to cross at the big bridge. Anyway, he got a running start and tried to drive through the water and the truck stalled. The water washed the truck about a half mile downstream and got stuck in a tree. The boy and the dog made it out, but the old boy and his wife drowned. They recovered the bodies when the water went down, and the pickup is still down there half buried in the bank of the creek. Rumor has it that the kid bounced around from foster home to foster home and ended up a Baptist minister up north somewhere."

They drove to the other side of the low water bridge; two boys were fishing in the deep water on the downstream side of the low water bridge. The two men pulled the truck and trailer to the side of the road, left the engine running and got out of the truck.

"Catchin' anything?" asked Tom in a cheerful tone of voice.

The younger of the two set his pole down and walked to the edge of the water and raised up a stringer half full of fish. He could not hold it in one hand and had to use both hands.

These two boys could spend their whole lives on the creek bank, thought Tom. He wondered if that would ever change.

"How big are they?" asked Tom.

The older boy answered, "the biggest is about five pounds. There's a couple there that should go three or four, and the smallest is about two. We're only keeping the catfish; we caught a couple of bass, but threw them back."

Tom turned to Carl, "Water came up last week with that big rain we had; these fish swim upstream with the high water and got as far as the low-water bridge. Then when the water goes down here they sit in the hole. Maybe we could figure out a way to just fish for a little while and then go."

"Better not," said Carl in an exasperated tone. "we'd smell like fish all the way to the city."

"You're right, as usual," said Tom, He surely wanted to fish for just a minute.

"You boys be careful," said Tom in a fatherly manner. "We're going to run up to St. Louis real quick and get your mom and sister. The car broke down and we're going to haul it back home."

"Rear main seal, right?" asked the older boy.

"How did you know?" asked Tom. He was somewhat surprised.

"Shop class," said the boy. "Mr. Martin has a list of stuff that always goes wrong with certain cars at certain mileages."

"Why didn't you tell me about this?" asked Tom.

"We told Mom and she said she would talk it over with you. She didn't want to worry you," said the boy.

There it was, thought Tom. So many times in life you get that one shot at the big old buck, that one little noise that tells you the water pump is going out, just one shot.

“Al will be in charge while we’re gone, as always. You be careful and do what he says, you hear?” Tom spoke sternly. It was always best to have someone in charge.

“We’ve got two cell phones with us; your mother has hers as well. I left a list of numbers by the phone in the kitchen. You need any money?” asked Tom.

“No thanks, Dad, we’re fine. We’re just going to slaughter these fish and then con somebody into cooking them for us and probably come back here and do it all over again tomorrow.”

“Come here,” he said to the boys, and gave each one of them a big hug, “Love you, Dad,” they said.

“Love you both,” he said. “You be careful now and we’ll see you in a few days.”

Tom thought of what a wonderful thing it was to have your kids be old enough to fend for themselves, to go out and catch fish and bring them home. Life was sweet.

Tom jumped back into the truck and headed east. Carl leaned back in the seat.

Tom thought a minute and then spoke. “I can’t think of any reason not to take the shortest, most direct route. Head east to Des Moines, take I80 to Iowa City, head on down to Davenport, pick up 74 and go south, to through Peoria, Springfield and end up in the south part of St. Louis. There is a quicker way, 218 out of Iowa City, but there was some road construction that would slow us down, Mary said. Even though it’s 30 or 40 miles to go from Galesburg to Peoria, probably be quicker taking 74 south.”

“You’re driving,” said Carl, “head down the road.”

3

DAVID LOWE FACED south looking through the double windows on his fourth floor office. It was a large office with thick green carpet, and the wallpaper was heavily embossed with gold designs. The patterns were of pretty oriental flowers, and the heavy woodwork was stained a deep reddish color. The ceilings were of stamped metal and painted a golden color. The room was large enough that the lighting was two large chandeliers whose lights were dimmed somewhat. He had chosen this office because of its close proximity to the stairwell so that he would not be dependent upon the elevator. He looked down upon the morning traffic. It was perhaps 6:30 in the morning. He liked to start the morning early; he liked to watch the commuters come to their offices. The secretaries dressed in their business suits and wearing tennis shoes, carrying their dress shoes in a shopping bag, and carrying their lunch buckets and their thermos jugs. In the front of the building was First Street, a one-way street heading east; on the east side of the building was Douglas, a one-way street heading south. He watched a late model red car pull to the left side of the street, and two young men got out of the car, one out of the passenger side front and one out of the passenger side rear. The first was dressed in blue jeans and a tan sweater, the other wearing tan slacks with a short-sleeved polo shirt with a dark pattern, and they were nearly the same age. He was only mildly surprised when the two young men embraced and kissed each other on the lips. The first man got back into the front seat, and the driver opened the trunk. The second man reached onto the trunk

and removed a briefcase and a 12-pack of Coke and a 12-pack of Pepsi cans. He walked to the curb and waited for the traffic to abate and then scampered across the street to an office building.

He would never really be comfortable with sights such as this, but such was life in the city. There was an awning below his window that spanned the length of the building. It was covered with black tar and white chat. Around the fringe were ornately sculptured concrete pineapple-like things every four feet. This puzzled him – who in the world would have built a canopy thing with pineapple things around it? Oh, well, he preferred gargoyles or grotesques. This was his last day. He had spent 20 years here and this was his last day. He had come to the states from the mother country to complete his MBA from Yale and had graduated with honors. He had been set up in business and financed, his responsibility was to set up a corporation of telemarketing buildings --- 40,000 square foot buildings all identical, all filled with computers and every one had a central computer in the center that fed the remote computers. He had named the corporation the Syracuse Corporation. The name had come to him as he passed through Syracuse, New York on a train. It was a good old American name.

Besides the central computer, each building contained an emergency generator capable of producing three times the power needed for the building and which had a reserve of 30 days supply of diesel fuel, a 5,000 gallon tank. Each of these generators was exercised once a week. Each building was fed with a fiber-optic cable that came from two different locations, along with a 1,000-pair copper cable to ensure that there would be no interruptions of the phone service. Aside from the central computer location, there was a full kitchen capable of feeding many hungry people.

The buildings were split into two. Each half was the mirror image of the other. Each half was connected to the central computer and the central kitchen. Each half was completely filled with office cubicles. Five-foot-high partition walls that formed squares, eight foot to a side, created these cubicles. Each cubicle contained a computer, keyboard and chair. Each half contained just over 200 cubicles. They were manned 24 hours a day seven days a week by technicians trained to troubleshoot computer problems for various computer companies. The Syracuse Company had also contracted to man several 800 numbers to satisfy such customers as Microtrend and ShopAtHome TV network.

Each building was designed with a loading dock, to accept a 52-foot semi-trailer. The buildings were fully sprinkled in case of fire and had a fire alarm system designed to shut down all power in the event of a fire. The main computer room possessed a dry system, a preaction system that was only charged in the event that one detector detected fire.

The real purpose of the Syracuse Company was to construct these buildings under the guise of creating a telemarketing network. The seed money allowed the first 20 buildings to be constructed for two million apiece. After the first 20, the company went public, and with the public capital was able to construct the remainder of the buildings. The Syracuse Company had become quite successful, and the profits had allowed the construction of over 100 buildings.

The way that it worked was that David would approach a number of Chambers of Commerce and tell them that they would create several hundred new high-paid, high-tech local jobs that would stimulate the local economy. They would tell the prospective Chamber of Commerce that they intended to build two buildings and that if they were

able to train enough help that they would build the second building and create 400 more jobs. That would be 800 new high-paying jobs.

The plan always required enough land for two buildings; they would take bids from several local communities. The land must be located near an airport that was capable of landing a 747.

As a rule, these communities would fall all over themselves trying to give them a good deal. There were the few odd holdouts, but most of the communities would cave in and give up the land to Syracuse. These high-paying, high-tech jobs were highly sought after by many college towns. They would then hire anyone who had the slightest inclination to become computer literate. Since all of these computer terminals were centrally fed from the central computer, it was fairly easy to generate a program that would create a subliminal directive that would cause these applicants to behave in a particular manner.

Only certain select employees were aware of this subliminal training. If it were determined that an employee was not susceptible to any kind of training or proved to be an otherwise troublemaker, they were gotten rid of. Some highly susceptible ones were kept for further training and development. Mind control had long been on the minds of leaders, but the personal computer took it to a whole new level.

David had done an admirable job; he had created approximately two of these facilities in each state with more in some of the more populous states. Each facility had at least 400 employees. He was somewhat saddened this morning knowing that his work was done. He was also anxious to get on with his future. It was going to be a bright future because his work had been a great success. He would be rewarded.

He looked across the street to the parking lot beyond. It was an attended parking lot that cost him \$10 a day, but it was well worth it. He looked at his new blue Suburban that was loaded with his clothes, his money, food, and other survival stuff and his guns. He knew he had to leave soon; he wanted to be out of the city by eight o'clock. It would be a 20-minute ride down the interstate assuming no problems.

He turned to look at his briefcase that contained the three hard drives from the three computers in the office. He had gone through the drawers and had gathered all the floppy discs and CDs. He looked around the office to make sure that every bit of data was removed, not that it would make any difference in just a few short hours. People would have a lot of other problems on their minds.

He took a last drink from the bottle of water on his desk, closed the lid extra tightly and placed the water bottle into his briefcase next to the hard drives.

As he walked out the door, he reached for the light switch and turned it off. He stood for a second and thought and instead turned the switch back on, along with two other switches. He turned and locked the door and walked into the hallway. There were three elevators, and to the right of them was the door to the stair well. He looked at the elevators, looked at his watch, and chose the stairs. He walked swiftly to the stairway door and took the stairs down two at a time. The walls were in desperate need of paint, and the old yellow paint was peeling to reveal an earlier ancient coat of green paint. There was old writing on the walls put there by some hand probably long dead.

What in the world were those things he thought as he passed a landing? Why would someone put yellow traffic cones on a stair landing? Probably some janitor had put them there to cordon off some floor that had just been mopped.

He reached the lowest stair level and came to the door at the main lobby. He opened the door, passed through the lobby and hurried past the elevators to the entry. There was a large revolving door in the center, and on either side were two man doors. He ignored the rotating door and chose the door on the right. He nearly ran into a man and a woman at the entry smoking cigarettes. And he noticed the man had a badge that had a funny little gold ball attached to the bottom of the badge. How unusual, he thought, and he wondered which one of these companies this man worked for.

He looked to the left and there was no traffic. He looked to the right even though it was a one-way street; he began to hurry across the street, half expecting to hear a policeman yell at him. He hurried to the parking lot and gave the attendant a \$5 tip for watching his car. He walked to his car, started it and headed south to the interstate to go west out of town. The rear tank was full, but the front tank was only half full. He thought he had better stop and top off the tanks; gas would be a little hard to get pretty quick. It was 7:15.