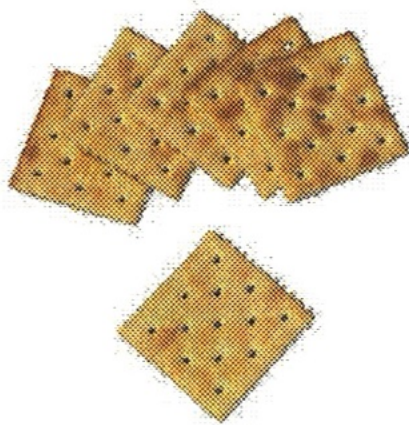


THE SALTINES



A NOVELLA

MATTHEW CAFFREY

The Saltines

By: Matthew T. Caffrey

Dedicated to Steve, Clayton and Mike for your
generous support, encouragement and constant love.

Edited by: Cathleen Gasheen Catherine J. Glasheen

Ahh! What a
horrid spelling of
my name!! I'd kill
my parents if my
1st + last name
rhymed!

Prologue:

'Twas a night like no other,
For most human beings,
Except for the lads,
Known best as Saltines.

They drove and they drove,
To their long destination,
For a weekend full of beer,
And reprieve from masturbation.

They party was kickin',
They saltines had their grove,
The music was pumpin',
They started to move.

Four young chicks,
Were hunted as prey,
Little did they know,
What was coming their way.

The first to strike,
Was Vinnie The Proud,
Founder of the group,
Leader of the crowd.

He spotted a hottie,
and went in for the kill,
He made her laugh and laugh,
And it was not long until,
The two went upstairs,
and it was easy to see,
That Vinnie was going,
To get some sweet pussy.

Inspired by Vinnie,
Mario went on the prowl,
He locked on a nine,
And started to howl.

He approached the babe,
And with his large grin,
In no time at all,
He knew he was in.

The two followed suit,
And they too went upstairs,
To try and entangle,
Their pubic hairs.

OK, let's do it,
Antonio said,
He found a hot chick,
And suggested they go to bed.

That simple, that easy,
And it was not that long,
Before that unsuspecting girl,
Saw the world's largest dong.

Feeling down and depressed,
Rocky sat down,
He closed his sad eyes,
And stifled a frown.

When out of nowhere,
Who should appear?

But the hottest girl there,
And she carried two beers.

"Mind if I sit here?"
She asked rather coy,
"No go right ahead"
Rocky replied with no joy.

"I brought you a beer"
She said with a smile,
"I thought it might cheer you up,
At least for awhile."

"Thank you very much"
Rocky said, "I think it just might."
"So, how does a girl like me?
Get you for the night?"

Rocky's dick was hard,
And did not care if it shown,
And he knew of a place,
Where they could be alone.

Again up the stairs,
Two more young lovers did climb,
To fuck and to fuck,
Until the sun began to shine.

"Oh Vinnie, Oh Mario"
You heard through the night,
Oh Rocky, Oh Antonio"
"You guys know how to do it right!"

One by one they came,
And they held their women close,
The girls almost all died,
From a Saltine Overdose. 😊

One by one the girls left,
With wobbly legs and sore pussies,
And a couple of slap marks,
On one girl's soft tushy.

The next morning the sun,
Rose over the hills,
And a cool autumn breeze,

Gave the four men all chills.

They each shared their stories,
From the previous night,
And despite their satisfaction,
Something was not right.

They sat there and stared,
Out the window when,
They saw a group approaching,
Four oversized men.

"Are you the saltines?"
The largest man asked,
"You slept with our girlfriends,
We're here to kick you ass!"

One by one the saltines stood,
Like oaks with firm roots,
Pulling out their steel,
They other men shook in their boots.

"There's one little thing,

I'd like to know before you die"

Vinnie asked the large men,

As he stared in their eyes.

"Please tell me your name,

Before we cut you to bits"

"Easy" they replied,

"We are the Ritz."

"What a gay name"

Mario cried,

And one by one,

The Ritz had all died.

Soon from the hills,

The four girls came running,

"You killed our asshole boyfriends,

In a move most stunning!"

"'Twas nothing, you see"

Exclaimed Antonio,

They're a bunch of pussies.

The girls all replied, "Yeah, we know"

"We thought that the Ritz,
Were the toughest in town,
But it was the Saltines,
Who brought them down!"

"So what do you say girls?"
Asked Rocky the strong,
"Let's go up stairs,
And fuck all day long!"

So the girls with a giggle,
Joined the winning team,
They knew that they'd,
Never leave the Saltines.

Chapter 1

The road stretched out before them, twisting, turning, the headlights from the cars across the median the only lights they could see. The night air was cool, but affected none within the confines of the saltinemobile. Antonio at the helm, negotiating each turn with supreme skill. Vinnie, riding shotgun, scanned the sides of the road, a gentle tear forming in his eye, though there was no sadness in his heart. Rocky in the back seat with his eyes closed, the music echoing in his ears as he dreamed of the girl he had met the night before. To his right was Mario, who sat quietly listening to the music, in his hands; hidden from the rest of the group was a female undergarment, size 32-C, a gift from the night before. There were no words, only thoughts. Each pondered the future, though curious about the past. It was such a blur, was it even real? It seemed as though at any moment, they each could wake up in the safety of their beds. Ensconced in their blankets, heads resting gently on their pillows. But there would be no waking up from this moment.

"How much further?" Vinnie broke the silence. His voice trailed off, almost hoping there would be no response.

"Not long, Dude." Antonio replied. His voice sounded empty. Perhaps it was the fatigue from driving all night, or perhaps it was the feeling of love lost that resonated in his words.

And then there was silence again. Geek music ^MV quietly played in the background, just enough to create a soft din to overpower the sounds of the road.

The moon was in the final moments of descension, any minute the sun would rise, a new day would begin, full of new adventures and new possibilities, but it was impossible to try and move on after their amazing night just hours ago.

The traffic ahead began to slow down, the flags waved proudly in the soft breeze. The red, white and blue or the American Flag was their last reminder of their homeland. Directly beyond their flag waved a flag that seemed somewhat foreign to the four young men, although it was not a new sight to them. The maple leaf in the center undulated in the wind. Their eyes set intensely on that curious flag.

"FUCKING CANADIA!!!!!!" Cried Mario from the back seat, followed by a rupture of cheering from the silver car.

"We're fucking here!" Echoed Vinnie! "Alright Saltines, let's get us some Canadian pussy!"

The car pulled up to the booth, the man in the window, obviously tired from his long shift coming to an end, began his questioning.

"What is your purpose in Canada, ey?"

"To bang some chicks and see the sights," answered Antonio.

The guard stifled a laugh. "Really? Can you handle our Canadian women?"

"Dude, you don't know who you're talking to." Responded Antonio.

"Well, who exactly ARE you, ey?"

In unison the four men cried out "THE SALTINES!"

"You're a bunch of crackers?"

"Damn straight." Answered Rocky.

"Well, you boys behave yourselves, and just remember one thing while in our country."

"What's that?" asked Mario.

"Simple. Just remember it's not the things in life we do that bring us joy, but the joy in life that brings us to do what we do." Silence fell over the crowd again. Pondering the poetic words. "Move along, ey."

With that, Antonio stepped on that gas and the car sped onto Canadian soil, opening a new chapter of their lives.

Finally Antonio spoke. "Man, that was fucking beautiful."

"What was?" asked Rocky.

"What the guard said, you know about the joys in life."

"Yeah, dude," said Vinnie, "You know guys, I know that we agreed not to talk about it, but it makes me think about last night. I mean, do you really think we should have just left them there? Hey, we could've gone to Canada some other time, but how many times are we gonna find girls like that?"

"Yeah, I've been thinking the same thing, Vinnie, but I just keep reminding myself that we chose the girls, but Canada chose us," replied Mario. "Besides, we'll stop and see the girls on the way back. But first, we've got some saltine business to take care of."

"Do you have the directions to the hotel where we're supposed to meet Him at, Rocky?"

"Yeah, Antonio, they're in my pocket."

"So, what exactly are we supposed to be doing here? We weren't given much information by Farloh."

"I'm not really sure, Vinnie, but there had to have been a reason for them to choose us."

"I just hope that we don't have to kill anyone, here. I was starting to feel badly about the Ritz. I wonder if maybe we should've just like maimed them or something."

"Are you getting soft on us, Rocky?" asked Mario.

"No, it's just that I was kind of thinking that maybe it was immoral to kill them. I'm sure ^{we} I could've just beaten them up really badly, tossed them around, and still gotten the same effect."

"A saltine has to do what a saltine has to do."

"What do you mean, Antonio?"

"I mean that sometimes we have to lay down the law, and if it means killing someone then we'll fucking kill them. Nobody fucks with the saltines."

"I agree, Antonio, but I also see what Rocky is trying to say. And, I sort of agree with him, too. I was starting to enjoy killing way too much. What do you think, Vinnie?"

Vinnie turned his steel over in his hands, as he carefully selected his words. "I like Ritz in bits."

With that, the group burst into laughter, and as the car crossed over the Niagara River the sun peeked over the horizon. Their journey continued into uncharted lands, their futures uncertain, but one thing was sure; it's not the things in life we do that bring us joy, but the joy in life that brings us to do what we do.

Chapter 2

"Wake up, Antonio, you lazy fucking bum." said Vinnie as he opened the blinds revealing the red sun peeking over the horizon.

"Dude, is it morning already? Did I sleep for twenty-fucking-four hours?" asked Antonio.

"No, you retard, it's 6:30 at night, the sun's setting." responded Vinnie. "Rocky and Mario went down to the bar to get dinner and some drinks, I figured we'd head down as soon as you got up."

"Alright, let me just take a shower first."

"C'mon Antonio, there's no time for showers. I'm God damn hungry, and we all know that you take the longest fucking showers in the world."

"Dude, I swear it will be quick." Vinnie raised an eyebrow staring at Antonio. "Seriously, I'll be ready in like 10 minutes."

"Alright, I'm going to head down and buy some smokes, be ready when I get back."

"Can you get me a pack too, Vinnie?"

"Only if you promise to be ready when I get back."

"Dude, I promise."

"Table for 4, smoking, please." Rocky told the hostess.

"Follow me, eh." responded the well-dressed young woman, her black pants were tight to her ass revealing the outline of her panties. Rocky and Mario couldn't help but stare at her cute little ass as they walked behind her. "Here's your table. Can I take your drink orders, eh?"

"Yes," answered Mario, "I'll have a Labatt's Blue."

"Can I get a scotch on the rocks please, eh?" Asked Rocky mocking her foreign accent.

"And maybe some sex on the beach?"

"Sorry, no mixed drinks until after 7:00pm."

"Ok, then can I have a coffee and some sex on the beach." replied Rocky.

"Coffee, yes, but there aren't really any beaches around."

"Ok, then sex at your place will be fine." Retorted Rocky.

"I'll be back in a minute with your drink, eh." As she walked away, Mario noticed a slight grin on her face, obviously amused by Rocky's attempt to hit on her.

"Well, do you think I have a shot with her?" asked Rocky.

"I don't know, she was definitely smiling when she walked away. I'm pretty shocked you had the balls to say that to her."

"Yeah, me too, it was like for a brief moment I was Vinnie." laughed Rocky. "Speaking of that, where the fuck are Vinnie and Antonio?"

"You know how Antonio is, he's probably still sleeping or just getting in the shower and Vinnie is probably out buying a pack of smokes."

The hostess returned with their drink orders, a Labatt's Blue for Mario, which she poured in a pilsner glass for him, and a cup of coffee for Rocky. "I figured you'd like it really hot," the hostess smiled at Rocky.

"Actually, I like it hot and wet, eh?" replied Rocky with a sly grin.

"That's funny, me too," said the hostess "here, I got a special napkin just for you." with that she handed the fresh white napkin to Rocky and quickly strutted away, a light step in her walk.

"Holy fucking Christ!" yelled Rocky as he opened the napkin, "It's her fucking number!"

"No shit! You scored her digits, Rocky?"

"Yeah, Mario, can you believe that shit?"

"You're still in the fucking shower!?" asked Vinnie, "What the fuck are you doing in there, jerking off?"

"No, I just finished, now I'm actually taking the shower."

"For Christ's sake," laughed Vinnie. "So, what do you think we're supposed to do here?"

"I don't know, man, I guess we have ^{to} find someone to help us with our mission or something."

"How the fuck are we supposed to do that? There's like 2,000 fucking tourists just on the ^{is} street alone!"

"I don't know, dude." replied Antonio through the bathroom door. "Hey dude, I think that chick, April, from the other night gave me herpes."

"Are you serious?"

"Yeah, Vinnie, I've got these strange bumps near my dick, and it itches like a son-of-a-bitch."

"Didn't you wear a rubber." ?

"Of course I wore a fucking rubber, but the rubber only covers so much."

"What do you mean?" asked Vinnie, stifling a laugh at the thought of Antonio with crabs.

"Well, the head is totally protected"

"Yeah"

"And the shaft is protected, real well"

"Yeah." replied Vinnie.

"But, like, your balls aren't covered at all, and the part where you dick meets your pubes is are completely exposed to the elements. It's a total danger zone. I know that I was totally slapping my nuts against her taint and my pubes were definitely mixing with hers. Fuck, Vinnie, I think I've got fucking herpes!"

"Let me see" said Vinnie.

"No way, faggot."

"Dude, I'm not gay, let me just take a look and see what the bumps look like."

"They're fucking bumps, man, what the fuck do you need to see them for? They're fucking little red bumps all over the base of my cock and my God damn balls, what the fuck more do you need to know?"

"Well, are they big?"

"What do you mean, Vinnie?"

"Are they big bumps? I mean, are we talking like a fucking pimple or like serious zit sized bumps?"

"They're totally pimple sized."

"Well, that's good, Antonio."

"No, it's not good, Vinnie. I've got fucking crabs!"

"Ok, well, forget about them dude, we're in Canadia and I want to drink so rub some fucking sports creme on them or something and let's go to fucking dinner, Crab boy."

Chapter 3

Vinnie and Antonio walked into the restaurant and after spotting Mario and Rocky ^{and} walked directly to the table, passing the hostess. Both ^S saltines took a moment to gaze at her luscious ass as they walked by.

"Dude, do me favor?" asked Antonio, "Please don't mention my possible crabbage to the guys."

"Why not?"

"It's fucking embarrassing, Vinnie, that's why."

"But don't you think they have ^a right to know? After all what if one of the girls gave them a similar rash all over their cock and balls? Maybe ^{they're} their going through the same feelings of fear and irritation as you are. Wouldn't that constitute their right to know about your little problem?"

"Well, since you put it that way... Fuck no! Look, all I'm saying is that it would be greatly appreciated if my little situation was kept on the DL. If one of the other ^S saltines would like to volunteer information regarding a similar experience, then that would justify me, yes me Vinnie, not you, but me, telling them."

"Jesus Christ, man, look it's probably not even herpes or pubic lice or any kind of STD, you probably just had some allergic reaction to something with that chick's pussy. Maybe she douched or something and your dick reacted in a negative way." Vinnie thought for a second, "Hey, when you jerked off did you use any soap or anything?"

"Yeah, why?"

"Well, there you go you dumb shit, the skin on your dick is much more sensitive than elsewhere on your body. It's pretty fucking obvious that you had some sort of allergic reaction, Antonio."

"You think so?"

"No, actually, I think you have crabs and I'm going to tell the other guys." With a large grin Vinnie walked ahead of Antonio to the table.

"Vinnie, you mother fucker, if you tell the guys..." Antonio yelled after Vinnie.

"Tell us what?" asked Mario.

"Nothing," said Vinnie.

"Well, it's gotta be something, why else would you be so fucking worked up?" replied Rocky.

"Fine, if you really want to know," Vinnie and Antonio sat down at the table and pulled out their cigarettes. "Alright, here's the deal, I think I may have contracted some sort of, well..."

"What, like crabs?" Asked Mario.

"Yes, as a matter of fact, I think I may have them. I don't know why, I wore a fucking rubber!"

"Yeah, Antonio, but a rubber only covers so much." added Rocky.

"That's what I told Vinnie."

"And like I said, it's probably not even crabs, it's probably some allergic reaction or something to the soap you used while you jerked off." said Vinnie.

"Holy Shit, I didn't tell you my news!" yelled Rocky.

"What, do you have crabs, too?" asked Antonio.

"Fuck no, what kind of a loser would get crabs? Just kidding, Antonio, no this news is totally cool." Rocky continued. "Did you see the waitress that works here? Dude, she totally wants me, when she took our drink orders I was hitting on her, man Vinnie, you totally would have dug it the most, it was as if I channeled your humor and smooth talk for her. Then, when she brought us our drinks, she gave me her phone number!"

"Dude, that's fucking awesome!" cried Antonio "So, where is she?"

"I don't know, I think she'll probably be back to take your guys' drink orders." said Mario. Just then, a morbidly obese woman, in her mid-forties, walked over to the table. Her forehead glistened with perspiration and she was slightly out of breath.

"Hi, my name is Tammy can I take your drink orders?" she asked.

"Uh, yeah, can I get a Labatt's draft?" asked Vinnie.

"Sure, and for you?" she asked Antonio.

"Uh, yeah, can I get a light butt, I mean Bud Light." Antonio answered.

"I'll be back in a few minutes with your drinks." she said before turning around to leave. Vinnie and Antonio's mouths were hanging and their eyes ^{were} wide open staring at Rocky. Waiting for the waitress to be out of earshot, Vinnie spoke.

"Dude, that was the waitress you ^{on} hit? No wonder she gave you her number, she's probably never had a guy come up to her before in her life except maybe to ^{ask her to} quit blocking the movie screen. And you're fucking, excited?!"

"No! No, dude I swear that wasn't her!" contested Rocky. "Look, that's her over there seating those people. See, she's fucking smoking!"

With sighs of relief both Vinnie and Antonio burst out laughing followed by Rocky and Mario. Vinnie pulled out a cigarette and started to light it when he heard a voice.

"Excuse me, can I please have one of your cigarettes?"

.....

Chapter 4

"Sure, you can have a cigarette" Vinnie said as he handed one to the woman. "You know these things will kill you."

"Don't worry, I'll take my chances" she said with a smile. Vinnie gave her his lighter and soon she exhaled a ring of smoke around the four young men. "You boys aren't from around here, are you?" she asked.

"No, actually we're from New York, we're just in Canada on business." Responded Rocky.

"Oh, and what kind of business?" she inquired.

"Well, to be perfectly honest, we're not even too certain ourselves." Vinnie answered with a smile. He was very taken by the young lady. Her blonde hair hung just to her shoulders, peeled back away from her beautiful face, revealing her deep blue eyes. She was tall and thin, with a killer body. Her breasts were large but firm. Vinnie could sense the others looking at her the same way. This sent a chill of territorial anger through his body.

"This wouldn't have something to do with a man named, Farloh, would it?" she asked. This took the four men by surprise. How did she know about Farloh. Did she work for him, too? They thought they were to meet a man in Canada, and judging by her body, she was definitely all woman.

"I can't really quite remember his name, but I do think it was something like Fargo or Farloh." said Vinnie, hoping not to give away too much information- just in case.

"Interesting, usually people never forget a name like Farloh, especially once you start 'running errands' for him." she stared deep into Vinnie's eyes, he felt as though she was reading his mind. Those were Farloh's exact words, that they were merely 'running errands' for him. "Mind if I sit down?"

"Go ahead" said Mario, as Vinnie slid over to make room for her. "By the way, my name is Mario, this is Vinnie, Antonio and Rocky. We're the Saltine brothers." He made certain not to give away their real names, but to use the names Farloh had given them.

"The name's Jasmine," she replied, "I'll say it again if it will help you remember, Vinnie" she smiled and looked right at him. "Listen, I'll cut right to the chase. I'm here to help you boys help Farloh. I know all about you, I've been watching. I saw how you guys handled the Ritz, it was very impressive. Farloh will be happy when he hears that you boys have replaced his previous task force with flying colors."

"So, wait, the Ritz were working for Farloh, too?" Asked Antonio.

"Of course," she answered, inhaling her cigarette and blowing it into the air "they were hand selected by Farloh himself, but let's just say he was severely disappointed in their effectiveness, so he had you come along to replace them."

"Does he know that we, um, killed them?" asked Rocky, his eyes became glassy and gazed over, deep in remorse.

"Not yet, but he will." she answered.

"Will he be mad?" questioned Rocky.

"That all depends on the four of you." she stared into each one of their eyes, this time all four felt that she was reading their minds. Who was this woman and what did Farloh want them to do? "So, tell me, how do Farloh find such brave men as you?" she turned

and looked at Vinnie "And not too mention, quite attractive as well" a sly smile shot right to Vinnie.

"Well, basically, I was in the office at the landscape company that I work for and a man called, saying he needed some landscaping done. He asked me questions about my age if I had any friends who were capable of doing some hard work. I told him yes and brought these three along with me to our scheduled appointment." answered Vinnie, his eyes still fixed on hers. She smiled.

"That's interesting that Farloh sought you out- usually people seek him. So, are all of you landscapers, too?" she queried.

"No, actually Mario is in college studying Physics, Rocky works in a library and Antonio works in a SCUBA dive shop." answered Vinnie, completely smitten by this young vixen.

"So, what happened when you met Farloh?" she asked.

"Excuse me, I don't want to sound rude, but I thought that you'd been following us and watching us all along. If you know so much about us, why don't you know about our meeting with Mr. Farloh?" asked Antonio.

She snapped her eyes to Antonio's. "Well, Mr. Distrusting, if you must know, I can only see what Farloh, not Mr. Farloh, just Farloh, wants me to see. You can sort of say that I'm his eyes in certain situations. He thought it would be unnecessary for me to know anything about you prior to your meeting him. But, I'm curious, and I'd like to know all about you," she placed her hand gently on top of Vinnie's causing his dick to become semi-erect. "I would ask Farloh myself, but who am I to second guess such a powerful and important man?"

"I don't know, I was just wondering." Antonio leaned back into the booth, slightly embarrassed, but still equally untrusting.

"Oh, and by the way, Antonio, your rash is an allergic reaction to the hotel's soap and has nothing to do with crabs. I recommend that you buy some regular soap and your 'crabs' will go away." She smiled as she stared at him. Antonio's face grew red, half with embarrassment, half with anger. Had she overheard their conversation? How did she know so much?

"See, Antonio, I told you it was just an allergic reaction." Vinnie said, as her turned to Jasmine "I had a feeling it wasn't any kind of disease." His attempt to impress her seemed to have worked.

"Well, you are certainly the wise one, aren't you, Vinnie." her hand continued to caress his. His cock reached full erection.

"So, what exactly are we supposed to be doing here, anyways?" asked Mario "What are these errands that Farloh talked about?"

"It doesn't involve killing anyone, does it?" asked Rocky, his eyes still set, lamenting on the situation in Geneseo.

"No, it doesn't involve killing, but you may kill anyone you want, I'm sure Farloh will use his influences to keep you from any trouble with the law." said Jasmine.

"So, Farloh is that powerful?" asked Mario.

"He can do anything, well, almost anything. Let's just say he specializes in answering prayers and dreams. Anything you want, he'll deliver." She looked at the four men, "So, let me ask you, are you willing to do one small little errand for Farloh and have your wildest dreams answered?" Vinnie, Mario and Rocky nodded their heads emphatically,

but Antonio only slightly nodded his head, still uncertain of the whole situation. "And what exactly is it that you guys want?"

"I don't know, I hadn't really thought it about it all that much" Mario lied. He knew exactly what he wanted. He wanted money to leave school and travel. He wanted to explore the sights of the world without worrying about deadlines, assignments and all of the stress associated with college.

"Well, I'm certain that you'll have an idea when Farloh begins payment." She said. "And what about you, Mr. Antonio?"

"I don't know either. I don't think that I need material goods to provide happiness." answered Antonio.

"Who said anything about material goods? Farloh can give you anything. Like I said he answers prayers and dreams, he can get you the things that you can't buy."

"I was thinking maybe something along the lines of a new Ferrari," said Rocky "would that be alright?"

"I know that it can be arranged." she answered. "And what about you, Vinnie?"

"Actually," he placed his hand on top of hers, and spoke quietly, looking directly into her eyes "my dream would be to have you."

"You might not need Farloh for that." she smiled, and for an instant seemed to have lost the composure she held earlier.

"So, what is it that we have to do?" asked Antonio.

"Simple, I need you to take a cup from St. Paul's Basilica in Toronto." she answered.

"That's it, just steal a cup?" asked Rocky.

"That's all there is to it. One little cup, and you can have anything you want." she stood up. "Toronto is 3 hours away from here, I suggest that you leave in the morning, I must have that cup no later than Tuesday morning, that will give you 3 days to complete the task. I'll find you when you return to Niagara." she paused, "Oh, and Vinnie, I will probably be needing your, um, assistance tonight, so here's my phone number, please give me a call around 11:00 or so." With a smile to Vinnie, and a nod to the Saltines, she turned away and quickly walked out of sight.

"Dude, she totally wants me!" Vinnie said! "Man, she was fucking HOT too!"

"I don't know, Vinnie, I just don't trust her." Added Antonio.

"Who said anything about trusting, her," said Vinnie "I'm just gonna have lots of sex with her!"

Chapter 5

It was 10:45p, feeling pretty cocked from having a few too many down at the bar, Vinnie paced around the hotel room. His steps were uncertain and he nearly toppled over on several occasions.

"Just 15 more minutes, and then I'll call her" he thought to himself. After dinner and several drinks Vinnie had come back to the room to shower and get ready for his date with Jasmine. Antonio decided to see the sights of Niagara at night. He hoped he would find some information on Toronto while he was out. Mario went to a club to meet some chicks and Rocky stayed at the bar waiting for the hostess to finish working. "Well, I suppose I could call her a little earlier than 11:00" he paced over to the phone, but couldn't pick up the receiver "no, she said 11:00, and I shouldn't call until after 11." Despite his inebriation, he had a roaring hard-on. "Well, I could jerk off to kill some time." He went into the bathroom and shut the door. Taking a wad of tissues and began to stroke his hard cock. Mid-wack, there was a knock at the door. "Fucking Antonio, always picking the wrong fucking time to come back." Quickly he staggered up, and tucked his penis back into his pants, zipping them as he clumsily walked to the door. There was a knock again at the door. "Antonio, you stupid mother fucker you couldn't have waited 5 more minutes before coming back" he continued to talk as he opened the door, "I was just in the middle of jer---, Jasmine! What are you doing here?"

"I'm sorry, am I keeping you from something?" she asked. He was so surprised to see her. She had her hair pulled back behind her ears, her lips were full and red. Her deep blue eyes shining like beacons. She had changed her clothes. She was wearing a tight pair

of jeans, a tight black shirt that exposed her naval and accentuated her breasts, and a pair of black boots that came up to her ankles.

"No, no I was just, um, never mind. I'm so glad you came over, I was actually waiting to call you." He said, slurring his words slightly. He was surprised that he had gotten as drunk as he had.

"Well, I didn't really feel like waiting until 11:00pm, so I thought I would just come over and surprise you." She seemed much different than before. She was still just as beautiful, but her voice seemed softer now, perhaps a little less confident.

"Please, come in." he said as he guided her into the room. "You'll have to excuse the mess, though, we haven't had much time to clean up."

"Don't worry about it," she said, she stared into his eyes, but this time he didn't feel like she was reading his mind. "Listen, I just want you to know that I'm not the kind of girl who just randomly comes up to men's hotel rooms, and I especially wouldn't make the first step by coming up uninvited." She took a step towards him and put a hand on his. "There's something about you, Vinnie. Something that I can't really quite explain, I feel, well, I fell out of control when I'm with you."

"Oh, Jasmine, don't worry about it. Believe me, I'm not the type of guy who just randomly ask a girl to be with me. And believe me, if you feel out of control when you're with me, I feel that three fold when I'm with you." She smiled and ran her hand through his hair. He took a step closer and placed his hand awkwardly on her hip and leaned forward to kiss her, but stopping just before he placed his lips on hers. "Is this alright?" he asked.

"Well, I honestly don't know what Farloh will think, but right now all I can think about is you. and me" she said. And with that, Vinnie placed his lips on hers.

Smoking a cigarette and walking down the lonely street, Antonio looked at the cityscape. He passed the occasional couple, young and in love. "Why can't that be me?" he thought to himself. He recollected of April from the other night. "Well, at least she didn't give me herpes" he thought, letting out a little laugh. "After we steal that cup, deliver it to Jasmine, then I'll get my payment and settle down with a girl forever." He continued down the side of the road, but couldn't help a small tear escape from his eye. It slowly ran down the side of his cheek before wiping it away.

"Hey, Antonio!" he heard from down the street. He looked up and saw Mario. "Hey, where you headed?"

"I don't know, I thought maybe I would just keep walking around and see the sights or something."

"Dude, you should come to the club with me, there should be a lot of hot bitches there."

"Thanks, dude, but I think I'll be alright laying low." Antonio answered.

"Are you sure, man? I'd hate to just leave you."

"Don't worry, I'll be fine." he paused "Have you thought at all about our mission and everything?"

"Seriously, Antonio, all I care about right now is dancing with some chicks and getting my dick wet. I'll worry about the mission tomorrow when we're on our way to a new life."

"Yeah, I suppose you're right. Well, you have a good time and I'll see you later tonight, Mario."

"Ok, later buddy, Viva la Saltines!"

"Viva la Saltines!" and with that, Mario left and Antonio continued down the road, stopping once in awhile to look behind at Mario "Maybe I can catch up to him," he thought "no, I'll just keep walking this way."

He walked to the falls and stared at the amazing phenomenon. He had considered ending his life before, but couldn't do it. He felt alone and depressed and wondered if he ever could do it. He didn't trust Jasmine or Farloh, and wondered if they would even come through with their end of the bargain. "I have nothing to live for," he thought, "Oh God, please, give me a reason to live." He closed his eyes and listened to the sound of the water rushing over the falls. He stood for what seemed like hours when out of the distance he heard a girl scream. He opened his eyes and quickly turned to the direction the scream came from. He found himself running towards a streetlight two blocks from where he was. Under the light of the overhead lamp, he saw a man in a cheap suit and bolo tie yelling at a young woman. Antonio could not make out all of the man's words but he was able to discern words like 'Money, bitch, and filthy whore' the man lifted his hand and slapped the girl across the face.

"Hey, you mother fucker!" Antonio yelled out "Leave that girl alone!"

"Listen you little shit, why don't you mind your own fucking business." the man shouted back. Antonio kept walking towards him, his hand poised just above the pocket where his knife was.

"Well, the second you hit that girl, you made it my business. Now, why don't you be a nice guy, tell the girl you're sorry, and be on your way before I have to come over there and kick your fucking ass." Antonio yelled back, now he stood less than 10 feet from the man.

"Look, kid, you got 10 seconds to get the fuck off of this street or else I'll kill you just like I'm about to do to this little slut." the man stared into Antonio's eyes, while the girl leaned against the lamp post, a small pool of blood matriculated on the ground underneath her.

"There's only going to be one person doing the killing tonight, and I'll tell you, mother fucker, it sure as hell ain't gonna be you." Antonio took another step towards the man, who stood a good six inches taller than Antonio, his shoulders were wide and his arms were certainly larger than Antonio's. "I'm not backing down, mother fucker!" Antonio shouted. With that, the man pulled out a knife and quickly slashed towards Antonio. Like a cat, Antonio, dodged the knife and gave a quick punch to the man's face. Seemingly unphased by his punch, the man slashed again. Antonio quickly pulled out his knife, released the blade and connected with the man's hand in mid-air. The man screamed and dropped his knife, his good hand wrapped around the bloody one. "I gave you a chance to leave, mother fucker, but you didn't listen, now you'll have to pay." The man stumbled backwards in pain. Antonio took out his knife and held it to the man's face, "Now tell the girl you're sorry." His stone cold eyes stared deep into the wounded man's.

"I'm, I'm sorry." he muttered.

"What was that, mother fucker? I don't think she could hear you?" Antonio yelled.

"I'm sorry!" the man shouted.

"Good, now tell her goodbye" Antonio said.

"What?" the man asked.

"Tell her Goodbye!" Antonio repeated.

"Ok, ok, Goodbye!" And with that Antonio slit the man's throat, blood pouring profusely over the cheap suit, the life was quickly withdrawn from his body and he lay like a heap under the street lamp.

"Are you ok, ma'am?" Antonio asked the young lady.

"Yes, I'm fine. Thank you." She answered.

"Who the hell was that guy?" Antonio asked as he helped her to her feet. He stared intently on her, she was absolutely beautiful. Her hair was as dark as the night, and hung down below her shoulders. Her body was slim though curvy. He couldn't help but stare at her eyes. They were dark, but there was something about them that he found irresistible. They were slightly slanted, and he realized that she was Asian.

"He was my pimp." She answered, a look of shame on her face.

"You're a prostitute?" Antonio asked.

.....

Chapter 6

Mario continued to walk down the road, letting the wind guide him to an unknown destiny. "I'm finally fucking free!" He thought to himself and he wore a huge grin. He felt as though a giant weight was removed from his shoulders. His stress was gone. Tonight was going to be his night. He passed dozens of hot young ladies as he walked down the street, but did not know what to say, after all, he was a stranger in these parts. Near an intersection, he spotted three young women, all of which were extremely attractive. "I've got to go talk to them" he thought. "But, what the hell am I going to say? I wish Vinnie were here, he'd know exactly how to handle this." He decided to walk past them, and perhaps make some kind of eye contact, if they acknowledged him, he would say something witty and charming, and hopefully strike up a conversation, at the very least, they might know of some place that he can have a good time. As we walked towards them he noticed that they had stopped talking, and just stared at him. He smiled and one-by-one they each smiled back and released a little giggle. It was fairly obvious that they wanted to talk to him.

"Excuse me, ladies, you wouldn't by any chance know of any clubs or anything around here would you?" he said, that didn't seem too dorky. But each one just shyly giggled. Finally one spoke up.

"Actually, there's a club up the street, we were probably going to go ourselves." the young girl spoke, her brown curly hair was pulled back tight in a ponytail.

"And how exactly would I get there?" he asked.

"Well, if you want you can go with us." the brown haired girl said. "My name is Kim, this is Alison and Danielle."

"I'd love to come along, my name is Mario."

"Are you Italian?" Danielle asked. Her red hair an obvious indicator of her Irish descent.

"Baby, I'm 100% pure blood Italian." Mario responded. The girls each gave a little laugh and sort of stared at Mario. "Well, do you guys want to head to the club now?"

"Sure" they responded "It's this way." The red head, Danielle, led the way.

"Are you girls from around here?" Mario asked.

"Well, we all go to Niagara University, but I'm from New Jersey, Danielle is from Pennsylvania and Kim is from New York. Where are you from?" asked Alison, her jet-black hair cut short, just below her ears.

"I go to college in Geneseo, but I'm actually from Syracuse." Mario answered.

"Really?" said Kim, "I'm from a small town just outside of Syracuse!"

"Wow, that's really amazing. Small world huh?" said Mario. "So, what do you girls like to do for fun?"

"I don't know," said Kim, "watch movies, go shopping, have foursomes." Alison and Danielle looked at Kim in complete disbelief for what she had said.

"Really?" asked Mike "I've never heard a girl say that before."

"What, have foursomes?" asked Kim.

"No, go shopping." Mario replied. The girls all laughed at his joke. "Are you serious about the foursomes?" The girls broke into laughter until Alison finally spoke.

"No, we've never had a foursome, nor a threesome for that matter."

"But who knows," said Kim, "Maybe tonight is our night to try something new." a sly smile crossed her lips.

"Who knows" responded Mario.

The four reached the club, there was a line wrapped around the block. The dance music could be heard from the outside and the amount of hot girls walking around was unbelievable. "Man, I should've brought Antonio along," Mario thought to himself. "Poor guy, he's probably just wandering the street all alone.

"This line is why too long" said Kim. "Let's just get some beer and head back to our hotel room."

"Sounds good to me." replied Alison.

"I don't know, I was kind of looking forward to dancing." said Mario. "But, what the fuck, let's go."

With that, the four headed back to the girls' hotel.

After stopping to get some beer, they finally made it to the hotel. The girls lead the way and Mario followed suit. The room was a nice suite and had three queen-sized beds. Alison took the beer and put in the fridge, Danielle went to put some music on, and Kim led Mario to the couch.

"So, what would you say to me if I told you I wanted you?" said Kim, her voice very serious.

"Well, I'd have to say that I'd be very interested." Mario answered, "How could a guy turn down a hot chick like ---?. Before he could answer, he found Kim's lips pressed against his. She wrapped her arms around him and pulled him close to her. He kissed her

back and began to slide his hand up her chest. He started to feel her breasts through her shirt when she pulled away. "What? Did I do something wrong?" Mario asked.

"No, not at all." Kim answered, taking off her shirt and bra. I just thought that you could feel my tits better this way. Mike's dick was truly hard as a rock at this point. He cupped her breast with one hand and began sliding his other hand up her thigh. Just then, Danielle came over, sitting on chair opposite and very casually began squeezing her own breasts with one hand and stroking her inner thigh with the other.

"Mind if I join in?" she asked.

"Sure, come on over," Said Kim, "If that's alright with you Mario."

"Absolutely." Mario answered. Danielle began to take off her shirt and bra while she walked over to the entangled pair. She sat next to Mario and began to kiss his ear. "This is great!" Mario thought to himself. He turned slightly to the side so that his body was evenly distributed between the girls. Hands groped and massaged, and tongues licked and played on all three bodies. Breast against chest, breast against breast, leg over leg over leg. Soon, Alison entered into the room.

"Room for one more?" she asked coyly.

"I'm sure we can work something out." Said Mario,

"IF that's ok with you two."

"Yeah, come on over Alison." said Danielle. Alison quickly walked over and put her head in Mario's lap, she began to unzip his pants and unfurl his erect penis. He helped her pull them down and she began to perform fellatio on him. Danielle then pulled down her pants so that Mario could finger her. He inserted two fingers into her moist pussy as she started to moan in pleasure. Kim also removed her pants and allowed Danielle to finger

her, all the while making out with Mario. "This is so fucking great!" Mario thought to himself, the other Saltines won't fucking believe it!"

"Let's go in the bedroom" moaned Danielle, "All four of us!" The four young lovers hurriedly moved into the bedroom. Any clothes that they had been wearing were completely removed by the time they all laid on the bed.

Mario began fucking Kim from behind. Kim's face was buried deep into Alison's snatch and Danielle sat on Alison's face. Kim picked her head up and Mario pulled out. Danielle moved over to Mario and pushed him down onto his back, forcing herself on top of his erect dick. Kim came over and sat on Mario's face so he could eat her out. Alison worked busily between Kim and Danielle's breasts. Soon, Mario reached his climax and one-by-one the girls finished each other off. They lay together in a giant naked heap and waited for the sun to rise. "I wonder what the other Saltines are doing right now?" Mario thought to himself, a grin permanently etched onto his face.

Rocky sat at the bar, waiting and waiting. "She's gotta get off work soon!" he thought to himself. He drank another scotch on the rocks and quietly hummed to himself. He looked at his watch, eleven o' five. "I bet right now Vinnie is making love to Jasmine, Antonio is probably screwing some girl, Mario is probably off with any woman he chooses, and here I am all alone. He finished his drink and set it down on the bar. He paid is tab and began to stagger out the door.

"Are you going to be ok?" he heard a familiar voice from behind him.

"Yeah, I'm just really fucking drunk, that's all." Rocky said, slurring every word together.

"Are you going to be able to make it home?" she asked.

"Sure, it's just a short drive." Rocky said with a smile, "Want a lift?"

"Uh, no. That's ok." she said, obviously missing Rocky's joke. "Hey listen, my apartment is right down the road, if you want you can crash at my place, it beats walking."

"Sure, why the fuck not." Rocky answered. "Do I know you from somewhere?" he asked. She did seem familiar but how?

"Kind of, I work as a hostess here, did you ever get your sex on the beach?" Rocky laughed in response.

"Nope, not yet, but who knows, as long as I'm young, the night is still on it's feet." Rocky slurred.

"You mean, 'as long as you're still on your feet, the night is still young.'" the hostess corrected him.

"Enough with the chit-chat, are we gonna fuck now or what?" Rocky laughed very hard at his own joke.

"Well, I've got to get you to my apartment first." The hostess said.

"What are we waiting for?" asked Rocky, "Let's roll."

"Sounds great, let me just grab my coat." she said.

"Fucking women!" Rocky thought to himself. "Why the hell do they take so God Damn long to get ready. How difficult can it be to grab a freaking jacket. After a few minutes she returned, he could see her face more clearly now and easily remembered how

beautiful she was. They walked down the street and up the elevator to her apartment. The trip was silent, with little words being said except for the occasional unintelligible group of words that Rocky would string together in hopes that an understandable sentence would be formulated. They came to her door and she let them in.

"Nice place you've got here," commented Rocky.

"Thanks, it's small but it works. Plus, check out this great view from the bedroom!" The two walked into the bedroom as she opened the blinds to reveal the night sky. Had Rocky been sober, he probably could have seen the Niagara River over the balcony and the moon's reflection on the water.

"Is this your bed?" Rocky asked.

"Yes."

"How does it work?" said Rocky.

"What do you mean, how does it work?" the girl asked. Just then, Rocky flopped onto the soft bed. There was a slight creak in the springs but it was definitely nothing to complain about.

"Well, are you going to lie down with me?" asked Rocky.

"Sure, let me just change my clothes." she responded.

"Good idea!" said Rocky and he began to clumsily fumble with his shirt and pants. Soon he was completely naked on the bed, under the covers, with a giant tent pitched over his lap. Soon, the young woman returned wearing a terry cloth robe. Her bare legs were exposed and top of her robe exposed much of her breasts. Turning off the lights, she walked over and slid under the covers. In the complete darkness Rocky could feel naked

body. Her skin was softer than the softest silk ever made. Her body pressed against his and he could feel the warmth.

Just as he was about to kiss her, the door opened.

"Oh shit, it's my boyfriend!" she exclaimed "Quick, get up and hide on the balcony!"

"What?" asked Rocky.

"Just get the fuck up before my boyfriend sees you!"

Rocky quickly rolled out of the bed and grabbed his clothes in his arms, he could hear the two talking in the other room. Completely naked, he stepped out onto the balcony and curled up into a tight little ball. He wanted to wait until he knew the two were asleep before he put his clothes on for fear of making too much noise. The lights in the bedroom remained off and soon Rocky could hear the slight creak of the bed followed by moans and groans. "What the fuck!" Rocky thought to himself, that asshole took my spot!" Within a few minutes the creaking, moaning and groaning stopped and the light came.

"What the fuck are these!?" the man yelled from inside the bedroom.

"I don't know, I've never seen them before in my life!" the girl replied.

"They're some guy's boxer shorts, that's what they are and why the fuck are they on our bedroom floor!" he shouted at her.

"I honestly don't know." she answered.

"Well, he's probably still here! I'll fucking find him. Rocky went through his bundle of clothes, but couldn't find his boxers.

"Fuckity Fuck!" Rocky thought to himself as he quickly threw on his clothes. Despite his efforts to be quiet, the racket he made was enough to catch the man's attention. Just as

he pulled up his pants, the sliding glass door to the balcony opened and out jumped an easy foot shorter than Rocky.

"So, you were about to sleep with my girlfriend, huh?" the short man asked.

"I wouldn't go so far as to say that was going to sleep with her, but I was definitely going to sleep in the same bed as her." Rocky responded.

"You mother fucker!" yelled the man as he charged towards Rocky. For such a small man he packed a powerful punch and sent Rocky to his back. Rocky staggered up and found the man charging at him again, this time Rocky ducked and just as the man began to tackle him, Rocky threw all of his weight up and behind, falling onto his own ass. The final shove he gave before hitting the balcony floor was enough to send the man over Rocky's shoulder. He heard a scream from the apartment, followed by a scream from the street. "Now what?" Rocky thought to himself. He looked over the balcony and saw the short little man lying in a pool of blood on the street several stories down.

The girl came running outside screaming profanities at Rocky, most of which he was still too drunk to discern. Making sure to grab his boxers on his way out, he clumsily ran to the door and faced to the stairs. Running down the first two flights, and falling down the next three, he finally made it to the ground level. He threw on his shirt, stuffed his boxers in his pocket and walked out the door as fast and as casually as he possibly could. He could hear police sirens in the distance and decided to duck into the first alleyway he saw, "What the fuck did I do?" Rocky thought to himself, "What a fucked up night this has turned out to be."

.....

Chapter 7

It was a long, passionate kiss. The moment seemed to last forever. The two danced and swayed in each other's arms, eyes closed, never intending to let go. The two began to move towards the bed when Vinnie pulled away.

"I'm just going to put a 'do not disturb' sign on the doorknob, I'll be right back." Vinnie whispered, laying a soft kiss on Jasmine's lips. Still a little inebriated he negotiated his way to the door, picking up the door hanger on his way. He placed the plaquard and locked the door behind him. "I sure hope Antonio doesn't get pissed" he thought. He walked back to the bed, turning off the lights before slipping under the covers to the awaiting Jasmine. He leaned forward to kiss her, the soft light from the moon outside danced inside the room. "You are so beautiful," he said, half a compliment and half an amazed observation "I always dreamed that I would meet that perfect someone. I even envisioned how she would look, but never in my wildest thoughts had I conjured up someone as perfect as you are." he said to her. He eyes lit up and she kissed him.

"Vinnie, you are so wonderful. I love being her with you, and there's no where else I'd rather be." she said, staring into his eyes. He pulled her close to his body and began running his fingers through her hair, while placing soft kisses along her neck and shoulders. Jasmine closed her eyes and let her head fall backwards, allowing his kisses to travel further south. He slowly removed her shirt, hands shaking all the while.

"I, I'm shaking." Vinnie said with a smile. "I don't know why, but for some reason I'm very nervous."

"Of what?" she said, in between laying kisses on his neck.

"I think I'm just afraid that at any moment I could wake up and you'll be gone, as if this is all just a dream." Vinnie confessed.

"Believe me, this is no dream. Just you, and me, and our love." She continued to kiss him, and slowly her lips made their way back to his.

Soon, their shirts were both removed, and their skin was almost fused together. Their hands wandered and explored, soon, their pants were removed as well.

"I don't think I have any condoms" said Vinnie.

"Don't worry, I'm on the pill" said Jasmine, and with that she rolled on top of Vinnie pressing his bulge against her tender thighs, rhythmically, the two bodies undulated in time to the others. The wind blew outside, but inside they were safe in each other's arms.

Vinnie's eyes opened slightly when he felt movement next to him. Although it was almost totally dark in the room, he could make out the silhouette of Jasmine's naked body as she walked over to the phone. She picked up the receiver and dialed a long number, he couldn't make out the entire conversation but his eyes opened wide when he heard her sweet voice turn bitter and cold "Don't worry" she said over the phone line "The seed has been planted."

Vinnie shot up in bed, looking frantically around the room. The room was dark, as he quickly scanned over by the phone.

"What's wrong?" Jasmine said, her voice sounding half asleep. Vinnie turned to her, her head rested gently on the pillow, her eyes opened now and adjusting to the lack of light.

"Did you, uh, never mind, it must have been a dream." Vinnie said. "I thought that I heard you use the phone." Jasmine put an arm around him and pulled him close to her.

"Don't be silly, I've been right by your side the whole night, and I wouldn't leave this spot for anything." She kissed him softly and his body relaxed. He slowly laid down again, her arm still resting around his body. He could feel her body rise and fall with each breath. He listened to her heartbeat as it echoed on his chest. "I wouldn't leave you for anything" she repeated quietly as he closed his eyes. She was on the cusp of falling asleep again when she whispered into his ear, "I love you, Vinnie."

"You're a prostitute?" asked Antonio, uncertain of what had just happened.

"Well, I'm not a very good one apparently. I haven't had a single customer." her eyes grew dim and she brushed the back of her hand against her bloody lip. "I can't thank you enough for saving me. That was absolutely amazing. It was the first time anyone has ever looked out for me, I'm not even sure what to say."

"Don't worry about it, but we should get out of here before the cops get here." Antonio said hurriedly. "Do you have any place you can hide out tonight?"

The young woman shook her head no.

"Well, I suppose you can come with me, but we have to get out of here fast!" The two began running down the alleyway, there was a series of screams off in the distance quickly followed by sirens. "Shit! They must have found him!" Antonio said between deep breaths. "I think the hotel is this way." and the two ran down the street hiding in the shadows the whole way.

Chapter 8

"We should be safe here." said Antonio as he led Alexis into the hotel. The lobby was empty, save the man at the front desk.

"Should we call the police or something?" Alexis asked.

"Fuck no! Look, I'm not worried about the cops, I'll take care of that, but right now, all I care about is getting in bed."

"Hey, I know I said I was a prostitute, but those days are over for me, now that Carlos is dead. Besides, I'm not really in any type of mood to go to bed with you. I'm sorry but-

"What the hell are you talking about?" Interrupted Antonio, "I was just saying how I want to sleep, I'm pretty tired and my mind is running a mile a minute" he paused to let out a little laugh, "but, for what its worth, I'd like to help you out any way I can."

"Oh, Antonio, you're so sweet, but you've done way more than I could have ever asked for." replied Alexis.

"Well, if you ever need anything, please let me help." With that, the two walked over to elevator, Antonio pressed the button to his floor, and quietly allowed the machine to take them upstairs. "I'm sorry if I misunderstood what you were trying to say." Alexis said, finally breaking the silence.

"Don't worry about it." Antonio smiled, and there was silence again. As they walked to the door, Antonio noticed the sign on the knob that Vinnie had placed. "What the fuck?" said Antonio, "Shit. Well, my friend apparently wants his privacy, so I guess we'll have to find somewhere else." Antonio thought for a minute and walked down the hall two doors, "My other friends should be there." He knocked on the door, but there was no answer.

"Fuckers must be out, too." The look of frustration was on Antonio's face. "Ok, maybe we can hang out in the lobby for awhile until either one of the guys comes back." The two headed back to elevator to wait.

"Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuckity, fuckity, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, mother fucker, fuck, fuck, fuckin fuck, fuck, fuck" Rocky said to himself. "What the fuck am I going to do now?" He heard footsteps coming down the alley and he quickly shot his eyes to the direction they were coming from. He started to get up and the footsteps stopped.

"I think there's somebody there!" came a voice from down the alley. Rocky then saw a flash of light from the same location as the voices. The stream of light was meandering from one side of the alley to the other. Rocky started to panic as the light came closer and closer to him. He peered to the left of him and saw the busy street, overflowing with people. To his right, inched a flashlight ready to find him. He looked to his left again, "It would be pretty obvious if I came running out of the alley now" Rocky said quietly to himself. He began to scan his immediate surroundings. He peered overhead and saw a drainpipe attached to the side of the building. He followed the pipe up the building with his eyes and saw it lead directly to a ledge about a floor above the street. Quickly, he began to climb the drainpipe, try to make as little noise as possible. He began to pull himself up slowly, he could see the beam of light reaching the point where he was on the ground. He let out a slow sigh of relief and continued to climb up to the ledge.

He finally reached the ledge and pulled himself to standing position. He adjusted his feet so that he wouldn't fall. He could see the man with the flashlight slowly walking

down the alleyway towards where he had been. He didn't see anyone else behind him. He could see the reflection of police lights on either side of the alleyway. "Fuck, I'm trapped!" thought Rocky.

.....

Chapter 10

Mario was awoken by the sound of several police sirens racing down the street below. The sheer number of vehicles caused him alarm. He untangled himself from the pile of naked, quickly picking up articles of clothing off of the floor he dressed himself. He was quiet enough to not disturb the sleep of any of the girls and was quickly out the door, heading back to the hotel. He had this innate feeling that something was not right.

He hurriedly raced back the hotel, the feeling of alarm grew greater inside of him. He had heard of stories of people who had premonitions of accidents or trouble before they actually happened, but he had always determined those to be freak accidents and coincidence, but the feeling inside of him was so strong that he quickly believed that they, too, were true. A few blocks from the hotel Mario found the swarming police officers, patrol cars and what seemed like hundreds of spectators. It was hard to discern what had happened and he could not get close enough to examine the scene. He saw a body being carried away by medical services into an ambulance. The body on the girny was very short, "Could that be Vinnie?" Mario thought to himself "Is that what this feeling means? Did something happen to Vinnie?" He waded through the crowd, half through careful maneuvers, half through forcing people out of his way. He managed to get to through and found himself 30 feet away from a pool of blood on the ground surrounded by several officers. A lone yellow tape restricting his ability to examine the scene closer. The body on the girny lay motionless behind the ambulance as the emergency medical technicians waited for the go ahead to remove the body from the scene. He saw a man dressed in a black suit and tie, carrying a clipboard, approach the

ambulance. He lifted the sheet off of the body's face, checked vitals with the stethoscope that he retrieved from his pocket and lowered the sheet. He wrote a few notes onto his clipboard and pulled out a small tag with a string on it. He wrote something on the tag and placed it over the toe of the dead body. Tears welled in Mario's eyes as he quickly broke the tape in front of him and raced towards the body. Three police officers intercepted him just a few feet from the ambulance and attempted to force him back to the crowd.

"That's my friend!" cried Mario.

"Well, I'm sorry to hear that, but you must go back to the crowd." stated one officer.

"Can I at least see him one last time?" asked Mario.

"No, I'm afraid I can't permit you to do that." said the officer, "Now please, return to the crowd." Mario's heart sank, he had no choice. He fought the urge to break free and see his dead friend, but instead he slowly went back to the crowd. Adrenaline surged through his body, he knew it was Vinnie.

Mario decided to tell the others, although he didn't know how to break the bad news to the rest of the Saltines. He dodged oncoming pedestrians and finally made it back to the lobby, which was also swarming with police officers. "This is too much to handle!" thought Mario. There was a young woman at the desk with a police officer, talking to the night clerk. Mario recognized her as the hostess from the restaurant. "What is she doing here?" thought Mario.

"Psst, Mario!" came a very quiet voice behind a fake plant. Mario turned around and around until he saw Antonio squatting, hiding. Mario began to walk over when Antonio stopped him. "Stay there, but don't look in my direction. There's no time to explain, but

there's been some trouble tonight, go up to the room and get our stuff, Vinnie is in my room, I don't know where Rocky is, but we have to get out of here fast!"

"Antonio," Mario sobbed, looking off in an opposite direction, "Vinnie is dead." His head began to feel light and started spinning.

"What?" said Antonio, "That's impossible! He's in the room right now!"

"No, I'm pretty sure I saw him getting loaded into an ambulance, and I just had this feeling that it was him." Mario tried to hold back his tears, but was only moderately successful.

Antonio was silent, but finally spoke. "I'll believe you, but I won't completely believe it until I see it. But, we definitely have to get out of here right now." Antonio slid a key towards Mario, "Here's the room key, please get my stuff and meet me out back, there is very little time."

Mario quickly walked past the young lady, the desk clerk and the several officers, hoping not to be noticed. He was relieved that the elevator had just opened to let some patrons out, he was quickly heading up to the room. "What have we gotten ourselves into?" Mario thought to himself.

.....

Chapter 11

Rocky peered over the edge of his presipice to the officer standing directly beneath him. His muscles began to ache from standing in the same spot so long. The man turned slowly around in circles, waiting, watching for any type of movement. His flashlight pointed intently on everything he looked at. Rocky's legs began to shake from pain, he knew he couldn't stand there much longer. He shifted the weight from one leg to another, his back accidentally scraping against the brick wall behind him. The air was still and the scraping sound echoed throughout the alleyway. With a flash, the beam of light was pointed directly at Rocky, his heart began racing even faster.

"What are you doing up there?" the man asked from below.

Rocky's head began to spin, and his body felt light. It was a instinctual reaction to the light and the voice, before he could even think about it, he found himself free falling to the ground. It was only a short 10 feet to the bottom, but the moment lasted forever. He saw the source of light coming closer and closer to his body until he eventually landed on the ground. To his surprise the impact didn't hurt as much as he expected. He felt something warm under his body and realized it was the police officer. He quickly shot up to his feet, a strange pain throughout his leg. He shot his eyes down both ends of the alley, no one was coming. He looked back down at the man lying motionless on the ground.

"Fuck, I killed another God damn person!" said Rocky, quiet and remorseful. He slowly lowered himself to the man's side, careful not to put too much on his tender left leg. He placed his ear to the man's mouth and heard nothing. "Oh please, God, please I pray you

give this man life again." Rocky's vision was blurred by the forming tears and closed his eyes. "This is the end for me. I'll just wait until another officer comes down here and finds me, they'll arrest me and I'll have to accept my punishment." He was surprised to hear a slight rustling next to him. He opened his eyes to see the man's eye's flutter. Rocky quickly lowered his ear to the man's mouth and heard a slow release of air followed by a slow intake. "Thank God!" Rocky said to himself "He's still alive!" The man began to lift his head. His eyes, marred with pain, began to open and his focus on Rocky's face. With a sudden reaction, Rocky punched the man in the side of the head forcing the man's eyes to close and head to drop to the street. Checking once more for vitals, Rocky was relieved to know he was still breathing, but obviously unconscious.

Rocky turned off the man's flashlight and dragged him to the side of the dark alley, void of any light from the other streets. Rocky began emptying out his own pockets and started to remove the man's uniform. Then Rocky removed his own and replaced his with the police officer's. The uniform was slightly too large, especially in the mid-section, but nothing too terribly noticeable. Acting quickly, he dressed the man in his own attire and picked him up on his shoulder.

"This is one heavy fucking cop!" Rocky thought to himself. He carried the unconscious cop, now dressed in street clothes, to the street in the direction closest to the hotel. Rocky approached the first officer he saw, a young man his early twenties. Appropriating his most authoritarian voice Rocky barked, "This man was found unconscious in the alleyway, take him to detox and question him when he comes around." Rocky thought he sounded fairly convincing.

"But Sir, I'm not allowed to arrest anyone, I haven't been on the force long enough yet." said the young cop.

"Look, Rookie, I give you orders, you do them. If that concept is too great for you to take, then I'll take your fucking badge. Do you want to lose your badge?" Rocky said.

"No, no sir!" the rookie answered.

"Good, now take this man into fucking detox and question him in the morning!" Rocky was getting nervously aggitated. Quickly the young cop raced over and took the police officer from ROcky's shoulder. "Careful, he's really fucking heavy" Rocky said.

The young officer carried the man to his patrol car and Rocky hurried off back to the hotel. "What a fucked up night this had been!" Rocky thought to himself.

Vinnie's tired eyes slowly opened by the rustling beside him. He turned to find Jasmine quickly getting out of bed and putting her clothes on. He couldn't help but stare at her beautiful naked body one last time before it was covered.

"What's up?" he asked.

"Oh Good, you're awake, you've got to get up and get ready to leave immeidately." Jasmine answered.

"Why?" Vinnie asked as he reached over to gently lay on her hip.

"I have this feeling that we're in danger. It's imperative that we get out of here." She said quickly.

"What about the others?" asked Vinnie as he slowly got out of bed.

"I sense that they're alright, but there's a strong feeling of fear among them. I think they'll be fine, I'll call Farloh and see if he can do anything to help." Jasmine continued to put her clothes back on quickly picked up a cell phone from the side of the bed. Vinnie put his clothes on, too, but couldn't help but overhear the conversation. She picked up her cell phone, dialed the number and placed the phone to her ear. "Farloh? Hi, it's me again. Look, the boys are in trouble-" there was a slight pause, "Oh you feel it, too? what is it?" another pause, "Just something local, ok, well Vinnie and I are going to head to Toron-" another pause, "Don't worry, I'll make sure not to go in." pause, "No, I don't think that will be necessary, the guys can take care of it. Can you please do something to help us get out?" pause "Great, thank you Farloh, don't worry you won't regret it."

Vinnie quietly grabbed his belongings, replaying the conversation over and over in his head. His distrust of Jasmine was growing inside of him conflicting with the growing love of her inside his heart. "How can you tell if there's something wrong?" Vinnie asked.

"Well, that was my gift from Farloh." she responded.

"What did you do to get it?" Vinnie asked.

"Please, Vinnie, we have very little time," her voice had was sharp and urgent. She turned to look at him. "Look, I'm sorry. I'll tell you all about it in the car," her voice was suddenly sweet, "I'm promise" she said as she gave him a kiss.

"Ok." Said Vinnie, his trust of her regained.

Jasmine poked her head out of the door and quickly closing it. "Shit, there's a cop outside your friends' door" she said. "I'm going to go distract him, you run out to the back parking lot and you'll see my car, it's a black Toyota Celica. I'll met you there." she began

to tug at her pants, pulling them just down below her hips, exposing some more skin. Then she tugged at her shirt to expose some of her cleavage. "Ready, Vinnie?" she asked.

"As ready as I can be." Vinnie said.

Jasmine walked up to him and gave him a very large, long and passionate kiss. "I love you, Vinnie, like I've never loved before. Please, be careful and I'll meet you out there as soon as is humanly possible!"

"I love you, too, you be careful too. I can't imagine losing you." With that, she opened the door and strutted towards the officer who was busy trying to break into the room down the hall. Jasmine was able to draw the police officer down the hall and Vinnie placed a rolled up towel around the base of the door jam and raced out of the room in the other direction, the door closing tightly on the towel, but not slamming.

Vinnie raced to the back hall and quickly down the three flights of stairs, out into the back parking lot. There was a cop car, but it appeared to be empty. He kept closely to the shadows of building and finally made his way over to the black car. He looked up to see a dark, ominous cloud forming over the horizon. The moon was exceptionally bright that evening, but the cloud would certainly remove any light.

Chapter 12

The flashlight danced in front of Rocky lighting his way. In just a matter of minutes, the sky grew blacker than anything he had ever seen before. Had it not been for the flashlight, Rocky would have been completely lost in the chaos that ensue outside. Voices could be seen, but none heard, save the occasional police officer or pedestrian with a flashlight. Rocky finally reached the hotel and immediately ducked behind a fake plant when seeing the hostess and police officer talking to the desk clerk.

"Rocky?"

"Antonio?"

"What the fuck are you doing here, Rocky?"

"Hiding, what are you doing?"

"Hiding. Why are you wearing that uniform?"

"It's a pretty long fucking story, Antonio. I'd love to tell you, but right now I'd just like to get the fuck out of here. Where's Mario?"

"He's upstairs getting our stuff" there was a long silent pause, "Um, have you seen Vinnie at all?" Antonio was hesitant to ask.

"No, why?" asked Rocky.

"Well, Mario said that he saw Vinnie being loaded into an ambulance...he's dead." Antonio burst into tears, quietly weeping.

Rocky's face became flushed, closing his eyes. "What should we do?" he finally asked.

"I don't really know, I suppose the first thing we have to do is get the fuck out of here."

"Without Vinnie?" asked Rocky.

"We don't have much of a choice. I'd love more than anything to find out about Vinnie, but I'm afraid we don't have time for that."

"Yeah, I agree." Rocky thought for a minute. "I think I decided on what I want for my wish from Farloh."

"Really? What's that, Rocky?"

"Vinnie back." Both were silent.

The elevator opened and Mario poked his head out of the doors. The hallway was empty. He quickly raced down to his room, unlocked the door, and with a burst began picking up everything they owned. It was very difficult with the light off, but he was able to grab most of everything despite the lack of light. It was better to have left something behind than to risk someone seeing the light on underneath. He knew it would only be a matter of time before the cop and hostess knew which room he was in. Arms full, he ran down the hall into Vinnie and Antonio's room. He was surprised to see the door slightly ajar, a towel wedged in between the door and the wall.

"That's odd" Mario thought to himself. He was equally disturbed to find all of Vinnie's stuff gone. He quickly combined Antonio's belongings with his and Rocky's and headed back into the hall. There was still no one in the hall, but the elevator doors were just starting to open. Mario lunged back into the hotel room and letting the door softly slam against the towel. The light was off as he raced over to the window, he carefully lifted the glass and removed the screen. The night was completely pitch black, and he had no

choice but to blindly throw their belongings into the parking lot below. "We'll have to pick them up on our way out" he thought to himself. It was easier to get away if he didn't have an armload of clothes.

He could hear the door down the hall open and close, their voices grew closer and closer. Quickly Mario ducked under the bed, careful not to let any part of his body be seen. The door opened and the light came on. Lying on his stomach, he could easily see two sets of feet. One pair belonged to a man, the other to a woman. His body was tense, like a spring ready to let its kinetic energy burst at the first possible moment. He made a tight fist, and just waited. The window remained open and he could see the two people walk over to it.

"Think they jumped out the window?" the woman asked.

"Only if they wanted to kill themselves, that's a good 30 foot drop." the man replied.

"Well, where could they be?" she asked.

"I'm afraid they got away, ma'am. We can go down to the station and fill out a report. We'll put out an APB to the border and to all cops within the area, if anyone sees them we'll know."

"That's it? That's all you can do? What the fuck kind of justice is this, eh?" she asked.

"Listen, lady, we're doing everything we can, now please bear with us." his voice grew irritated. Mario could hear her start crying. "Oh, please stop crying, I'm sorry. Don't worry though, in no time we'll catch the man who killed your boyfriend."

The woman's voice was strangely familiar, he knew he had heard it before, earlier that night. But he could not match the name to the voice. The woman began crying hysterically when the man mention the latter part. He gently led her out into the hall and

Mario knew it would be safe to leave soon. He waited, listening intently on the sounds in the hallway. He heard the bell from the elevator opening and waiting a few seconds before he knew it would be closed and on its way to a different floor.

He quickly crawled out from under the bed and raced to the door, again he poked his head out, scanned the hallway and raced towards the stairway. He flew down the three flights of stairs, threw open the door way and raced into the lobby. The elevator doors had just opened and the man and woman were exiting. Mario sprinted as fast as he could, colliding with the man, who to his surprise was a police officer. The woman he recognized as the hostess.

"That's one of them!" She shouted, her voice cracking slightly from crying.

"Fuck! Run!" Mario shouted, he and the police officer each scrambled to their feet as Rocky, dressed as a police officer and Antonio popped out from behind the fake plant. A girl who Mario had never seen before also jumped out from behind a chair and raced after the two. The cop had gotten to his knees by the time Mario was on his feet. With a quick kick to the groin, the cop was back on the ground again. The girl hurled herself at Mario and landed a punch to his face. For a chick, she punched pretty hard. Although tempted, he knew he could not hit her. Instead he turned and ran as fast as could away from her. She chased him, screaming profanities the whole way. Rocky, Antonio and Alexis were already in the car by the time Mario got to the parking lot. The door was closed and he knew there would be no time to open it. He yelled at the top of his lungs, "Open the fucking window!"

Antonio quickly pressed the button that made the window go down, Mario jumped and was able to clear half of his body. Legs flapping in the wind he yelled to Antonio "Floor it!"

With that, Antonio pressed the accelerator, squeeling his tires, the small silver car and its passengers went screaming out of the parking lot. It was difficult to see, and Antonio came very close on several occasions to hitting various obstructions. Mario pulled himself through the window.

"That was fucking close!" he yelled as they screamed down the highway.

Vinnie sat in the shadows of the black car. His eyes shut tight, as he silently prayed that Jasmine would come back soon. He heard a voice yell to open the window and he popped his head up to see a man that looked much like Mario jumping into a small silver Toyota Corolla. The car raced out of the parking lot. A young woman screaming at them, they were the loudest profanities that Vinnie had ever heard. Vinnie didn't know what the hell was going on, but he knew they were running from someone, and this bitch in the parking lot seemed a good enough reason.

Vinnie could hear footsteps, they were very soft. He heard a woman whisper, "Vinnie, are you out here?"

He peeked his head up to see Jasmine coming towards him. "Down here!" he quietly responded.

"Quick, get in the car!" she whispered as she unlocked the door with her remote. The two quickly piled into the car and immediately sped out of the parking lot.

"How did you distract that cop?" Vinnie asked.

"Easy, I told him that the sirens outside scared me and I wanted him to walk me down to the lobby so that I could see what was going. But, as soon as we got in the lobby I saw your friends start running, so I too started running. I don't think they saw me though."

"Are they all ok?" Vinnie asked.

"Rocky was limping a little, but the other two seemed ok." Jasmine replied.

"So, where are we going now?" asked Vinnie.

"Toronto," she answered, "You guys still have some business to attend to." Her voice trailed off and she seemed lost in thought.

"What's wrong?" asked Vinnie as he leaned to place a kiss on her cheek.

She was silent for a long time, but finally she spoke. "It's Farloh." she answered.

"What about him?" Vinnie questioned.

"I'm afraid that he's going to be mad when he finds out that I've fallen in love with you. Believe me, you don't want to see Farloh get mad." Her voice trembled as she spoke.

"What would he do?" Vinnie asked, there was a serious concern to his voice.

"Probably kill one of us, and I fear it would be you." She stared off in the distance as a sinking feeling grew in Vinnie's stomach. "But, I think if you deliver that cup with no more problems then we'll be ok. It's hard to tell, but there's shot."

Vinnie placed his head on her shoulder. Her body smelled divine, and the thought of losing her was worse than the thought of losing his life. "I'll do whatever I have to do to keep you, Jasmine. I love you so much."

"I love you, too, Vinnie."

The sky was still darker than anything Vinnie had ever experienced. He quietly rested his head on Jasmine's shoulder while she maneuvered down the highway. The road twisting and turning. He knew it would be a long way to Toronto. Vinnie knew what his wish would be, to stay with Jasmine forever.

.....

Chapter 13

The car was quiet for a long time, as emotions and adrenaline ran high. The race to Toronto was fast and furious as Antonio darted down the Queen's Highway. A feeling of fear and remorse ensconced the vehicle. The side of the road was blurred by speed, and their minds raced almost as fast. After brief introductions to the newest passenger, there was little to be said.

After an hour, as the sky became illuminated again, life resumed within the car. One-by-one stories were told of their amazing adventures that night. Rocky explained how he had wound up in bed with the hostess, killed her boyfriend, absconded the police uniform, and eventually reunited with the group. Antonio and Alexis, both sitting in front, each contributed parts to their story of Antonio's heroism and bravery. Remorse took over in Antonio's heart as he retold of the murder that he had committed. He vowed never to kill again.

"It was as if someone else possessed my body," Antonio explained, "for that brief moment I found a darkness inside of me I never knew existed." His heart grew heavy with guilt.

Mario described with some detail his night with the three girls, and the strange premonition that he had. He hesitated to tell of Vinnie's death, but he knew that it must be said.

"There's something I have to say, Antonio you already know, and it's very difficult for me." He grew silent.

"Mario, I already told Rocky," said Antonio "I didn't give much detail though, is it possible that you can tell us?"

"I'll try," Mario said in between tears that began flowing down his cheeks. He told of what he had seen, with the ambulance, the body, the blood, the coroner, the tag, everything. The car became quiet again and remained quiet for the remainder of the ride. It was the longest moment of silence any of them had endured, but it was obvious that there was no one more worthy of it than Vinnie.

They finally reached Toronto as the sun was mid-way through the sky. Fatigue set in and it was decided to find a hotel, get some rest and find that cup as soon as possible. None knew when it would be safe to return to Niagara, but the sooner they were out of Canada, the better.

Alexis and Antonio shared a room, Rocky and Mario shared the other. The two pairs went into their respective rooms, agreed to meet by 1:00pm, and shut the doors.

Alexis was quiet, she was looking in a mirror for the first time since she had been hit by her pimp, Carlos.

"You saved my life Antonio," she said as she stared at her reflection, "Carlos has been known to have a bad temper, but never did I realize how bad it was. I just can't thank you enough."

"Please, stop thanking me. I was glad that I was there to help, I only wish that-" Antonio stopped.

"You did the right thing, Antonio, believe me there are probably at least 25 other women in Niagara who are thinking the very same thing right now." She took a step towards him and placed an arm around him. He was sitting on the edge of the bed, his

face in his hands. Her touch was soft, and comforting, enough to lift his head but not his spirits.

"I somehow feel that Vinnie's death is my fault. It's as if had I not killed Carlos then perhaps Vinnie wouldn't have died- like life would have remained in balance, instead of death staying in balance." Antonio's eyes streamed with tears as he choked on the last words.

"I don't know what I can say to make you feel any better," she said, "But if there's anything I can do-".

"Thanks, Alexis, that truly means a lot to me." Said Antonio as he stared into her eyes, had it not been for the loss of his dear friend, he probably would have felt the urge to kiss her, but his heart ached too much.

"So, there were really 3 other chicks?" asked Rocky, hoping to lighten the mood.

"Yeah, it was by far the greatest sexual experience of my life." replied Mario. Each shared a small laugh and a moment of pride for Mario, but it was not a scene of joy or happiness.

"You know, all night long, I kept asking myself 'What the hell have we gotten ourselves into.'" said Rocky, "I almost wish we had never even gotten involved. We should've just left before Jasmine even told us--" Rocky paused, "Hey, where the hell is she anyways? Wasn't Vinnie supposed to 'help her' tonight?"

"That's a good fucking question, you don't think that she, you know, do you?" asked Mario.

"I don't want to point fingers, for all we know Vinnie could've been hit by a car, but it does seem a little strange." Both were silent. "Do you think we should talk to Antonio about it?"

"I think he needs to sleep, as do we. But as soon as we leave for St. Paul's Basilica we should bring it up." said Mario, "Although I'm pretty sure I know his answer- it was pretty obvious that he didn't care too much for Jasmine."

"Yeah, I got that feeling, too." Rocky replied. "Well, we'll just have to wait and talk to him. Good night, Mario."

"Good night, Rocky."

.....

Chapter 14

Vinnie's head rested gently on Jasmine's shoulder as she traversed the highway. Keeping a close eye on the road. Her imagination running wild of the things Farloh may do to her or Vinnie. She knew she would have to tell Farloh everything, even if it meant never working for him again. She knew the gift he gave her would last forever, regardless of her status with Farloh. She occasionally took a hand off of the wheel to gently touch Vinnie's leg. She truly loved him, and regretted that he had gotten involved with Farloh. She knew the terrible things Farloh was capable of, she was also aware of his plan for the Saltines. It was a constant struggle to not reveal this plan to Vinnie. Twenty-four hours ago her heart felt cold and lifeless, no one could penetrate the steel fortress she had built around it, but somehow this short little man had found a way in.

"Vinnie?" she quietly said, half-hoping that he wouldn't wake up.

"Yes?" he said warily as he lifted his head off of her shoulder. "Sorry, was my head hurting you?"

"No, not at all. In fact I was enjoying it." she looked off into the distance.

"Vinnie, there's something you need to know." her voice was serious, and Vinnie's imagination ran wild from the possibilities.

"Ok," he answered, his voice unsure. He awaited for a response, expecting to hear that she's married, or engaged, or didn't really love him, or that she had to leave, the possibilities were endless.

"It's about Farloh." she hesitated.

"What about him?" he asked.

"Well, let me ask you this, what do you think of him?" Her question took Vinnie off guard.

"Well, he's definitely unlike anyone I've ever met before. He seems to be all business, but nice at the same time." Vinne began to ramble. "I don't know quite how to describe it, I guess I trust him, but I do fear him at the same time. And I wonder how it could be that he can give such great gifts, as if he's God or something. Why do you ask?"

"How do I put this? Farloh, is not what you would call a normal man." she hesitated again, "He's rather divine in some ways."

"What do you mean?" asked Vinnie.

"Well, I'm not certain exactly who he really is, but I would have to say that he is the closest thing to the Devil that I've ever met."

Vinnie was speechless.

"In fact," she continued, "I guess you could say that I'm sort of his assistant for some of the things he does- and in a way, you four will be doing him a great service by getting that cup."

Vinnie threw his head up, it began to spin. "We're helping Satan?" he asked. He could hardly formulate words.

"Yes." Her eyes became glassy and her face revealed her lament. "I can't believe I'm telling you this, if he finds out we'll both be in deep shit."

"I won't let him do anything to you." Vinnie stated bravely.

"I appreciate that, but unfortunately your naivete is showing through. Farloh has powers that can only be rivaled by one other- God himself." The mere concepts of God and Satan were difficult for Vinnie to fully grasp, it seemed all too surreal.

"So, what should we do?" Vinnie asked, his fear ringing through every word.

"I don't know, I've been trying to figure that out myself. If you tell your friends you will all be in great danger from Farloh. If you don't tell them, and give him that cup, then you will endanger the lives of just about every human being on this earth. You have no idea how powerful that cup can make him." she continued, "That cup is believed to be the one that Jesus drank from on the night he was betrayed, of course, there have been dozens of false grails that have popped up for the past two thousand years. Farloh has been searching for it the entire time, and has been using the Ritz for the past 300 years in search of it. But they were taking too long, and Farloh was doubting their capabilities. Time was becoming of the essence and he needed someone who could accomplish this. That's partially why he selected you four."

Vinnie couldn't believe what he was hearing. His mind raced, he began to feel betrayed. His voice grew angry, "You were going to use us to help the devil?"

"Yes" she said, sounding ashamed, "But that was before," her voice trailed off.

"Before what?" Vinnie asked sternly.

"Before I fell in love with you." Vinnie could tell that she was sincere. "I want to save you, and your friends, before its too late."

"So, what exactly are we to do?" Vinnie asked, hoping that she would have an answer this time.

"I have a plan, but it's not perfect. There are some complications, and I'm not even certain if it's going to work." she said, turning her head to face Vinnie. He took a long look at her face, the rising sun cast new shadows on her features. He could see years of evil on her face, evil he hadn't noticed before. The dark shadows danced in her furrowed

brow, she seemed older now, in this new light. Gently wrinkles formed at the corners of her eyes and lips. She was getting older. He quickly pulled down the visor to see his own reflection in the mirror, small wrinkles formed on his forehead, each having the same sence of evil.

"Is it too late?" Vinnie asked, "Or by me simply being here convicting me?"

"Late for what?" she questioned.

"Is it too late for me to stay innocent, will I too become evil?"

"No, it's not too late. Actually, it's never too late. Redemption can always be had. There was one man who worked for Farloh years ago, he was the epitome of evil. But he asked from redemption from God, and received it."

"What happened to him?" asked Vinnie.

"Farloh killed him." The car was completely silent and remained that way until the two reached Toronto.

After a few hours sleep, the three remaining Saltines and their newest member to the group, Alexis, met at the designated time. They debated whether to cover more ground in two small groups, or to avoid losing anyone else by staying in one large group. After much discussion, it was decided that time was of the essence, but their safety was of greater importance. So the four set off into the streets of Toronto.

The city was huge, beautiful and clean. Rocky, Mario and Antonio had never seen anything like it. Alexis had been there once before, but was equally surprised upon her

second visit. After stopping to purchase a map, they easily found St. Paul's Basilica and were well on their way to retrieving the cup.

"This might be the easiest thing we've gone through this weekend!" noticed Antonio as they approached the large building. The architecture of the basilica was beautiful, its gothic peaks stood high above the surrounding buildings. There was a wrought-iron gate surrounding the property it set on. The gate was open, and Mario decided that he would go in first to scout it out. He casually walked up to the building, when he reached the door, he felt chills running up and down his spine, there was something special about this place.

He opened the door and stepped in. The feeling became more intense inside of him. He could not figure out what it was. The first room he entered, a foyer, was completely empty now. He could hear soft prayers in the distance and decided to follow them.

He entered a great room, the stained glassed windows projecting grand colors onto the floor. Each window depicted a scene from the New Testament, from Jesus' miraculous conception, his death on the cross, and his resurrection. Directly behind the pulpit was the largest stain glassed window, depicting Jesus' last supper, his cup raised as he gave instructions to his disciples. Directly beneath it, on a column of marble, rested a gilded goblet. It was simple, but held a true beauty that Mario could hardly describe.

"I know why you are here." a strange voice came from behind Mario. He quickly turned around to find an older man, his face was rugged with years, but like the cup, held a inner-beauty that could not be described.

"You do?" asked Mario.

"Absolutely, and I will warn you. I know your heart, I know what you seek, and I fear that you may make a decision that you will forever regret, Michael." The old man said.

Mario was stunned that he knew his actual name. It was a name he thought he had lost forever, his new life as Mario would end all of the frustrations associated with his previous one. "What do you mean that you know my heart?" he asked.

"I know your struggles, your battles against temptation and your fears of failure. You seek an easy road to happiness, but you must compromise yourself in the process. Your morals, your ideals have all but been washed away." The old man took a step closer towards Mario and placed a hand on his shoulder. His touch was soft and warm. His eyes closed as he prayed for Mike. Mario closed his eyes, tears began to seep through his eyelids. He fell to his knees and gently wept. What had he become over the course of the past few days? He could hardly even recognize himself. Had he really compromised himself in search of any easy path? The man exited the room. Mario was alone, but he felt as though the eyes of many were staring at him. He felt dirty and ashamed, he felt as though he had let evil take over his entire body. He slowly made his way to his feet. How could he steal something now? Especially steal such a special relic? He slowly exited the room and made his way through tear-blurred eyes to the remaining Saltines. He stared long, and intently on each one. He hardly recognized them, too. Antonio and Rocky's faces seemed to be the manifestations of evil. They both wore countenances of dark shadows.

"Did you get it?" asked Rocky.

Mario lowered his head and slowly shook it, his answer obvious. "I can't do it." He answered slowly.

“Want me to try?” asked Rocky.

“I don’t know.” Replied Mario, replaying the scene with the man inside. A war between good and evil raged inside of him.

Before he could answer, Rocky walked past him, still wearing his police uniform. Mario walked towards Antonio, throwing his arms around his dear friend. “Antonio, there’s so much I need to talk to you about.”

“Like what?” asked Antonio softly.

“Like our purpose here.” Answered Mario, letting go of his embrace.

“What do you mean?” asked Antonio.

“I met a man in there, Steve, he knew who I was.” Antonio was surprised to hear his actual name. It seemed like forever since anyone had called him that.

“He knew who you were? How is that possible? Did you meet him in Niagara or something?” Asked Antonio, clearly confused.

“He addressed me as Michael, and he knew why I was in there. He read my mind, and my heart. He knew all about me. He knew about my struggles with temptation and my feelings of doubt towards my own successes. It was as if he knew me my whole life, Steve, I’ve never been so frightened and so happy at the same time.”

“Who was he?” asked Antonio quietly sincere.

“I, I think he was—“ Mario couldn’t finish his answer.

“Who?” asked Antonio, “Don’t worry, I won’t make fun of you or anything, I just really want to know.”

“I think he was God.” Explained Mario, the words seemed to roll off his tongue and he felt as though a huge weight was lifted. “I know he was God.”

Antonio's head began swirling; his thoughts became muddy. Is it possible that Mario could actually have come face-to-face with God? It seemed so unlikely and impossible. "How do you know it was God?"

"I just, felt it. There was no doubt I was in the presence of God in there." Mario began sobbing again. "I just couldn't do it." He buried his head into Antonio's chest. Alexis walked over and placed a comforting arm around Mario as he cried. Just then, Rocky came running out of the church, a small bundle tucked under his shirt.

"We gotta go!" yelled Rocky, racing past the three standing in a circle.

"What?" Yelled Antonio. "Did you get it?"

"Let's get the hell outta here before he comes back!" yelled Rocky as he sprinted towards the car. Alexis and Antonio raced after Rocky. Mario turned back to the basilica doors, he could see the older man peaking through the windows, his face showed concern and disappointment. Sorrow built up inside of Mario. He turned his head away and followed the others back to the car. His heart knew that evil would prevail.

Chapter 15

“We have to find the others and warn them.” Said Vinnie, “We have no other choice. We’ll just tell Farloh that we failed and that we can’t do it. What’s the worst that could happen?”

“Believe me, you don’t want to know. You don’t just tell the Prince of Darkness that you can’t do something.” Said Jasmine.

“Have you ever tried?” Asked Vinnie.

“Yes, as a matter of fact I did. I told him that I wouldn’t carry someone else’s child.” Jasmine’s eyes filled with tears.

“He wanted you to have someone else’s kid? Who was it, his?” asked Vinnie.

“No, not exactly.” She fell silent. “It’s yours.” Vinnie’s eyes shot wide open.

“What?!” he yelled. “He wanted you to have my kid!? Why the hell would he do that?! Is that why you came up to my room!?” Vinnie grew very angry it was an anger had never felt before. He pulled down the visor and looked at his reflection in the mirror again, this time the shadows grew deeper, the furrows on his forehead were darker than they were before. The evil within was taking over him. He flipped the visor up and looked at Jasmine. She was crying. “I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have yelled at you.” Said Vinnie. “I just love you so much, that I was afraid maybe you were only using me to complete some strange mission for Farloh.”

"No, that's not the case at all!" Jasmine demanded. "I was supposed to make love to you for Farloh, so that I could become impregnated, but after meeting you I told him that I couldn't go through with it. I told him that I had to draw the line somewhere."

"What was his response?" asked Vinnie, trying to console Jasmine.

"He told me that I had no choice. It was to have your child or lose my life." She looked at Vinnie. "I fell in love with you, Vinnie, and that's why I went up to your room. I wanted to make love to you; I wanted to be with you last night. That had nothing to do with Farloh."

"So what about the pregnancy thing?" asked Vinnie. "Are you going to have my child?"

"Someday, I want to. But I'll be damned if I let Farloh get his evil hands on it!" she was crying again.

"You'll be damned if he doesn't get his hands on it though, and so will we if we give him that cup." Said Vinnie. "Jasmine, I love you. I'm sorry if I yelled at you, I was just shocked at the news, that's all."

"No, I should have told you from the start, I was just afraid that if you found out you wouldn't want anything to do with me. I could sense your feelings, and that only reinforced mine. I love you." Jasmine said as she wiped tears from her beautiful blue eyes.

"We need to figure out a plan, something that will allow us to live free of Farloh. Would you quit working for him to stay with us; to stay with me?" asked Vinnie.

"Absolutely, Vinnie. I would do anything to stay with you." She laid her hand on his knee.

"I don't want to be known as Vinnie anymore. Please, call me by my real name, Matt." Asked Vinnie.

"Ok, Matt. I like that name." Said Jasmine.

"Here's what we'll do: you said that you're Farloh's eyes right?" Vinnie questioned.

"Yes, why?" asked Jasmine.

"Are there others? If you didn't tell him where we were would we be able to get away?"

"I'm the only one he uses, but there would be more. How far do you think we could get away before that happens? Besides, that saying that he doesn't kill you guys first!" replied Jasmine.

"Well, he won't kill you as long as he thinks your carrying my child, correct?" asked Vinnie.

Jasmine nodded her head.

"Ok, well, in that case, if we deliver something false, something that only looks as though it might be the cup. As soon as he finds out it's fake, then he'll send you out after us. You can give him false information as to our whereabouts and you can run away with me." Vinnie's plan seemed almost too simple.

"I suppose that could work, for a little while. But we couldn't run forever." Said Jasmine.

"Then our only other option is to fight him. If we can kill him, will we be free?" asked Vinnie.

“Yes, in theory, but that is impossible because only God can destroy him.”
Jasmine’s eyes gazed towards the skies, “Only God.”

“Damn, then I guess we’ll just have to run.” Resolved Vinnie.

“Matt, I’d run anywhere with you.”

“Did you get it?” asked Antonio as they started to peel away.

“Yeah, but it was the freakiest thing!” answered Rocky.

“Why, what happened?” asked Mario, knowing fully who Rocky ran into.

“There was some guy in there, he called me by my name and said that he knew my heart. He said that he knows how I struggle with doubt and searching for answers instead of just accepting them by faith. I was going to give up at that point, but then he told me not to worry about Matt, and then I remember about him. I stole the cup only because I want Farloh to return Vinnie back to life. There is no cost I wouldn’t pay for him back!” said Rocky.

“Wow, I can’t believe you actually stole it.” Said Mario. “Hey, who do you think that guy was?”

“Well, I have an idea, but I’m not sure. It’s kind of stupid, but I thought that it might have been,” Rocky hesitated.

“God?” asked Mario.

“Yeah, actually. It was sort of like this feeling I had that he was God. It’s freaky, y’know?” answered Rocky.

“But you stole it anyway? What if Vinnie can’t be brought back to life?” asked Antonio.

"Then I'm telling Farloh to 'suck my dick' and I'm bring this cup back!" Replied Rocky. "Simple as that." The group burst into laughter as Mario stared out the window, gazing back into the skies.

"Do you guys feel, different?" asked Mario.

"Hell yeah, and I fucking hate it!" said Rocky. "I don't want to live this life as Rocky anymore. I want to go back to good old Clayton, and I want to bring you guys back with me- including Matt, and like I said, I'll do anything."

The four resolved to use their wishes to bring Vinnie back to life and then walk away from Farloh and this whole experience forever. They drove back to the hotel to get some more sleep. Rocky carefully held the bundle close to his chest. He had deep reserves about stealing it, his only hope was that God would forgive him.

"After all," he thought to himself, "I'm doing this for a good cause." He carefully wrapped it in a towel and tucked it away in the dresser drawer. Mario was lying on his bed face up towards the ceiling. "Are you mad at me?" asked Rocky.

"No, I'm not really mad. I understand why you did it. I'm not going to say it was wrong. I am a little disappointed. I'm disappointed in all of us really." Answered Mario.

"Yeah, I know how you feel." Replied Rocky. "That was definitely the weirdest experience of my life, I mean, we each came face-to-face with God." Rocky paused, "You think he's mad at me?"

"Who? God?" asked Mario.

"Yeah. Do you think that God will send me to eternal damnation or something?"

“I’m not sure. He’s omniscient, right? Therefore he knew you were going to do it. He probably knows what’s going to happen. I think the important thing is that you seek forgiveness as a result.” Mario responded.

“Oh, believe me, there will be a lot of praying for forgiveness.”

“Well, that’s good. Did you pray with him? Asked Mario.

“Kind of, he prayed for me and then he left. That’s when I took the bloody cup.”
Answered Rocky. “If Matt was still here, I would have left it there.”

.....

Chapter 16

After stopping at several hotels in Toronto, Jasmine and Vinnie were finally able to locate where the others were staying. They quickly raced to the rooms where they were. Both were silently praying that they were there and hadn't taken the cup yet. Each took one door and began knocking. Mario was the first to open the door and shocked to find Jasmine standing there.

"Jasmine, what are you doing here?" he asked.

"There's no time, I need to know, did you take the grail yet?" she asked impatiently.

"As a matter of fact, we did." Said Mario with a remorse in his voice.

"We need to return it!" she urged.

"We can't. We need it bring Matt back to life first." He explained.

"Matt is alive! He's down the hall trying to see if Antonio's home." Said Jasmine.

"What? He's alive!" Mario turned to Rocky, "Clayton! Matt's alive!" Rocky bolted to the door.

"Where is he?" asked Rocky.

"He's talking to Antonio." Replied Mario. "Let's go see him!" Both ran out the door, locking it behind themselves. The three raced down the hallway to find Antonio and Vinnie locked in a huge hug. Tears streamed down Antonio's face.

"I'm so glad you're alive!" cried Antonio.

"I'm glad to see you, too. Why wouldn't I be alive?" asked Vinnie.

"Mario thought you were dead!" explained Antonio. With that Mario and Rocky embraced Antonio and Vinnie. The four nearly toppled over as cries were shared.

"Listen, guys," said Vinnie, "We need to talk. Farloh is not who he seems. Farloh is the devil, if he gets that cup then he'll become more powerful than we can imagine. We must do everything we can to prevent it. You guys haven't taken it yet, have you?"

"Actually," said Rocky, "I stole it because I thought you were dead and I was going to have Farloh restore your life."

"Holy shit!" shit Vinnie. "Wow, that's fucking awesome that you would do that for me, but I'm alive and we can't let him get that cup."

"How do you know that about Farloh?" asked Antonio.

"Jasmine told me everything. You guys wouldn't believe it!" Vinnie quickly told them about Farloh and the tentative plan. "So, if we can somehow get away without him getting that cup, then we can just run away and never look back. Jasmine said she would help us get away, and meet up with us, or rather, me, later."

"Will that work?" asked Mario.

"We don't have much choice, we can't fight him, he's almost as powerful as God!" cried Vinnie. Mario and Rocky shot each other a look.

"What if we have God on our sides?!" asked Rocky.

"That's impossible, how the hell are we going to get God to help us?" asked Vinnie.

"Easy, we think that we met him earlier." Responded Mario.

"Man, this is getting pretty fucked up. You guys met God?" asked Vinnie.

"Yeah, at St. Paul's. Vinnie, you wouldn't have believed it, he knew each of our hearts. It was as if he had known us our entire lives." Said Mario.

"Jasmine, can God really defeat Farloh?" asked Vinnie.

"Absolutely, he's the only one who can. The toughest part is getting the two of them together. I can call Farloh and tell him that you have the cup and that he has to meet you here in Toronto for delivery. Are you sure that you saw God?" said Jasmine.

"I would bet my life on it." Replied Mario.

"Ok, I'll call Farloh. Just pray that the man you saw is truly God and that he'll confront Farloh." Said Jasmine, as she pulled out her cell phone. She turned her back to the group as she called Farloh. Antonio grabbed Vinnie by the arm.

"Do you really trust her?" asked Antonio.

"Of course, why wouldn't I?" replied Vinnie.

"How do we know that she isn't going to tell Farloh our plan, how do we know that she won't try to steal the cup before Farloh gets here?"

"That's just a chance we'll have to take, Antonio, we love each other and I have place my trust in her." Vinnie's eyes met Antonio's. "It's just a chance we'll have to take." Jasmine turned around and walked over to the group. She placed an arm around Vinnie.

"Farloh was a little perturbed, but he said he'll be up here this afternoon to collect. He didn't understand why I couldn't just deliver, but I told him that you four wanted payment on site. He seemed to buy into that." Jasmine sounded sincere. "And please, Antonio, don't worry. I promise to you guys that I wouldn't let you down. I love Matt too much to let anything bad happen to him."

This surprised the group, but they each decided to place their trust in her.

"How are we going to get Farloh to come to the church?" asked Rocky. "Or, how are we going to get God to come to meet Farloh?"

“That’s a good question, Rocky. If I meet Farloh somewhere I can take him to the basilica, it’s the best we can do. But, we don’t have much time. Farloh said he’d be here this afternoon, but knowing him it will be sooner. You guys go ahead to the basilica, return the cup, and talk to the man. Explain to him the situation and pray that he’ll help you. I’ll deliver Farloh.” Said Jasmine.

Rocky ran back to the room, unlocked the door and grabbed the towel-wrapped relic. He gingerly placed it under his cop uniform and raced out to the parking lot to meet the others. Vinnie, Mario, Antonio and Alexis were already in the car. Jasmine was talking to Vinnie through the passenger-side window. Rocky climbed in the back. Jasmine gave a kiss to Vinnie and the car soon pulled away. Their hour was coming soon.

Chapter 17

The silver car came to screeching halt in front of the giant church. Their only hope was to find the man who had talked to them earlier. The four saltines exited the vehicle, Alexis remaining the car, and walked slowly through the gates to the great doors that separated them from the inside of the church.

"So what exactly did this guy look like?" asked Vinnie.

"Well, ^{he looked?} he was old, I'd say probably in his sixties, of course if he really is God he'd be much older." said Mario. *should all these 'h's' be capitalized since you're referring to God?*

"What do you mean, IF he IS God? I thought you said that you were certain he was!" argued Vinnie. "What the fuck are we going to do if he's not in there, or even worse, if he's just some crack-head janitor who's out of his gourd and thinks he is God. ~~Then~~ what? We'll have led Farloh right to this damn cup and we'll all die- and that's without saying what he's possibly capable of by having this thing!"

"Ok, ok, I know it was God, right Rocky?" replied Mario. "It wasn't like he had a damn name tag on or something. 'Hello, my name is God'. I just got this feeling when he was near me. I place my faith in knowing that he is truly God."

"Your faith? You place your faith? That's all? How good is that?" Vinnie grew very irritated.

"Yeah, what's wrong with that? You placed your trust in Jasmine when for all we know she could be planning to have Farloh kill us and take the cup. Then what? But, no, you're 'in love' with her, therefore you know. Well, God dammit, I know in my heart that he was and is God!" Mario stepped closer and closer to Vinnie. He towered over Vinnie, but Vinnie wouldn't back down.

"Guys! What the fuck are we doing? We're fucking arguing with each other!" yelled Antonio, stepping in between the two. "Look, this is all pretty fucked up, and it seems pretty retarded to say, but if we're going to defeat Satan we have to work together as a fucking team. What the hell has gotten into you?"

As Mario and Vinnie looked at each other, the anger washed away from their faces, knowing that Antonio was right. They each said their apologies and turned towards the church. Rocky had already started making his way to the door, and was surprised to find it locked.

"Fuck!" yelled Rocky, "The fucking door is locked!"

"What?" cried Vinnie as he raced over to help Rocky pull on the door handle. "Oh, for Christ's sake! Now what?"

"Do you think we could break in?" asked Mario.

"I don't know, it would definitely be tough, I guess we could break a window or something, but I would definitely have issues about that." said Rocky.

"You didn't have issues about stealing the cup," taunted Vinnie.

"What the hell is wrong with you, Vinnie? It's like you're suddenly turning against us. We need to work together and all you want to do is fight!"

"Well, I'm sorry, Rocky, but I'm getting a little pissed here. You know, the whole fact that Satan is coming to get the damn cup you--" With that Rocky punched Vinnie in the face, sending him down to the ground in a little heap of man. *HK!*

"I'm sorry, but I had to do that. I mean, I love the guy and all, but I think I liked him better when he was dead. He definitely bitched less." The three laughed a little.

Mario tried pounding on the door hoping that someone would come and unlock it, but it was to no avail. "How are going to get in there?" he asked. Antonio dragged Vinnie into the bushes hoping he'd be safe there until he regained consciousness. Rocky, still wearing his uniform, began fingering the walkie-talkie on his belt.

"Hey, I've got an idea!" said Rocky, picking up the walkie-talkie. He turned it on, and changed the frequency until he heard other voices. Looking at the officer's badge he pressed the button allowing him to talk, "This is officer John Williams breaking in, I'm standing outside of St. Paul's basilica where a break-in and robbery was reported," he looked up to see Antonio and Mario with smiles on their faces, impressed with Rocky's quick thinking, "I'd like to request a skeleton key or something to get in, I'd like to check it out in case there is some evidence left behind." The three waited patiently for some sort of response.

"Roger, than⁴ Sgt. Williams, we'll send someone over immediately," the voice from the walkie-talkie said.

The three breathed a sigh of relief. Their only hope now was that the other officer would get there before Farloh did.

.....

Vinnie was starting to show signs of recovery, and there was a long moan coming from the under the bushes. His head was throbbing, and a giant bruise was forming on the side of his face. He slowly got to his hands and knees, looking out to find Antonio peeking through the windows of the church door. Mario was wandering around the side of the large building looking for some other way to get in. Rocky stood at the foot of the walkway, waiting for the police officer to arrive. Vinnie crawled out from under the bushes and regained his composure.

“What the hell happened?” he asked calmly though confused.

“You were getting a little out of hand,” replied Antonio, “We had to concentrate, but you wouldn’t shut up so he had to knock you out. Are you alright?”

“Well, my head hurts like hell, but other than that- was I really that annoying?” asked Vinnie

“Yeah, I’d say you were pretty annoying.” Antonio smiled, and Vinnie tried to smile too, there was an incessant ringing in his head. “Rocky radioed for help, and now we’re waiting for another officer to come let him in.”

“Shouldn’t we be hiding, it would look pretty suspicious if we’re all standing around.” Said Vinnie.

“As soon as Rocky sees him, we’re going to jump in the bushes. On the other hand, if Rocky sees Farloh first, then we’re going to run and help him.” Antonio answered. “I hope the cop gets here soon.”

“See anything, Rocky?” yelled Vinnie.

“No, not yet,” Rocky cried back, “How’s your head?”

"It hurts, you dumb fuck. Couldn't you have knocked me out in a less painful manner?" asked Vinnie, a smile across his face.

"Yeah, but where's the fun in that?" Rocky laughed a little. He was very nervous and it was good to laugh again. He scanned the road meticulously, looking for any sign of vehicles. Like a hawk, he peered down one direction then slowly crossing to the other. His heart raced when he saw a small black car coming towards him. It slowed down as it came upon the church. It looked very much like Jasmine's car, which would in turn have Farloh in it. Rocky was about to call the other guys over, but the car sped up and passed him. The driver was an elderly woman, barely tall enough to see over the wheel. Rocky let out a sigh as he resumed his position, watching.

Mario joined Antonio and Vinnie, his fists were clenched and he was obviously anxious about the situation. He wanted nothing more than to seek safety inside of the church, but there they were, trapped on the outside. He glanced over at the Corolla to see Alexis' head just barely peeking over the back seat. She, too, was keeping an eye on the road. It was best for her to stay in the car, where she was the most safe. Mario didn't understand why she shouldn't stay at the hotel, but he could sense a strong passion between her and Antonio. He noticed a lot of new things^{^^} his senses were heightened. Despite his wrong assumption about Vinnie's death, he was right in feeling that something had been terribly wrong. His thoughts were interrupted by Rocky's yell.

"Somebody's coming, and it looks like a police car. You guys should hide."

Vinnie, Antonio, and Mario each jumped into the small hedge that grew in front of the building's foundation. They couldn't see anything, but they could hear Rocky's

voice. They could hear footsteps coming up the walkway, and through the gate. Rocky's words became more audible the closer they came.

"Yeah, if you can just open the door, I'll go in and scout it out. I may need to you stick around in the back of the building in case they return," said Rocky, trying to use his cop-voice.

"Sure thing, you know I've never actually used this device, it's supposed to be able to open any lock ever made," The cop said. "Of course, I'll believe it when I see it."

"That sounds like quite the device, mind if I see it?" asked Rocky.

"No problem." He handed the device over to Rocky.

"Wow, this thing could definitely come in handy!" said Rocky.

"Yeah, I know. Imagine what you could do if you had that thing all of the time?" asked the officer.

"You know what, I think I just might." Rocky went to hand the device back, but hesitated, "Hey, you know. I think I've got it from here. I doubt the perpetrators will come back. I'll just quickly check inside, fill out the paper work, and I'll drop this little baby off on my way back. Sound good?" asked Rocky.

"Well, I suppose. Are you sure you don't want me to check out back?" the cop asked.

"Yeah, I think I'll be fine," Replied Rocky.

"Ok, well be careful," Said the cop as he turned around and walked back to his car, stopping once to turn around and look at Rocky. He shrugged and kept walking away.

When he was completely out of sight, Rocky called to the others. "Ok, you can come out now."

One at a time, the three guys crawled out from under the bushes. As they got to their feet, Antonio spoke, "That's a pretty cool thing you've got, I'm surprised that cop just gave it to you like that."

"Yeah, me too," said Rocky, "I was afraid I'd have to knock him out too so that I could take it. But I was afraid that if Farloh saw the cop car he would grow suspicious."

"Are you going to return that later?" asked Mario.

"Probably, but how knows, I think it just might come in handy." Answered Rocky as he placed the small metal device up to the lock. It consisted of two small thin bands of metal, attached at one end like a pair of tweezers. They were very flexible but strong. Rocky placed one hand on the doorknob and began to insert the metal device. Before he could jimmy the lock, the doorknob turned and the door opened. "What the hell?" asked Rocky, "The door unlocked before I even used this thing!" He looked back to see the astonished looks of the others. "That was definitely freaky."

He opened the door and the three walked into the foyer. The rooms were completely dark, save the colored light that came through the stained glass windows. They walked into the large room where the cup was found. The room was completely empty. The group huddled together as they walked down the main aisle towards the pulpit. Rocky carefully removed the bundle from his shirt and gently unwrapped the towel.

All eyes were set on the cup. Its golden finish was gone and was covered in green patina. It had been tarnished from its trip. The beauty it once held was gone. Rocky and Mario looked at each other.

“What, what happened to it?” asked Mario, “It was completely golden before.”

“I don’t know,” said Rocky, “I only touched it with my bare hands once. I can’t imagine the oils tarnishing it that quickly.”

“Maybe it was an allergic reaction to the soap at the hotel,” joked Vinnie, but the mood was not lightened. Rocky carefully replaced the cup, the light shining of the dulled surface was not as spectacular as it once had been. Mario’s heart sank as he looked at it. Their evil hands had ruined the once magnificent spectacle.

“What have we done?” asked Rocky, as he returned the grail its place atop the marble pedestal.

“I don’t know.” Replied Mario. The air was calm and quiet.

The four rested their knees to the carpet and quietly began to pray.

Time stood still as the four men kneeled on the carpet, the wind rustled outside, the skies grew dark. They were each lost in thought, reflecting on all that they had been through. They knew that their adventure was not yet complete, and the fear of what was to happen grew inside of them. No one spoke, no one opened their eyes, no one lifted their heads until finally a voice came from behind them.

“I knew you boys would come back.” The gentle voice spoke. They quickly turned around to see an old man standing behind them, “I’m proud of you.”

“We’re sorry we stole the cup,” Antonio began, but the man raised an opened hand, signaling Antonio to be quiet.

“You have been through much, and you have each made choices that perhaps were not of the best intentions. But I forgive you of your actions. I know your hearts, I know your minds.” His eyes met with each of the four men. There was calmness in his eyes, they gave much rest to their weary minds. His face was aged and harsh, yet there was a true beauty behind it, a beauty that resulted from an inner-peace. It was impossible to take their eyes away from him, he gave much comfort to them, and they felt tranquil. “I’ve been watching you, and I’ve been waiting for you to return. You have triumphed over the battles of sin that raged war inside of you, but there is still one battle you must overcome.”

The four stared at him, waiting for instructions and guidance as he continued. “But you must not fight. Despite how much you despise the evil of this world, and the evil that began to swell within your bodies, you must not raise your fists against it. If you

become evil, in order to destroy evil, then evil has already one.” He paused, as the four men listened intently on his every word.

Vinnie finally spoke, “We need your help. We must defeat Satan and stop him from gaining more power.” The old man looked curiously at him.

“Patience, my son. For you must learn that what you resist, you empower. Stay true to your beliefs but do not raise your fists. You must fight with your hearts and not your hands. Resistance is the root of all evil.” The man spoke softly. “Learn to fight with your hearts.

“Now rise my sons, for the enemy draws near. But remember you must not wage war against him. He can be defeated without resistance.” With that the man turned and walked out of the room, leaving the saltines alone once again.

“Was the man you met earlier?” Antonio said as he slowly got to his feet.

Mario and Rocky nodded their heads in silence, contemplating the words the man had spoken to them.

“Well, then I guess its time.” Antonio spoke slowly as the others also got to their feet and headed towards the doors at the entrance to the basilica. Rocky turned to look back at the cup and saw a strange glow about it.

“Look!” he shouted as the others turned to see, “The cup is restored!” They ran back to the marble column where the cup rested. The patina was gone and the gold was shining bright again. There was a brilliance to it, one that had not been there before. Rocky and Mario remembered the beauty it had prior to its removal, but now it was far more beautiful than they had remembered. Standing in awe of the amazing sight, they too, felt renewed inside.

The foyer was empty, the doors closed. There was no sign of the man who had spoken to them. The walked out of the building, and down the steps towards to the walkway. The sun was completely covered by the dark clouds that began to form, the same dark clouds they had seen the previous night in Niagara. The looked towards the street, waiting patiently, quietly, a calm about them, as the black car pulled to a stop at the front of the church. Jasmine could be seen in the driver's seat, but it was hard to see who was with her. A second car pulled up behind, and four men could be seen inside. Then, the passenger side door of the first vehicle opened, and the Saltines saw Farloh once again.

.....

Chapter 20

His eyes were cold and dark, as he walked towards the four young men. There was an air of confidence about him as he long black hair flowed with the wind. His eyes were set one on the four figures as he strode closer and closer. His jet-black suit was as dark as the clouds overhead. The earth trembled with each step, but the saltines would not move. They stood their ground, their hands to their sides, waiting patiently for him to strike at any moment. His arms were large and his face was stern. He stopped mid-way and spoke.

“Well, where is it?” he yelled in a low, booming voice. Bird flew from trees as his words echoed off of the building.

“We will not let you have it.” Yelled Mario, as he planted his feet firm into the ground. Vinnie, Antonio and Rocky also planted their feet nothing would move them.

Farloh’s face grew angry, he pointed a finger towards the group and spoke again. “You are making a grave mistake! You can not defeat me! I have made an offer to you, and you would be fools to deny it. Fools do foolish things and make foolish mistakes. I’ll warn you- do not cross me! Now, let me ask you again, where is the cup?!”

“The cup is inside, where it belongs. And that is where it will stay!” yelled Vinnie, his voice was strong and sure. “We want nothing to do you with you and your evil plans!”

Farloh took another step closer to the group. “Do you honestly think that you four, puny, mortals can defeat me? It is not in your powers to stop me, and if you were smart you would know that in the end Evil triumphs. Look around you. See the evil that has already taken over this world. The hearts of men are dark and cold, they care not for their

neighbors, or their families, or their friends. They only care about themselves and their evil ways. Can't you see? My victory has already begun. Others have tried to stand up against me and I have delivered them to their graves! If you want to follow them, than so be it!" The wind howled as he turned his head to the cars behind them, giving a signal. Four doors opened and four large men exited from the second car. Their faces were dark and evil surrounded them. They approached Farloh and stood at his side.

"Remember us?" asked one of the men, his voice caused a shiver to run through the Saltines' spines.

"Of course we remember," answered Rocky, "I thought we killed you back in Geneseo?" His voice resonated the pains and frustrations he carried from murdering them.

"You did," replied Farloh, "But I am more powerful than death! I resurrected the Ritz in order to kill you!"

"We will not fight them." Yelled Antonio, as he stared into Farloh's dark eyes. "We will not fight you either!"

"So be it, but you will surely die!" cried Farloh, as he pointed his finger towards the four young men. The Ritz received their signal and ran directly towards the Saltines. Seeing this, Jasmine opened the door and cried but it was too late. The Ritz came barreling towards the Saltines with a surge of power and collided with them. Remembering what the old man had told them, they stood their ground but did not fight. The Ritz tumbled to the ground as the Saltines remained in place. "Get up and fight them, you fools!" Farloh shouted as the Ritz once again attacked. Knives in their hands, they swung violently at the Saltines. Remaining true to their instruction, the Saltines did not

respond. The sound of steel piercing flesh could be heard, but there was no bloodshed. The Ritz stood amazed at the site. The knives had pierced each Saltine but none were wounded. The Ritz cowered in fear and ran back to Farloh whose anger had grown ten fold.

Alexis also had run out of the car and met Jasmine at the gates each stared unbelieving of what they had seen. Their countenances were firm and unchanging, as the Saltines glared back at Farloh.

“We will not fight you!” cried Antonio. “Now, be gone!”

The Ritz turned and ran away from Farloh, back into their car and drove off at a blinding speed. Farloh stood alone, facing the Saltines. He turned and yelled to Jasmine.

“Jasmine, kill them!”

“No, Farloh, I will not! I renounce my position with you and I want nothing to do with you!”

The skies grew pitch black as enormous storm clouds rolled in. Lightning streaked across the sky, followed immediately by the booming thunder. The wind gusted and threw small objects in its path. “I have been betrayed!” Cried Farloh. “You all must die!” He lifted his fists and attacked the Saltines. Once again they did not move. His body crashed into all four of them. The earth shattered under his weight as he collapsed to the ground. He lifted his head to see the four Saltines crowd around him.

“It’s over, Farloh,” said Mario. “We will not fight you, and yet you have been defeated.”

Farloh’s covered his face as tears began to streak down them. He cringed under the staring eyes of the four figures above him. The color from his face was drained, and

he seemed much smaller now. He quickly got to his feet and ran towards the street. His arms, once large and muscular, had become small and weak. His stature reduced, he hid into the shadows and was out of sight.

Jasmine and Alexis ran towards the four young men who were still reeling in what had transpired. Jasmine threw her arms around Vinnie and held him tightly, knowing that her life with Farloh had ended and she could start anew with her true love. Rocky fell to his knees to pray, and Mario quickly returned inside of the church to tell the old man of their triumph. Alexis embraced Antonio, her arms almost strangling his body. She looked deep into his eyes, and they shared their first kiss.

.....

Epilogue:

The skies were clear now, and the sun lit the landscape. The sleek black car cruised down the highway, followed closely by the silver corolla. Vinnie drove, as Jasmine rested her head against his shoulder. He felt safe and secure, knowing that the evil one had been defeated. He glanced in the rear view mirror and looked intently on its passengers. Antonio was driving, Alexis beside him. Mario and Rocky sat in the back. Each wore smiles, but it was obvious that they, too, were lost in thought. The quiet hum of the car was the only sound to be heard. Vinnie reflected on all that they had been through. In such a short period of time, they had each grown so much. No longer were they the free spirited, naïve men whose thoughts were reserved mostly for sex and having fun. They had matured in a way that none would have expected. Their futures, which once seemed so distant and unreachable, were now clear and they anticipated anything that came their way. Vinnie placed his hand on Jasmine's knee.

"I never would have dreamed that anything like this could have happened." He said quietly. "It amazing how lives change, how people change, and how our destinies can change."

Jasmine lifted her head and placed a soft kiss on his cheek. "Things happen for a reason," she said, "we can never expect what might happen, but just accept how it happens, and to do it what fate throws at us."

Vinnie quietly stared at the road, remembering the words spoken as they entered into Canada. "It's not the things we do in life that brings us joy, but the joys in life that bring us to do what we do."

.....

The End