

# NAZI ECHOES

BY

RONALD EUGENE CLARK

## Foreword

One of the great injustices committed by the human race in recorded history was the Holocaust. The lives of six million people with families and friends were exterminated. This book is about the possibilities of bringing a wee bit of justice to the horrible events of the past.

# Contents

Neil and the Idea	1
The Federal Bureau of Investigation	9
Viennese Echoes	17
Helping Somalia	26
The Solomons	33
Caroline	42
Road Trip	50
The Bauers	58
Baghdad Bombs	66
The Friedjungs	74
The Drug Enforcement Agency & the Weisskopfs	82
Birmingham Bad Boys & Earthquakes	89
Horse Heaven	94
Mr. & Mrs. Caroline & Neil Jacobs	101
Amalfi	106
Tyrrhenian, Ionian & Adriatic Seas	111
The Faults of California	117
Miami Vices	123
Work, Work & More Work	131
Under Attack	137
Manfred Guzman	145

## Neil and the Idea

Neil Jacobs left work at 5:30, a little earlier than usual. He carried his bicycle down the stairs, through security and out into the warm late afternoon sun of Fairfax, Virginia. He lived just three miles from the office and, today, he was anxious to get home to start work on a new project. Otherwise, he would have gotten in a few miles of hard riding before settling in for the evening. He liked to bike and jog and was in pretty good shape. He was tall at 6'2" and had the slender build of an athlete. He played soccer in high school, but never enjoyed the game. He did enjoy his studies and was considered an egghead. Everyone left him alone and he excelled. He had a girlfriend or two but nothing serious.

Neil worked at Spacequest, a company that manufactured orbital micro-satellites that tracked all types of things for the government. Neil was a mechanical engineer specializing in lenses. He held two graduate degrees from MIT, one in Mechanical Engineering and another in Materials Science and Engineering. He was very, very good at his work, but his heart lay with the pet projects he did in his spare time at home. His home was on the second floor of four in the building. It was old, but comfortable. He made a nice salary that kept his projects funded.

In the three years since he finished school, Neil had tried to start businesses that all failed miserably. He was burnt out and figured that working at Spacequest was going to be a long-term career. However, he had one idea that he had to push forward with. He truly believed he had learned from his mistakes and this invention was the *one*.

That was not to say Neil disliked his work at Spacequest. On the contrary, he truly enjoyed it. His coworkers were great people and the smartest of the smartest out there. The work was half academic and half application where you actually got to see something come to life from a design that came out of your head. Neil started working there right out of school. He had done two internships there and they loved him. So, when it came time to graduate, Spacequest just seemed like the logical choice of employers. Neil fell into his work with all the energy and passion he could muster. The work was never boring, but he calculated that it would be soon unless he could come up with another breakthrough. He had some things he wanted to try and was given a free hand to pursue his ideas. But a lens was a lens after all and the math was simple. Everything revolved around materials these days and their light diffusion properties. He was working on the cutting edge of the technology and that kept him going and reasonably enthused.

Neil expected a package to be waiting for him when he got home. He had been tracking the delivery and knew it would be there. He had nice neighbors that kept to themselves for the most part. Mrs.

Danskeep was the only really nosey one and she kept trying to set Neil up with blind dates. She thought it was a shame that such a good-looking boy did not have a girlfriend. He actually did look good with a solid chin and wavy brown hair. He kept his hair on the longer side more because he hated haircuts rather than worrying about how he looked. Neil dated a bit, but was not ready for any real relationship at this point in his life. He just had to chase that dream of success one more time.

He arrived at his apartment building quickly, carried his bicycle upstairs and found the large package waiting beside his door. He unlocked the door, put his bike inside in its parking place and returned for the box. It was heavy and he had to drag it inside where he placed it ready to open in the center of the living room. He grabbed a drink from the refrigerator and pulled a knife from the set his mother had given him last Christmas. He walked over to the box and cut it open. He pulled out the cardboard inserts that kept the contents somewhat safe and then extracted the interior boxes that held his new toy. He opened each box and laid out the parts around on the floor. He put all the packaging into the big box and stuck it by the front door ready to go out to the trash. He turned the manual to the first page and set to work putting his new \$3000 Ground Penetrating Radar System (GPRS) together.

Neil was watching the first Jurassic Park movie with his two best friends, married couple Marty and Melinda Rossett, when he had an idea. Take a COTS (Commercial Off The Shelf) GPRS, enhance its sensitivity and 3D-map a building. He believed the end product would be capable of “seeing” with sound echoes every nook and cranny within the structure. He would be able to find things long hidden in walls and floors.

Neil grew up in New York, the only son of Edgar Jacobs, who ran a successful talent agency. He handled the bookings for professional classical musicians. Edgar’s star client was his wife, Neil’s mother, Zoe Kronberger Jacobs. She was a pianist and played concerts around the world. She learned piano from her father, Hans Kronberger, an Austrian Jewish Physicist. Zoe tried to get Neil to play the piano or any musical instrument, but he was too busy tinkering with old refrigerator parts or anything he could disassemble. He loved music nonetheless and always regretted not learning to play the guitar. The family traveled frequently to Europe for concert tours and Neil was exposed to all the beauty and sadness the capital cities offered. His grandfather was born in Linz, Austria and fled to Britain in 1938 to avoid the *Anschluss*, the Nazi annexation. Hans studied for two years in London before he was classified as a “friendly enemy alien” in May of 1940. He and 2,500 other refugees were deported to Australia and suffered bad treatment at the hands of the crew on the voyage. He was interred at several camps before being allowed to return to England in 1942. He took up his studies again and graduated from Kings

College with the Stroud Prize in Physics.

Being Jewish, Neil's parents focused their family travels on their heritage. That was the sad part of visiting Europe for them. Zoe lost an aunt and grandmother in the Holocaust and, although she had never met them, they were family. Zoe was determined to school her children and their children's children in the painful reality of their past in order to prevent it from ever happening again, as were other children whose parents suffered at the hands of the Nazis.

When Neil was starting high school, the family visited Austria. Neil was told story after story of the Jews being treated as sub-humans by the Germans and many Austrians as well. He learned about the artwork and other valuables that were confiscated by the "invaders." On one walk through Vienna, Neil overheard his mother telling his father about the Jews hiding their valuables from the Nazis in secret compartments in the walls and floors of their homes. Neil never forgot that story and wondered if the hidden treasures were still there to be discovered.

Neil put the system together, but had to wait for a battery to charge before he could begin the real work. He called his friends Marty and Melinda and asked if they wanted to meet for dinner. They were free and agreed to meet at the Italian restaurant that was located perfectly between their homes, three and a half blocks away. Marty was six foot tall and very athletic. He worked out with weights as well as running. He had blonde short hair in a buzz cut. He still like the military style cut from his service days. Melinda was blonde as well, but her hair was long and straight. She was only five foot four, but was a powerhouse with a personality to back it up.

Neil changed clothes and took off on foot for the short walk. He was dressed in jeans and a tee shirt with sandals. He carried his leather bag over his shoulder and could access it quickly should the need arise. It had his cell phone and key ring alarm, but no weapons of any kind. He arrived at the restaurant to find his friends already at a booth.

Everyone said hello and Neil got a hug from Melinda. They sat down and ordered wine when the waiter showed up a few seconds later. They all knew what they wanted and ordered dinner to accompany the merlot that was coming.

Melinda said, "So, Marty and I have been thinking about your latest project. We think it's great and we want in."

"I'm not sure it will work or not. I just got the first unit today."

Marty said, "We know you will make this work. This project is different from your other ones. This could do a lot of good." Besides being a veteran, Marty had a Master's Degree in Chemical Engineering.

He worked at the DuPont facility at the other end of the city. Melinda was a freelance journalist and worked from home, making more money than the men did put together.

“Thanks for the confidence.”

Melinda took off, “I’ve got your business plan all worked out. You are going to map a few buildings around D.C. and we are going to show them to the FBI?”

“And what would the FBI do for us?”

“They will be your main customer. You are going to offer to map every embassy in the District. They will pay millions for that, millions.”

Marty followed up and said, “We are going to get the FBI to classify your system Top Secret. And here is why. We are going to make only one of these machines. Only one. We keep the patent rights a secret. We cater to our security agencies around the world. They won’t want this in any foreign government’s hands. Can you build the system into a plain looking utility van?”

“Whoa. Slow down.”

The food arrived just as Neil said those words. It was abundantly clear that Neil’s two friends were enthusiastic, to say the least. The plates were spread out and more wine was poured. They talked while they ate.

Marty said, “Here is another thing. We keep the company between the three of us. We hire no employees, except pilots.”

“Pilots?”, exclaimed Neil.

Melinda said, “Yeah. For the plane that carries the van.”

“Oh, I’m sorry. My head was still on the ground. You guys are getting way ahead of yourselves. I will know more when I see the system’s code, which might be later tonight. I will let you know what I find out as soon as I can. I promise.”

They switched the conversation to lighter subjects for the rest of dinner. They finished, said goodnight and took off on foot in different directions.

Neil got back home and sat down for some serious brainwork. He connected everything and turned his new machine on. It worked perfectly. He could get some minor readings just as it was configured. When he was finished getting familiar with the unit, he set it on a workbench in the second bedroom. He took some pictures of it from various angles and began the dissection.

He documented each step and took notes on ideas for improvements. He discarded the section that actually created the ground vibration. He would need a much more powerful one. Neil kept going until he

reached the control unit and separated it from the rest of the system taking pictures at every step. He carefully opened the control box and placed it on an anti-static mat. He disconnected the main circuit board and laid it on its own mat under a magnified light. He identified the main processor chip and took it out of its cradle with a chip puller tool. He mounted it into an eeprom reader that would take the programming from the chip and put it into computer code. He started the transfer and was done in a few seconds. Neil had no intention of using any of the proprietary code. He just needed to learn the interface from the chip to the motherboard. He thought he would be able to use the same one that came with the system.

Once the code was loaded into his computers, he left everything right where it was and took his laptop to a desk in the living room. It was now around midnight. Neil decided to call it a night and went to bed thinking of the new code he needed to write. By the time he fell asleep, he had it half way finished.

Neil spent the next few evenings working on the code. He had several setbacks that only helped him along after he solved the problems they illuminated. He would stop, install the code in the hardware and test and retest. After going back and forth between frustration and baby steps of success, he finished version one dot oh of the code in a week. He had to balance the code with the new more sensitive hardware and, by understanding the code, he understood the new upgraded sensors he needed. He ordered parts as he went and tested them step by step with the software being adjusted as the parts were delivered and were integrated.

He met with Melinda and Marty, who were now actively involved with the project, almost every evening as he worked. Marty helped with the testing while Melinda prepared to get the business organized. Neil never hesitated to think about going into partnership with them. Melinda and Marty insisted on fifty-fifty and Neil signed on to a LLP corporation with the two of them. Melinda went to work on everything -- white papers, business plans, presentations, etc. She interrupted the men often from their tinkering fun to give input to the white paper she was putting together from Neil's notes. She could only go so far without the technical input needed. They knew it was a necessary evil and appreciated her work.

Finally, the time came when they were finished with this side of the project. All the smaller technical parts were wrapped up along with the all-important software. It was now time for the big investment into a vehicle. Melinda and Marty lived in a condominium, so they also needed to rent a garage to work on the van's necessary modifications. No one hesitated with concerns about success. The completed work was enough proof of concept for them to keep moving forward. Melinda planned the purchase, estimated all



the costs, adjusted the business plan and came up with a figure.

With Melinda managing everything, they each kicked in twenty thousand dollars, rented a garage and bought a used 2005 Ford E350 bucket equipped van that had a working height of 34 feet. Neil and Marty calculated the necessary reach that the hammer unit would have to have to go from double parking to a sidewalk and the van they bought would be perfect. The hammer would be the size of a 55-gallon steel drum, but one foot taller and would replace the bucket at the end of the boom arm.

Melinda found a garage they could rent by the month and they leased it for three months, the minimum. She was frugal with the expenditures and made the men explain to her every purchase and why they absolutely needed it. Over the next few weeks, they borrowed all the equipment they could, rented rather than purchased, if possible and bought used rather than new when purchasing was required. They outsourced the cutting of the large, heavy piston that slammed into the ground hard enough to generate the sound waves read by the monitoring sensors. The length of time and the strength of the returning waves created a three-dimensional picture of the hidden insides of the structure. The piston needed a full-length collar with a very small tolerance for the boom to slide up and down. It was finished at the bottom with a six-inch steel plate that would lay flat against a sidewalk. The top housed the drive mechanism that fired the piston into the bottom plate. Neil designed a firing system that worked with compressed air. If he was right, the sound the boom made when it fired would be more felt than heard.

They moved everything to the garage and went to work building the rest of the system. The inside of the van was outfitted with computer racks, desks, chairs, monitors and a refrigerator. They had to beef up the arm to make sure it could handle the boom mechanism. They removed the bucket and replaced it with the hammer when it was delivered from the shop across town. Melinda took the bucket and sold it on eBay as fast as they would let her. The boom would swing the hammer up and over any cars parked parallel to the curb. Then it would ease the hammer to the sidewalk. The steel base of the hammer had a special plastic that molded itself to a rough sidewalk or street to create a snug fit so the force of the hammer blow would travel seamlessly into the ground and up into the target building. Once the picture was taken, the whole extension process was reversed and the boom would be stored. The whole process should take less than a minute from when they pulled up to a target, took the picture and pulled away.

One of the hardest chores turned out to be running the cables for the video cameras they were putting on the van and boom arm. The cable was fed through a wall of the van and brought up through the floorboards. They finally figured it out after two days of trying all kinds of tricks and watching YouTube videos, but there were lots of scraped knuckles along the way.

At the end of another week, they started testing the boom. Neil's software went through twenty-two

versions of code -- including one where he threw it all away and started from scratch -- before he felt satisfied that the invention was ready for outside tests. They found an abandoned building not too far away with nothing around for a block in any direction and took the first actual picture with the system. It was blurred and very disappointing to Marty and Melinda who were looking at the results. Neil knew he would have to make code adjustments to tune in the detail. It took him just a few minutes before he was ready again and they worked the hammer for another reading. This time the result was much better, clearly showing the basic outline of the building's studded walls. Another adjustments and the photo improved again. This went for the rest of the Saturday afternoon, with significant improvements made every time. Neil reached a point where he had maxed out the resolution on the monitor they were using and Melinda approved a forty-eight inch super-duper high-resolution monitor from Best Buy and a very expensive 36 inch roll plotter they had to buy new from a large computer store in town. To wrap up the prep work, they sent the vehicle out to be painted a standard white and orange that most utility vans use around the Virginia area. Melinda had magnetic signs made up to imitate vans for Pepco, AT&T and a private construction company.

With these new tools installed and the fresh paint job, they finished the system fine-tuning out in the real world. Marty and Neil dressed in their utility worker costumes and drove into the night to test on buildings around town. They also practiced and refined the process of parking, swinging the arm out, taking a picture, swinging the arm in and driving away. With no cars parked on the street, they could do it in fifty seconds. With parked cars, it took just short of two minutes. Melinda had plotted everything out making sure they didn't fire off the machine too close to the previous picture site. The work went slowly with Neil tuning the software after every picture until he was satisfied. With the new monitor, he was able to see rodents running around, what was on the front room coffee table and even the kind of insulation the house had built into it. The plotter yielded excellent reference blueprints and showed the details almost as well as the monitor. Marty and Melinda thought every picture looked perfect until Neil would explain the detail problem, fix the software and then reprint the picture. By comparing the before and after snapshots, they could appreciate his work. After detailed and excruciating examination of the product, they felt it was as good as it was going to get.

Now it was time to take some highly interesting pictures to sell the FBI on the business concept. Melinda set the choices for samples -- an office building and three embassies. Neil and Marty again put on their jumpsuits, tool belts and hard hats and went into town to complete gathering the marketing material. Melinda, dressed like a supervisor of the two-man crew, took videos and stills of the system in action right in front of the J. Edgar Hoover Building. Then they stopped by the Russian Embassy and got

a perfect picture in less than fifty seconds, start to finish. They went up the street and captured an image in front of the United Kingdom building. They wrapped up at the embassy of Mexico, finding nothing of interest there except a building that needed serious renovation. All in all, they got exactly what Melinda needed to make the pitch. She posted the photos to their secure website and printed out the wireframe plots to use during the presentation.

They all believed the detail yielded in the file would knock the socks off anyone with any sense. Now they needed to find an in at the Bureau, at least a friend of a friend. They started making calls and it did not take long to get a name.

## The Federal Bureau of Investigation

Neil called a friend who worked at Homeland Security and asked for a favor -- the name of a contact at the FBI. His friend quickly gave him the name and number of an old chum who was a Special Agent there, Fletcher Todorov. They knew each other from law school. After several attempts and messages left, he got hold of Fletcher and asked for a meeting. Neil would only tell him that he had an invention that could potentially be of service to the Bureau. During the phone call, it was evident that Fletcher was online looking up Neil in a few serious databases because of the questions he started off with. Fletcher's attitude changed in the middle of the call from patronizing to excited. Neil figured correctly that Fletcher had found him on the computer, briefly read his file and realized that he was not dealing with a crackpot. Fletcher prodded Neil to share more details, but was stonewalled and told would just have to wait. More than once, Neil said that Fletcher was going to have to trust him that he was not wasting his time.

Fletcher was obviously curious and set up a meeting for the next day. Neil told him his two business partners would accompany him and gave Fletcher their names. With that meeting set, Melinda made the trio meet to strategize on exactly how to present the project. They arranged their show and fine-tuned it as the meeting time got closer. Melinda's basic strategy was to play dumb to start with and let Fletcher think the next steps were his.

The next morning, dressed in their most serious business clothes, Neil, Melissa and Marty drove into our nation's capital, found a place to park, gathered their things and walked to the FBI Headquarters Building. They checked in at the front desk and sat down to wait. They had just gotten comfortable, when Special Agent Todorov came down personally to escort them to a conference room. They got special badges and he escorted them upstairs. When the trio entered the room, they were surprised to find there was no one there waiting. It was going to be just Fletcher to begin with. Melinda could tell they needed to get through to Fletcher before he would open the meeting up to others. Neil and Marty clearly understood what was happening as well.

There was a computer in the room connected to a projector and, with Fletcher's help, they pulled the PowerPoint presentation up on the screen. Melinda led Fletcher down the story path and let him think he was coming up with the business plan. He recognized the value in what he was seeing immediately and then told them this needed to be classified as soon as possible. This technology must not roll out to the world; it must remain a U.S. intelligence tool. They showed him the detailed pictures and matching blueprint plots. Fletcher got to see inside walls, desks and almost everything, even a large safe at the Mexican Embassy. Somewhere in there, Fletcher got it -- the whole idea and everything changed.

He asked to step out of the room to make a call. He said he wanted to get an expert to come look at the pictures. He came back in the room and waited a few minutes for his new invitees to show up. Five people walked in at the same time, introduced themselves and the presentation was started again. They quickly got to the pictures and everyone went to the display to study them closely. Words like “amazing”, “incredible” and “unbelievable” were used a lot.

After a short time of studying the pictures, the team finished the presentation. When they were done, a woman turning out to be Fletcher’s boss said, “So, if I understand this proposal, you wish our help to keep this machine a secret and you wish to offer your contracting services to map buildings for us and other United States security agencies. Did I get that correctly?”

Melinda said, “Yes. We are not going to build any other machines. We will maintain ownership and keep the trade secrets of the device to ourselves, of course. We feel that would be the prudent way to proceed considering the impact of other countries getting their hands on the machine. Also, from a business point of view, we want to maintain a monopoly on the technology, albeit a Top Secret monopoly.”

“This is all fine with me. Give us a ballpark figure of the cost to take pictures of thirty-three buildings around town for starters.” Thirty-three just happened to be the number of embassies present in D.C.

Melinda answered, “The price would be one hundred thousand dollars per building. That’s three point three million. We could deliver the product one week after we get our down payment. Of course, our service offers complete analysis and partnership with your analysts so that you get the most for your investment.”

Assistant Director Milano began an interrogation and wanted to see the whole presentation again. She asked for and was given access to all the pictures, the presentation and the plots. She grilled the three company principals and wanted to know what their motives were. When she was convinced that Neil, Melinda and Marty’s reasons for building the machine were ethical and well founded, she lightened up and started to make friends with them, asking about their families and plans for families. She was a good judge of character with a keen sense of situational awareness. After that, no one in the room blinked an eye at the numbers. Kathryn Milano apparently had broad sweeping powers. She turned to her people and said, “Let’s clamp down on the security concerns first.” She looked at the three partners and said, “Do you want a facility here in the Capitol?”

“We’re in Fairfax and we have a rented garage. We like that location in general but, when you put the first check in our hands, we will purchase a remote location that we would appreciate your assistance in securing.”

They wrapped up the logistics and Fletcher was assigned as their principal point of contact, at least for the time being. Around noon, takeout sandwiches magically appeared and they continued to work while eating. Milano agreed to all terms and conditions that Neil and his partners asked for. Milano added one requirement. The FBI would get exclusive priority for the duration of the first job. The friends were more than willing to let the FBI take command of the arrangements with the other agencies. Then they moved on to the contract and it was as simple as Milano making a call. Two attorneys appeared and went through the agreement on the spot. They finished the meeting, but Fletcher wanted to return to Fairfax and see the rented space and the van itself. Some of the others wanted to come along as well, including Deputy Director Milano. So, they all arranged for cars and caravanned out to the country.

Twenty minutes later, their parade of four cars pulled up to the garage. Two new agents got out and started taking pictures of the inside and outside of the building. During the discussions, Neil learned that these two fellows would be the first shift watching over the van and garage. It would now be guarded 24/7. The agents found a spot in the corner of the open room and claimed it as their command center. They pulled cases from the trunk of both cars, set them in a circle and opened them to reveal laptops, cameras, motion sensors and all the cabling to secure the garage as best as it could be for the time being.

They talked over the procedures and then all the visitors wanted a demonstration of the system. The friends gave a quick dog and pony show and everyone continued to be amazed at what they saw. Then official people started coming and going and coming and going. They were security advisors, computer setup technicians and building engineers of one kind or another. One person that appeared was a financial contracts administrator. He brought a check for half a million dollars and, just like that, the company known as Echoes was now well into the black, with its principals ready to quit their jobs and get into their new line of work.

The day only got more hectic. Some project security people blew in and took over the show for a few hours. They gave lectures and had papers signed. Marty's company website was replaced with one built by the FBI consultants that would be secure enough to store pictures, job records and any other files that needed to be kept secret. Three new Iridium satellite phones were given to Marty, Melinda and Neil for all work-related communications. They could text and talk to each other, Fletcher and the other FBI designated people on a secured line knowing it was all encrypted and protected. Marty talked to the technician and asked for new Samsung phones, tablets and Gear watches for the three of them. Then he made sure the Feds understood that Echoes would be hiring staff eventually and would want everything provided for them as well.

Finally, the Echoes principals wrapped up the show by taking a picture of the building they were in. Neil was able to show the space where the group was standing and identified if they were wearing concealed handguns. Almost everyone was. That demo alone had the gears turning in the heads of all present. They all realized they had just been handed a surveillance tool beyond any capability known to exist. A couple of times, the FBI General Council Office staff were consulted on the legality of what they were doing. It turned out that there was no law against it because it had never been thought about in anyone's head but Neil's. If any of the Senate or House members got wind of this capability, they would probably try to outlaw it. But, until then, these FBI people were quite content to take full advantage of the new partnership with Echoes. They would eventually have to share the secret with a few on select congressional committees, but that was down the road a bit.

The group celebrated their success with pizza delivered to the garage for everyone and they cracked a couple of six-packs of beer for those who were off duty. The suited men were replaced by ones looking like garage mechanics and cots with sleeping bags appeared. Melinda let them know that the trio would not be back for a few days and Neil, Melinda and Marty were driven home. Both households were issued surveillance cars parked outside their homes for their safety for a while.

Neil gave Spacequest a week's notice the next day. All he would say was that he was going to pursue an entrepreneurial enterprise and let them jump to their own conclusions. Marty's work was slow and he walked away the next day. It was kind of a lone wolf job anyway where he had made few friends. His boss only really saw him every month or so and simply wished him well, never even asking where he was going. Melinda began cutting off her writing commitments, finishing what she wanted and telling the others that she was changing careers. Marty tinkered around the garage the rest of the week and Melinda kept busy wrapping up her commitments. Early Saturday morning, accompanied by Fletcher, the Echoes team was ready to begin fulfilling their contract.

Fletcher turned out to be a really smart and very nice guy. He was not married, but had a girlfriend and he appeared to be in no hurry to change any status there. He was serious all the time to the point of being kidded about not getting jokes. His lack of humor only made him endearingly comical and pleasant to be around. He was all ready to offer anything he could to help make the project a success. In short, Special Agent Fletcher Todorov was a team player just like the three Echoes team members.

The foursome drove into the city wearing their utility worker outfits, but this was different. This was the real thing and they needed to produce results -- super results. Melinda had plotted out the route and they soon pulled up to the first building. They had to double-park, so cones were put out and flashers were

turned on. Marty and Fletcher were outside manning the street operation While Melinda was behind the wheel. They worked the arm into position, gave the signal to fire the piston, one-stepped back and waited for the thump. It went off and no one took notice. Marty raised the hammer, swung it back to the van and locked it down. He hopped inside and Melinda drove away.

Neil said, “Perfect picture. Excellent, just excellent.” Fletcher made a call to report the success and the team moved on to the next building. When they had completed five targets, the pictures started to degrade a bit. So Neil called off the work and they headed back to the garage. He spent the next day adjusting the software again. It seemed the ground around the embassies was quite different from what Neil had used to test the system in the Fairfax suburbs. Neil added a calibration function to handle varying soil conditions. When he was satisfied with the quality of the images, the team went out for another round. Neil was good with the detail and they fired through the rest of the buildings in two more days.

The Echoes partners made a big deal of showing each and every photo to the analysts who caught on quickly. They held a daylong briefing at their garage with a few new Bureau higher-ups in attendance. Their payment was slipped to Melinda somewhere during the dog and pony show. At the end of the meeting with everyone milling around and socializing, Fletcher wrapped up their first assignment with a request for more pictures. The powers-that-be at the Bureau wanted fifty-five more buildings “mapped”. It was three days’ worth of work if everything went smoothly. They accepted the contract and started the next day.

The buildings they were targeting made no sense to Neil, but so what. If the FBI wanted a picture, they were going to get one. It was a hard three days, with Melinda pushing the schedule as fast as she could. They only had to take one short break for adjustments, but otherwise it all went very smoothly. The system worked well and people even moved cars to help the “utility workers” out.

There was no celebration at completing this contract, just kind emails from the FBI management chain and a bank transfer. After talking it over, the Echoes trio asked Fletcher to inform his bosses of their plans to take time to take care of some things to make the business better. They were going to buy homes with acreage in the countryside around Fairfax. They would use an outbuilding at one of the houses to store the van and anything else they wanted to secure. This would be a temporary home for the van until Echoes could buy an airplane and store the van and plane together in a hangar somewhere. Fletcher would play an integral part of making the specific decisions. They trusted him and he trusted them.

The men slept in the next morning, while Melinda got up and shopped for a realtor. She used a trick her father had taught her to find the right one. She called the local office of three big national realty companies and asked to speak to the agent who sold the most last year. The offices all immediately tried



to pawn her off on the junior agent in the office watching the phones. She got the first name and made a call. The junior realtor picked up on the first ring. She was nice, but too busy to see them that very same day. Melinda left a message for the next agent when he didn't answer. She talked to the third candidate who immediately said some patronizing things to Melinda and the call ended quickly. The second agent called back and he and Melinda hit it off as he wisely started treating her like his daughter. Of course, he could see them this afternoon, but he had to move another appointment and would. He got friendlier when she told him they were shopping for two homes. He met the trio at his office and they all went for a drive in his very comfortable van.

Will Murdock, real estate agent, was in his sixties and it became evident that it wasn't the number of homes he sold that made him the highest selling agent -- it was the price of the homes he sold. He was very familiar with the entire territory and, after a short question and answer session, he knew just where to take them. They drove to Clifton, about eight miles out of Fairfax. Melinda fell in love with the area immediately.

Will started asking about price range and, when they told him around two million, he zeroed in on a couple of properties and drove directly to them from memory. The first was a newer home on twenty acres with a guest house and a pool. The far back yard was wild and Melinda liked that very much. She wanted to garden. Four houses later, she settled on the first one they visited. Neil was more of a challenge. He had to have something hidden from the road. There were only two choices and they were both over three million. Marty and Melinda pushed him to get the one with a large garage, pool, a guest house and a stable. He was reluctant to get such a big place until they helped him remember that the garage was going to be heavily secured to hold anything of value that the group might find. That meant he would have a security force living with him whenever there was anything stored.

Then the fun happened, Melinda told Will they wished to put in offers on two of the houses and they were going to pay with cash. They wanted the shortest closing possible and were anxious to get settled into their new lives. Fletcher approved the purchases and, when the offers were accepted, he scheduled a security company that the FBI recommended to fix up the new homes. Marty and Melinda's closing took two days, while Neil's took a week. They used the time to pack up their old homes and get rid of a lot of furniture they had made do with over the years. Melinda had several beautiful family heirloom pieces that were absolutely going to the new house.

Neil moved into a friend's guesthouse for the few days it took to close on his property. Marty and Melinda lived on blown up air mattresses for the first few nights until Neil's house closed and they could hire decorators. Again, Melinda picked the person -- a very nice Miss Nina with tastes that matched her

own. The men were wise and left this business to the alpha of the pack. Miss Nina would stage the homes in three days and wanted them out of the way while she worked. They could keep everything they liked and replace the rest to make everyone happy. All Marty and Neil could think about was the hi-tech toys they were going to build into the houses.

Neil drove up to New York to see his parents and Marty and Melinda went on a short camping trip into the mountains to stay away for the time Miss Nina needed.

Neal's parents were ecstatic over the news of his successful invention and business. He offered to give them money, but they were doing just fine and looked forward to visiting his new home. He spent the rest of his time seeing friends and going out to eat with his parents, although he made his mother cook a few special things he was craving. And she loved to do it for her only son. Neil did end up taking his parents shopping and bought his father a new car and his mother a new piano.

Marty and Melinda came back and met Neil at their home first with Miss Nina. She nailed it from the reaction Melinda had as she toured the home. Melinda ended up liking all of the furniture, but wanted to gather her own pictures and knickknacks. Then they all drove the mile to Neil's house. Neil thought the furnishings were nice but didn't really care, so Melinda made the choices. A few pieces of furniture went back, along with all the pictures and decorations. Neil wanted his home furnishings to be "sparse", as he put it.

Dulles International Airport was in flight line over their homes and very nearby. Neil and Marty talked to Fletcher about renting a hangar there for their aircraft. It turned out that the FBI and a couple of other agencies stored some planes there, could easily accommodate their airplane requirements and the hangars were already secure. Echoes asked the FBI for help in finding a plane to move the van around and they came up with an old Hercules C-130 that had just been overhauled. The Hercules had been recycled by an independent aircraft company and they were now ready to sell their investment. The FBI handled the purchase, bringing in inspectors and pilots. The plane was delivered two days later along with two resumes for private pilots that lived in Virginia. Echoes signed their first private contract as a company and now had a bunch of pilots ready when called to take the team anywhere. The van fit into the plane perfectly. In fact, there was room for three vehicles of the same size.

The FBI had put together another contract in downtown D.C. that they wanted finished before Echoes took time to do a private project. It was a lot of buildings and it seemed like the Bureau just wanted to have the whole city mapped. It took four days and brought in another six and a half million

*Nazi Echoes*

dollars. The Echoes team took care of that contract while the new garage on Neil's property was secured.

After a week of preparation, the Echoes team were ready for the real reason Neil created the system. They were going to take the van to Vienna and look for treasure the Jews had left behind in the floors and walls of their homes when the Nazis invaded.

## Viennese Echoes

The Echoes team and Fletcher went together on the first scouting trip. The idea was to walk the streets and select their first target buildings. Once that was finished, they would identify the owners and take the pictures. For the ones that had positive indications of hidden treasure, they would contact the owners and set up the visit where they actually enter the buildings.

While they were on the American Airlines flight, in first class, Fletcher came up with the idea to keep the van stored in the Hercules at the secured hangar of the city airport they were visiting as a practice. It was brilliant in so many ways. The FBI would be guarding the plane, so why set up two different locations when the van would be sheltered in the plane anyway from now on. And, they wouldn't have to shift procedures for a new, unfamiliar location. But, the secret of the whole operation was to get the van in, do its job and disappear all in the space of a few days. They figured the actual picture taking days in Vienna would be long ones once they got started.

However, this trip was half business and half pleasure. They were there for four days and walked every street where the pre-war buildings were still standing. They identified forty of them that fit the agreed-upon criteria and mapped out an operations plan. Melinda did the majority of the work and really just wanted the men around for company. The men worked out a schedule so that only one of them would accompany her, leaving the others free for anything they wanted to do -- and they shopped a lot. On one outing, Neil took Fletcher and went antique shopping. Neil hadn't planned on buying much, but he ended up having a dining room set of table and ten chairs, an armoire and a six-foot tall by five-foot wide chest of drawers made out of maple shipped home. He didn't blink at the prices and Fletcher, who was something of an antique buff, helped him negotiate a reasonable cost for everything. Marty spent all his time in ski and sport shops. He sent home close to ten thousand dollars' worth of equipment. Everybody bought clothes and Neil even had a couple of suits made with advice from Fletcher who pretty much wore them every day.

Fletcher however, only wanted to do one thing -- tour the Glock Handgun manufacturing plant fifteen miles away in Deutsch-Wagram. They all went and even Melinda enjoyed the visit. Neil was talking with Fletcher about the weapons they were watching being made and asked him to help him buy one when they got home. Of course, Fletcher agreed.

Melinda didn't get a lot of time apart from business, but she ate at all the best restaurants, did get to see the museums and go to the nightly music events. She took eighty pictures that were printed and filed in the folders created for each of the properties. Of course, the files had addresses, descriptions and any

other pertinent data she could find online. When Melinda was done, they packed up and caught a cab back to the airport for the flight home. They intended to return the day after next in their “new” C-130 Hercules aircraft.

During the whole trip, while Fletcher wasn’t babysitting, he was defining security contingency plans. He was thinking ahead at the variety of applications the system would have when the Bureau’s fellow agencies got wind of the new capability. He sent reports home every day with details on strategies to protect the Echoes principals, as they were known in the office. He included manpower estimates, costs, logistics and every other detail. He was basically preparing an operational plan complete with a budget request. The system pictures and findings were briefed at the White House and Neil, Melinda and Marty became national security assets. Fletcher’s budget was immediately approved and he now had a dozen agents and analysts working for him.

The return flight was long, but very nice in first class. They chit chatted on the plane, made more plans and tossed out ideas for discussion. When they were finally home, all of them immediately went to work. The van was loaded into the C-130 and the team saw that there was a whole lot of space left over. They went for a test flight and both Marty and Neil realized just how noisy and drafty the cargo section was. Marty had an idea, got online and had an insulated storage shed overnight shipped to them. Then he ordered sound insulation foam panels. The other two principals were skeptical at first, but Neil, having actually flown in the plane, knew Marty was on to something. Melinda bought folding cots, air mattresses, sleeping bags and a small table and chair set. They could always use the van if they wanted to work. Everything showed up and Marty’s idea was built out in no time. Once it was checked over and over, they took off for Vienna. It was midnight, but no one cared. Only three cots fit in the little room, so they split shifts during the nine-hour flight. It would be three in the afternoon when they landed and they wanted to move as quickly as possible. In and out was the plan, but Marty had a side agenda as well.

They landed, rolled the van out of the plane, secured it and went to work. The team drove into the beautiful city and, after a quick reconnaissance tour, they went to the first building. The streets were laid out with almost no curbside parking, so they were able to move quite rapidly. They took pictures of sixteen buildings before calling it quits at midnight local time. Almost every building had a hit on possible secret compartments, but Neil expected a special signature from the ones that contained something. He was looking for some kind of container, like a shoebox. The computer identified ten matches and two of the ten were in the same building. No one on the street paid any attention to the utility van working late at night. They were up at six in the morning and ready to go quickly. They completed

fifteen buildings before they stopped. It was mid-afternoon and Marty took off in a taxi with Melinda saying he would be back shortly. An hour and a half later, he came back with a bright yellow Tushek TS 600 super sports car that cost him a cool four hundred thousand dollars. It came from the manufacturing plant just outside of Vienna. It was beautiful and fast. It looked like it was doing one hundred miles per hour even when standing still. He drove it up the ramp of the plane and tied his dream car down for the ride home tomorrow. They continued mapping the buildings and finished halfway through the daylight. When they were done, they grabbed takeout food, drove to the airport, pulled into the C-130 and took off for home. They ate, reviewed some of the pictures, took naps and repeated the routine again before they landed at home at Dulles International Airport.

After landing, the team unloaded the plane and drove home in two vehicles, the one they had taken to the airport and the sports car they brought home. They agreed to catch up on life at home and then meet the day after to review the Vienna pictures.

The Echoes principals all used the day to sleep and get their new homes together. Neil actually never had the time to shop for groceries. He was waiting for his parents to visit and help out in that area; but they were busy, so he finally had to breakdown and shop. Per the agreement, Melinda and Marty met at Neil at his house to look at the Vienna images. Out of the forty buildings, a total of twenty-two matches in eighteen of the targets were identified. There were a whole bunch of possible hits, but the computer filtered them out. The computer actually prioritized the samples and gave them a perfect game plan for the next phase of the operation. Melinda prepared all the documentation, found an interpreter, detailed out the ownership of the buildings and even picked out the clothes for the work ahead for everyone. It was all coming together and they were excited at the possibilities.

Melinda would approach the building owners, tell them about what they might find and cut a deal. Neil and Marty would be the workers who actually cut into the walls and floors. They had a handyman carpenter contractor lined up to do the repairs. The team really needed the contractors for their tools for starters. They felt they planned everything as much as possible to hunt for secret treasures, so booked the flight. Fletcher came along again, of course. He had a special job this time and that was to get the treasure, should they find any, out of the country and back to the United States. The last thing they wanted was to get their discoveries tied up in some international jurisdiction battle.

The first buildings targeted were owned by individuals and not corporations. Melinda was still trying to figure out how to deal with the management companies, but a person could be individually reasoned with. She already had appointments with three personal owners.

The foursome landed in Vienna again, taxied to their hotel and checked in. They met a bit later and

went out to dinner together. They had typical heavy Austrian food with a nice wine then walked the short distance back to their rooms. Melinda had to meet with the interpreter and all the men called it a night.

At nine o'clock the next day, they met the first owner outside of his building. They timed the visit to occur when the least amount of people would actually be inside the building. The owner was a jolly man in his sixties and clearly thought they were foolish. But he did think it would be fun, so he agreed. He and the interpreter went on and on but, in spite of his curiosity, the owner got nothing more than Melinda had told him. Melinda made it very clear, both verbally and in writing, that anything found would be returned to the family that hid it. If they could not find the rightful owner, then and only then, would the discovered property be sold and the building owner would be given five percent. The process would take time to jump through all the legal hoops. There was another stipulation -- secrecy. The wireframe model of the building they had to show to the owner was a business secret. They had the building owner sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement with the stipulation that, if he leaked anything about the existence of the picture or any of the Echoes team, he would forfeit his share.

The building was an apartment complex and the people in the two target apartments were gone for the day, working as the team had hoped. The owner chatted and laughed while he let them in. They climbed two flights of stairs in the main entryway and quickly arrived at the first apartment. The owner opened the door with his keys and led them into the fairly large, open front room. Neil set a case down, opened it and pulled out a portable scanner. Marty had a laptop open with the building picture zeroed in on the area where they were now standing. He led them to the first place, an interior wall in the master bedroom. There was a chest of drawers in front of the spot and they had to carefully clear the top of it of all the porcelain figures that decorated it. With those safe and sound, the men moved the chest aside easily. Neil went to work with his scanner and identified the exact area they needed to open to allow a box inside to be freely removed. Marty stepped forward, got down on his hands and knees and cut the hole out with a portable cutter. He pried the small wall section out until they all could see a metal box. He tugged at it after Melinda took some pictures, but needed Neil to help him get the box out. It was heavy and the opening was tight. Together they lifted the box to a clear spot on the floor. Melinda took more pictures and finally reached over and pulled the latch to open it. She lifted the lid back to reveal a few thousand plain gold rings. The box weighed close to twenty pounds. She took more pictures and then had Marty get out a portable scale they had brought along. He weighed the box of rings and found it to be twenty-two pounds. He showed Melinda, she worked her cell phone calculator and said, "This is around \$400,000 worth of gold. Here is a note." She handed it to the interpreter, who read it aloud in English and then in Austrian for the building owner.

*Dear Joseph, I am so glad you came back for this. But go back to America and make it your home. This was my retirement from the jewelry profession when the time came. Every once in a while, I would take the tiny flakes of gold that were lying around after grinding and pour them into a ring. Now they can help you start a new life. Mutti and I love you, Papa*

The interpreter added, “The back of the note has this written on it.”

*Abraham Johann Solomon b. Dec 22<sup>nd</sup> 1900*

*Rebecca Eloise Craig Solomon b. June 2<sup>nd</sup> 1902*

*Joseph Edward Solomon b. April 6<sup>th</sup> 1920*

Neil quietly said, “This was what I was hoping for.” Melinda and Marty both stopped and hugged him.

Melinda continued to lead the charge. “We need to stop and count the rings. I need a good inventory to keep our agreement with Mr. Wagner.” This was all interpreted to him and he smiled and agreed. Melinda went to work inventorying the rings with the interpreter’s help. Neil called in the crew to repair the wall. The men showed up just as Melinda was finished and ready to go. The group moved on to the next apartment, which was up one flight and toward the back of the building.

This apartment’s hidden box was in a floor. It actually worked out well because they went in through the ceiling of the apartment below. Melinda took the obligatory pictures when the hole was opened. Neil pulled out an ornate wooden box and set it on a table they had cleared. More pictures were taken and finally Melinda opened the box. On top of the items inside was a stack of many family photos with writing on the backsides. Then there was paper money, long since worthless and jewelry, lots of jewelry. There were diamond and gold rings, bracelets and necklaces of gold, silver, most with diamonds and other precious gems. They laid it all out, took pictures of everything and left the workers to clean up. They signed more papers with Herr Wagner regarding what they found and said they would be in touch as they left for the next targeted building just a block away.

Once outside, the team had to make a quick stop to secure the treasures they had found. Neil gave the signal to the interpreter and she made a call. Five minutes later, a small armored car pulled up and two armed men got out. They placed the boxes in secured canvas bags, locked and sealed them and gave a receipt to Melinda. The bank guards drove away to a local institution that had been prepared to receive



and store the things that were found. They told the drivers to stay alert -- there would likely be more.

The next building had been converted into legal offices that held one firm. It was a four-story structure and still had the classical air to it. They picked this next building because there were two packages in it as well, just like the first building. Melinda, through the interpreter, told the owners of the second building the canned story and showed the pictures on her laptop. They walked to the office, asked the associates that lived there take a break and pulled out the hand scanner. They taped out the cut and pressed the two men for a decision. They talked amongst themselves and finally let the team go to work. The law firm specialized in immigration issues and so the place was not a hot bed of activity. Marty and Neil got the impression the two men would love to have any excuse to break up the regular office monotony. But, they were both conservative and weren't sure they believed the story anyway. The wall was opened without making a big mess and Marty and Neil carefully pulled out a beautiful wooden box. They opened it and it was empty. Melinda still took pictures of everything she could think of, even the two men holding the empty box. They left the box for the office and had the contractor start to work repairing the wall. The next spot was in another office three doors down. They shoed two quietly working women out and Neil opened the wall. A second, similar wooden box was hidden there and it held newspaper clippings of the lives of a family. Melinda went to work taking the pictures and making notes. Neil had opened the hole large enough to get a good look in between the studs of the next section. He stuck his flashlight in the opening and saw five tubes of rolled up canvas. He got Marty to help, gently pulled the tubes out and handed them off to Melinda. She laid them out on a table and unrolled the first canvas. It was a Monet and so was the next. Both were paintings of Monet's flower gardens at his home in Giverny, France. They opened the third and it was a Picasso and the next one as well. The last one was a large Rembrandt. The two law partners were drooling over the potential money and were reminded of the agreement. But Melinda had to talk a long time to them before they would continue to honor their word. They called for the bank guards, picked up the box and paintings and walked outside just as the armored car pulled up. Everything was quickly and quietly taken away.

The team walked around the corner to the next building and went through the introduction with the owner. This owner spoke excellent English and that made it a lot smoother. They reached an agreement quickly and went to retrieve the stashed items. When they opened the wall, they discovered an old electrical conduit box that a lazy worker probably threw in the wall to avoid tossing away. Everyone was disappointed and the wall was patched by the contractor who was following them around. The fourth building was just next door and the team went through the same process with that building's owner. This time, when Neil opened the wall, all that was inside was an oddly framed out bunch of studs. Again, the

contractor repaired the wall and they said goodbye to the owner. The next and last building for the day was a block and a half down the main street. These owners were a couple of young people who actually lived in the building. They quickly agreed to the contract and Neil made a big hole in their pantry. There was a cigar box inside and, when it was removed, the girl actually jumped up and down with excitement. They opened the box and found jewelry -- a few rings, bracelets and one necklace -- nothing of great value, but not nothing. Melinda followed protocol, took pictures of everything and wrote notes on the finds, whether it was nothing or something. That took care of all the buildings that were owned by people and not corporations. From here on out, the team had to deal with management companies.

Late that afternoon, Melinda went to work with the interpreter calling the companies. She had the next morning filled, but not the afternoon. The team celebrated the success they were having with a nice late dinner. They were all tired and ended the night early knowing they had a big day again tomorrow.

Before they could go to the actual buildings, the team had to take a trip downtown a couple of miles away and meet with the different management companies that handled the building for the invisible corporate owners. They got permission from all eventually and arranged a decent schedule for the rest of the day. Around ten thirty, they finally got into the first building. The team entered the apartment and quickly found the wall where a package was hidden. They had to significantly rearrange some furniture before they could cut into the wall. They found another cheap wooden cigar box. Neil took it out, opened the box and found Austrian pre-war cash, all worthless. Neil put the crew to work and moved out to the next building. It too was an apartment, but this item was in the floor of the master bedroom. The boards came up easily without too much damage and this time, Fletcher pulled the box out of the floor. They opened the box and found the personal knickknacks of a small boy. Melinda documented the find and had the contractors seal up the floor.

Melinda had not been able to schedule more appointments for the day, so gave the men the rest of the day off while she and the interpreter made calls from the hotel. Marty took off and went shopping for clothes, while Neil went looking for antiques with Fletcher. Neil scored a couple of really nice pieces as he and Fletcher strolled down the main street where the antique shops seemed to gather. They timed their route carefully so as to arrive back at the hotel for dinner with Melinda and a night at the opera -- Mozart's Don Giovanni. Fletcher had wisely begged off, while Neil fell asleep halfway through the third act. Marty almost nodded off several times, but Melinda kept nudging him awake.

Things went well the next morning for a while. The team went four for four on packages and found more jewelry, gold coins, pictures, notes and a bag of diamonds. All these went by secured courier to the bank. They stopped for a lunch of soup and sandwiches at a local café before attacking the three buildings

scheduled for the afternoon. Two of the buildings had valuables. These finds weren't a lot, but they weren't peanuts either. Neil guesstimated that the two boxes valued at \$200 thousand. The loot made the trip to the bank to be stashed away. The afternoon's work yielded four full boxes. Although they were stuffed with very valuable items, Neil was disappointed because there were no notes, pictures or anything that would help the team find the rightful owners. They would have to rely on the old archived city records for any clue at all.

The time changes and the work finally caught up with the group and they called it an early night. Neil was exhausted but couldn't sleep. He went out into the warm night air and strolled around the neighborhood. He walked by several of the houses they were going to look at tomorrow. He stopped in the front of one of them and studied it for a moment. He remembered it well from the pictures, but something was off. This particular house was on a street where all the buildings had garages on the street with the living quarters on the three floors above. He realized what was wrong, but it would have to wait for the morning light.

The next day, he made sure the house he had looked at the previous night was the first on the list. The manager showed up, everything was agreed upon and they went to work. What had been troubling Neil was that the garage was built into a hill with dirt on the three sides of the brick walls. That meant the system could not look into the walls as clear as it could when the wall was free standing. He had studied the wireframe models and noticed the garage had tools laid up against one wall. Behind the tools, inside the wall was more rolled up artwork. Neil could recognize the silhouette now that he had seen it before. They opened the wall to find twelve masterpieces all nicely wrapped and protected. No note, no clue of any kind accompanied the paintings. If they were to be returned, the paintings themselves would have to hold the secret.

The last three buildings were run by management companies and the team could not come to terms with the company employees. They basically thought Neil and his group were crackpots. All in all, the team had searched fourteen buildings and found eleven stashes of "treasures", some worthless, some with just papers, some with a little value and a few worth a fortune. They had the items shipped home by special courier, courtesy of the FBI and State Department.

The team stayed a few more days and caught a train to Venice for an impromptu vacation. Neil continued antique shopping, while Marty shopped for more hi-tech and high speed toys. Melinda was content and toured the tourist sites in between shopping. They traveled to Rome for more of the same activities and were planning to stay for four days. They were there three days when Fletcher got a call to get home immediately.



## Helping Somalia

The Echoes team were on the next flight home and made the best of the long trip talking about the future of the company. Things were going well and they were afraid it might come crashing down on them somehow. The group landed at Dulles and were hustled off into waiting cars and vans. They bypassed the airport and went straight to the hangar where the Echoes airplane was waiting. They were told what was going on as soon as they entered the hangar. Two of their newest special friends were there to meet them - Bob and David were dressed in sweats and tennis shoes. Both men were quite Black and both were yawning. It was obvious they had been gotten out of bed. It was midnight, after all.

The airplane and company were going to Somalia. It seemed that a former pirate was going to attempt a takeover of the government with the bootie he had gained from his profession. The coup would be financed with money stored in the town of Eyl and the CIA wanted the spot identified with the Echoes system. The challenge would be the fact that there really were no utility vans in the area. The Echoes team would be disguised as an oil searching van.

Bob and David had brought some equipment, which was loaded quickly into the waiting and prepped airplane. They all climbed aboard as the engines started and the plane taxied into the cool dark night. The plane was off the ground and reached cruising altitude in a matter of minutes. The entire group hunkered down for the long flight and got some rest.

The first leg was to Munich. After an eighteen-hour flight and a time change, they arrived in Munich at midnight, where they hooked up with a Special Operations force of twelve men -- all Black to look like Somalian natives. They had a van exactly like the Echoes van, painted to match what an oil company van in Somalia might look like. The vans were stressed with dirt to look fairly "real" to the casual observer. The twin van was loaded with communications gear and weapons. The whole group hung around the airport and talked about the mission, while the vans were reconfigured and the Echoes van painted.

The team was heading to the desert twenty miles from Eyl, pattering in from the west. The plan was to arrive in the town around midafternoon, the laziest time of the day for the locals. It was a nine-hour flight to Eyl with a two-hour time zone shift. That meant they had a three-hour layover in Munich. The soldiers took the time to teach Neil, Marty and Melinda how to use a weapon and fit on body armor under their clothes. This frightened them, but the soldiers were confident the trio would be safe and that they could protect the three principals against anything.

Marty had spent four years in the military and did a tour in Iraq. He was a chemical engineer before officially changing careers to be a part of Echoes. He could relate to the soldiers and took the lead on

interfacing with Melinda and Neil. He wanted Melinda to remain behind in Munich, but she would not hear of it. She dressed like a soldier and tucked her long brown hair under a cap for the entirety of the mission. They ate a good meal during the break and checked the system to be sure all was calibrated and otherwise working properly.

After they landed in the desert, the idea would be to take the two vans into town and find the stash of money. After the money was located, Fletcher, two soldiers, Neil, Marty and Melinda would drive back to the airplane where the pilots would be protecting it. When they were clear and safe, the remaining men would deal with the money in whatever form it was -- currency or gold.

Melinda went to the BX on the base, accompanied by Sgt. LeBoof and bought pizzas, other fast food and a microwave oven. They had plenty of time to set everything up and the men even expanded the little shed inside the plane with stuff they found next to the hangar where they were parked. More cots and air mattresses showed up complete with blankets. Just before they took off, they got one more delivery of a dozen sets of nice fleece sweat suits, tee shirts, flight jackets, socks and shoes. These were all stowed away and the time came for them to take off.

One last check was made on everything when one of the men noticed they were short pillows and made a quick call. Pillows were brought to the plane on the taxiway by a security van and the plane took off into the night heading south by southwest.

The team wasn't in the air very long before a card game of Hearts started and music was turned on. Three of the team were having a friendly conversation about who could breakdown and assemble their handguns fastest. A few bucks were thrown on the table and two more men joined in the competition. It was like watching cymbal crashing mechanical monkeys on steroids. The competitors finished and the timers awarded the win to Sgt. Waterson with a time of forty seconds flat on his Sig P227. He won serious money -- \$4 -- and started a coffee can with loose change for good luck on board the plane. Waterson got everyone to kick in the change that was in their pockets to boost his winnings of four bucks.

The team took sleeping shifts and things got quiet for a while. A few hours before touchdown, some of the men started to get hungry and went to work on preparing food. That brought everyone to life and the food just kept coming and coming for a bit.

One of the soldiers showed Marty how the soldiers' van was armored. This utility van had bulletproof glass with plenty of Kevlar plates around the reinforced body and suspension. Marty immediately went to Fletcher and told him that he wanted one.

The group cleaned up, did comm checks again, ran through the plan together and got ready for the

landing. They came in low over a small hilly range of sandy dirt and floated down in the solitary desert. The vans were unloaded and the team began the slow hot drive into the town. Once they got to the road, they made okay time doing forty miles an hour. There were six likely targets, with Neil identifying two more. That meant eight pictures needed to be taken. But first, they were going to stop by the local police station to show permits that had been ginned up and put into the system a week ago.

Neil considering the soil and one-story buildings that were sparse and calculated the coverage he would get from each picture. He figured he could do the whole town with six well-placed pictures. They stopped the van at the first spot, while the military van went to the police station. Neil and Marty got out of their vehicle and quickly took a picture. They moved on to the next site and did the same.

The van at the police station had now been parked eight minutes. The Echoes primaries moved on to the third site and took the picture quickly, but there was notice from some men who were just hanging around their meager homes. The team saw one of the men use a cell phone as they moved out. The resident was obviously warning someone about the Echoes activity. When they reached the fourth site, they got out of the van and prepared to swing the boom over, when a truck with two men in the front cab and four riding in the bed pulled up behind them. The two soldiers accompanying the Echoes team took over.

The four men in the bed of the truck were armed with old AK47s. They were telling the team to stop what they were doing. The Special Ops men were arguing back in Somali that they had permits and would be done in a few minutes. The team's second utility van pulled up behind the locals and more Special Ops men got out, waving permits. The Somali driver looked over the papers after conferring with someone on a phone, then allowed the team continue their work. They wrapped up the picture-taking and decided it would be wise to head back to the airplane to decide what to do next. They made the trek back to the plane easily, quietly and quickly. Once back, Neil studied the pictures and realized there was a problem. They didn't find a hidden cache, they found three. This changed the rest of the plan.

The tactical operation was laid out per standard rules. Go in at four a.m. with the element of surprise on your side. Possess overwhelming force and overwhelming numbers, neither of which they had. They decided to go with the best they had which was to split up into three groups. Neil and Melinda were to watch the plane and cover the escape route. The pilots were to stay with the plane under any circumstances. One very good thing was the fact that the pictures were of such clarity, the team knew what they were up against. One basement held a pallet of cash. It was going to be destroyed. The other two targets held bricks of metal, most likely gold. They calculated the amount and estimated close to four thousand pounds split equally between the two remaining pits. Moving it was going to be rough.

They discussed the plan over and over, making adjustments as ideas were considered. Finally, the time came to return to the town. They loaded up and took off. The trip was longer in the dark, but it went by quickly. At the edge of the town, two of the men left the others and headed for the police station. They entered through the unlocked front doors and found one man behind a desk reading and another asleep. The soldiers secured the two in the station, signaled the others to begin and headed to the house with the cash. Three pairs of the soldiers went to each of the three buildings and easily secured the residents sleeping quietly. They had to kill two of the sentries when they went for their weapons. The vehicles were brought around to each of the houses with the gold or silver bars and parked close to the windows that they hoped to use to toss the bricks through.

Fortunately, these houses were distanced far enough away from other homes and they drew no attention to themselves at all. So far, all was going to plan. Remotely detonated charges were set to destroy the paper money and the soldiers joined the rest of the team to help move the gold. The bricks turned out to be all gold, which made little difference to the men who had the unpleasant task of moving the twenty-five pound bars. They got started at the two houses and managed to get a decent process going. They were about halfway through with another fifteen minutes to go when lights went on at one of the residences next door.

The men watching the backs of the group removing the gold stepped in and were ready for the man next door when he came out to see what was making the noise. He stepped onto his porch and was pushed to the ground. That was done quite silently, but what they missed was his wife right behind him. She saw what was happening, shut the front door behind her and started screaming. Before the men could stop her, she woke up the whole neighborhood.

The gold movers immediately kicked it into overdrive now that they did not have to be so quiet. It didn't take long before men with weapons reached the perimeter of the stash houses. When they saw the soldiers, they opened fire. Flares were shot over the urban commandos and they were picked off quickly. The surviving commandos retreated to safety and stopped shooting. But trucks started arriving loaded with armed men. The Special Ops men took advantage of the lag and spread out enough to easily hold the Somalis off in the one direction they were coming from. There was sporadic fire that missed everything from the locals and a few of them got picked off for their trouble.

The firefight at the second location started when a few more residents investigated the noise. The first residents to shoot were taken out quickly, but more were streaming in. For a few moments, it seemed like everyone was firing a steady stream of bullets. The Somalis came in too close and were blown up by claymore trip-wired mines. They scattered waiting for reinforcements and that gave the gold moving team



time to finish up. This group had the armor-less Echoes van, but two of the soldiers managed to drive it down the street into the safety of darkness.

The team leader ordered the cash house to be blown up. That took some of the pressure off the first team and allowed them to finish loading the gold. The town's men had moved around where they could get a shot at the utility van and opened fire. The soldiers returned fire with a couple of RPGs and that ended that threat. They set charges around the cash house and drove away. Once safely down the street, they blew the house. The explosion gave them time to meet up with the other vehicle and together they took off as fast as they could.

They turned the corner that would take them onto the main road out of town and were greeted by a roadblock of vans and Somali men all firing at them. The armored van had taken the lead position and took the hail of gunfire with no damage at all. Two soldiers jumped out either side of the van and fired RPGs into the roadblock, making a gap large enough to drive through. The men hopped in and the drivers floored the gas pedals as they barreled through the burning debris. Just past the flames, the two vans switched positions allowing the armored van to take the fire from the rear again, protecting the Echoes van. The men from the roadblock got in the remaining working cars and took off in hot pursuit. They were joined by five more cars filled with angry town people, all shooting wildly up the road. The two fleeing vans had their lights off with the drivers wearing night-vision goggles and that made them very hard targets with the eighth of a mile lead they had on the convoy.

The soldiers chucked out a couple of well-timed grenades and blasted the lead car off the road. The remaining cars just went around and kept going. The vans were faster than the cars and kept expanding the lead as they drove on. The shooting had stopped, but the cars were still coming. About a quarter mile away from the turn off the road toward the airplane, Melinda and Neil were waiting with a couple of boxes of road spike strips. The vans stopped and several men got out and helped lay out the strips. They were cammo-colored and blended into the dusty dirt road perfectly. The cars got close enough to see the vans and started to fire again. Melinda, Neil and the others flew into a van and both vehicles sped off toward their waiting airplane.

They just made the turn when they saw the Somali cars hit the spikes and stop dead. All the pursuers got out of their cars and took off on foot across the desert toward the waiting airplane. It would be close as to whether the Somalis would get within firing range before the takeoff. The soldiers in the van saw this move and five of them jumped out to slow down the advancing Somalis. They ran across the sand fanning out in a line covering the route of the men chasing them. They had time to set enough trip-wire charges to scare the men into slowing down when they hit them.

The vans reached the plane and drove up the ramp. The pilots had repositioned the C-130 for a quick departure. They had the props turning when the second van was safely inside. The five soldiers outside reached the plane as it was ready to taxi and climbed up the ramp as the plane started to taxi. They all watched the explosions go off in the desert as the Somalis reached the booby traps. In a matter of seconds, the Hercules was in the air and away.

Once safely airborne, the people stripped off their weapons and body armor. They all drank a ton of water and started to decompress from the mission. Then much to their pleasant surprise, Melinda pulled out ice cold Budweisers for each of the men. A few refused with their buddies trying to take the one offered to them. Melinda shooed them away like a mother cat telling them there was another case in the fridge.

Then all at once the men wanted a look at the gold. They went to work counting the bricks, ending with a total of two hundred twenty-one. They weighed one brick as a sample and it came to exactly twenty-three pounds. That made the whole load worth close to ninety one million dollars. They all got a kick out of that figure. At that point, one of the men who had set the charges on the cash,house opened up his jacket and pulled out fifteen one hundred dollar bills. His commanding officer started to say something and the man said, "Look, I have celebratory cigars for everyone." He pulled them out of his pack and continued, "And what better way to celebrate by lighting them with a one hundred dollar bill." With that, almost all the men took a cigar and made a big deal about lighting them with the cash. Melinda even took one. The soldier who provided the cash made sure that all the bills were destroyed. Rules were rules and orders were orders after all.

Fletcher and the two agents from Washington had to make a few conference calls regarding the mission status and disappeared for a while. The men started to break down their equipment and get cleaned up. They loved the new sweats and other clothes and soon were settling down for some sleep. Fletcher appeared briefly out of the shed and asked Neil, Melinda and Marty to join him and the other two agents.

There was a video conference going on with Fletcher's boss, the Commanding Officer of the soldiers and a suit from the CIA, or so it was assumed. When the Echoes primaries appeared, Fletcher's boss, Agent Milano, said, "Ah, there you are. Thank you so much for your work. You helped a few million people out today. Here's the thing, we really had no idea what we would find when we decided to move on this operation. Now, we have a problem, a ninety one million dollar problem." She waited while the team understood and went on, "So, we have an idea. We want to give it to your company."

Melinda said, "Why would you do that? What's the catch?"

“We want you to return it to its rightful owner.”

“And who would that be?”

“The Somali pirates were paid ransom after ransom for hijacked ships over the years. You can return the gold to the shipping companies, their insurance companies or whomever you choose. We simply believe that you three will do the right thing with the money. We trust you.”

Marty said, “Well for starters, we need to upgrade our van if you are going to keep sending us on these types of missions. How about we accept some of the gold for payment for this operation and maybe even the next few?”

Agent Milano said, “Done. Thanks again. We’ve got to run and brief the President on your success.”

The connection was cut and that was that. Echoes was now funded for the lives of the founders. They all laughed and hugged and high fived each other. They were suddenly hungry and went out where the others were chowing down. They joined the stream of people being served by one of the men who had designated himself “Chef Nuke.” They ate and settled in for the rest of the flight. Everyone exchanged phone numbers with the men and agreed to stay in touch as best as they could considering their life styles. They grabbed some sleep and woke to a late afternoon touchdown in Munich. While the armored van had its gold removed, the weapons and equipment were unloaded and, finally, the van was rolled down the airplane’s cargo ramp, Melinda made another trip to the PX and returned with more of the same items to restock the aircraft. She made it feel like a home with all the things that matter -- a good bed, reasonably good food and comfortable clothes. They said goodbye to the soldiers and reboarded for the trip across the Atlantic.

As soon as they took off, Melinda asked for a favor. She wanted to spend a few days in Paris before returning home. Everyone agreed and the arrangements were made. They landed in Paris at six p.m. The plane was parked at a remote friendly airfield and a squad of soldiers arrived to guard it for a few days. Now Echoes had FBI, CIA, Homeland Security, the State Department and the military as special friends.

They all enjoyed Paris, although the CIA men were ordered to catch the next flight and come back home. They had another job to take care of. The Echoes crew ended up staying in Paris for three days enjoying the sites and the food. Fletcher went off by himself most of the time leaving Neil to feel like the third wheel on a bicycle with his two married best friends. Even with his two best friends, he often felt lonely.

## The Solomons

Neil, Marty, Melinda and Fletcher arrived home and dove into laying out the treasures in Neil's security garage. Once everything was safely organized, they split up for the next few days to catch up on life chores. A bunch of Neil's antiques had arrived and he called Miss Nina for help. She immediately came, looked over the purchases and loved everything. He let her know that more were coming and showed her the pictures of everything. She called her moving team and had some of the furnishings she had decorated with taken away. They filled in the empty spots with Neil's purchases and left room for the next batch to arrive. Neil enlisted the services of the agent watching the garage to make some choices on fabric colors for some chairs that needed to be reupholstered and they hung out until it was time for Neil's friends to show up.

Marty and Melinda came over for grilled steaks and to examine the things they had found in Vienna. Having no idea how to locate the rightful owners of the items, they called Fletcher to ask his advice. Fletcher actually didn't live too far away and quickly joined the group. They sat around and reviewed the articles until they reached the next natural topic, how to find the owners.

Fletcher said, "Piece of cake. Between the FBI and all our friends around the globe, we can locate anyone, as long as they aren't hiding or just don't want to be found..." His voice trailed off as he remembered all the persons of interest the FBI was looking for right now.

Melinda said, "That service is kind of pushing our relationship, don't you think?"

"Not at all. It's easy and you guys even have clues. Like I said, piece of cake. If it makes you feel better, you can do the next job for free."

Neil said, "That actually works for me." He looked at Marty, saw his frown and said, "Fair is fair. We've got a sweet thing going and I'd like it to stay that way. We are helping our country and they are helping us keep it a secret. We all understand the advantage the Echoes system gives our nation and, at this minute in time, our country needs all the advantages it can get. Right now, I just want to see the faces on the people we will be returning these wonderful heirlooms to."

Marty said, "Well, the FBI did help me get my car home and bypass all the," he hesitated and then found the words, "red tape." Everyone laughed at that one.

Fletcher said, "Excellent. Now let's talk about each of these things you found, one by one and see what we can figure out on our own."

They started with the obvious things. They would have the archives in Vienna searched for any records of who was actually living in the buildings at the time of the *Anschluss*. Then they talked about

the gold rings.

It was the month of June in the year 1938 in Vienna, Austria. Abe Solomon was at his jewelry shop when one of the Stormtroopers came inside and let him know that his shop was closing down immediately. He had known this was an eventuality and followed all the orders the soldiers gave him. The Stormtroopers searched the store one last time and took everything left in his inventory. That was minimal as they had visited several times before. When they were done, they made Abe lock the store and hand over the keys. He went home quietly trying to slip through the crowds that now hated him. Last year, he was a well-respected businessman with both Gentile and Jewish friends. Today, he was a member of the lowest and most reviled class, all because of the Nazis and their idea of a master race.

He walked the few blocks to his house and was spit on twice by people that recognized him. He entered his home and found his wife in the kitchen preparing dinner.

She said, "They stopped by today and searched again."

Abe hugged her and said, "I'm sorry. They searched my store and took the last of my inventory. They shut down my business."

"Oh, Abraham. How will we survive?"

"I do not know, but God will provide as He always does."

"That's easy to say with a pot of soup on the stove and a warm bed for the night. But tomorrow or the next day..." She broke down in tears. Abe tried to console her as best he could, but it was difficult with him feeling more afraid than she did. At least they had sent Joseph away last year when they still could. He stashed the rings away six months ago and they were still a secret. That was something.

Without an income, they only had enough money for two more months' rent. Thank goodness, it was summer and the weather was nice. They rationed their food and money and felt they could hold out for six more weeks.

It was only one week later when the knock on the door came that they had been dreading. It was four a.m. and the soldiers entered their home and told them to get their coats. They each could take a small suitcase and they filled them quickly. They were loaded into the back of a large truck that already was half-full of people, many their friends. The truck moved on to the next street and picked up enough people to overfill it. Then it drove to the railyards where the people were loaded into cattle cars for the ride to the camps. The train stopped at two of these detention camps before Abraham and Rebecca were taken off. They were immediately split up and given bunkroom assignments. Rebecca was the first of them to die inside one of the large gas chambers. Abraham never knew it. He was murdered a day later. Both bodies

were burned in the furnaces that were running day and night.

Joseph Edward Solomon, born April 6, 1920 was just seventeen when he arrived in New York in June of 1937. He had enough money to attend university and enrolled at the University of Virginia to work towards a degree in Engineering. This is where he met and fell in love with Sophia Milch. She was studying to be a nurse. They were married in 1940, as the war in Europe and the Pacific was about to draw the United States into the conflict on both fronts. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, Joseph and Sophia spent their last holiday together for the next five years. He enlisted in the Marines and was commissioned as a Captain. Sophia joined the Army Nurse Corps and served as a First Lieutenant in Hawaii.

Joseph was with the 10th Marine Regiment and saw action at Guadalcanal where he took a bullet in the leg and earned a Purple Heart. He went on to receive the Navy Cross during the Battle for Saipan where he landed with eight thousand other marines.

The war ended and brought Joseph and Sophia home to the United States where they settled in New Jersey. Joseph started a construction company and became a successful builder of the new highway system around the Tri-State area. Upon their return to the States, Sophia got pregnant immediately and gave birth to the first of three sons. After the boys, she had two girls. The family thrived, as honest hardworking immigrants will often do. Joseph passed away peacefully of cancer January of 1985 with his four surviving children in the room at his family home.

Neil and everyone stopped by the garage to view the items that were laid out next to the soon to be old van. A new van was going to be ordered with everyone helping out with design of the new system. It would look like an older County Utility Van on the outside, but the inside would look like a cross between the situation room at the White House and a room at the finest hotel in New York.

Whenever Neil looked at the treasures, he couldn't help but feel the actual personal lives that *were* touched and *would be* touched by this piece of history. He got in some workouts in his new pool and gym and even went for a couple of bike rides. Cell phones were silent per agreement, but an email showed up the evening of the day after they returned. It was from Fletcher. It simply said, "Edward Abraham Solomon. Oldest living heir to the gold ring box." It included his phone number and address in New Jersey. Neil responded to the email and said that he would call Edward Solomon in a few minutes and record the conversation for everyone to hear.

The conversation was short just as Neil hoped it would be and they set eleven o'clock the next day to

visit. Neil simply told him that some items belonging to his grandfather had been identified in Vienna and he wanted to drop them off. Edward pressed for the exact contents, but Neil managed to keep it vague with “some personal items and a letter to your father, Joseph” as the answer. That was true after all.

The three friends splurged and chartered a plane for the day. They packed up the ring box securely and headed for the airport. It was a thirty-minute flight and ten-minute ride to the home of Ed Solomon.

They found the address easily and were surprised by the beautiful modest homes in the neighborhood. They were all immaculately kept up complete with porch swings, blooming flowers in pots and flowerbeds everywhere. They had to turn around to park and Neil saw a young man at the Solomon address dash inside as if to let everyone know the mysterious visitors had arrived.

Neil kept watch and, sure enough a couple of older women stuck their heads out the front door and watched them turn around. An older man, presumably Ed Solomon, walked out to the curb and waved them into a parking spot right in front of the home.

He greeted them warmly, “Hello. I hope the trip was not too long for you.”

Neil said, “No, sir. We are just thrilled that you could meet with us on such short notice.”

Ed said, “How could I refuse with the mystery? It’s driving the women crazy. I’m betting somebody died and left us an old boat.” And they all laughed as they walked toward the home. A few hands were shaken, but they all knew the big introductions would come in a few seconds. Once inside, they were led into a large open living room. The entire family was there waiting -- twenty-two people standing or sitting around the room and at the kitchen bar.

All these people took the friends a bit aback, but they quickly surmised the situation and made mental adjustments.

“Well Mr. Jacobs, what can I do for you?”

Neil started as arranged, “Before I can tell you the story and show you what I have for you, we need to get some legal stuff out of the way. Melinda?”

“Hello everyone. It is our requirement to have this meeting remain a secret between us. We cannot have attention brought to us for national security reasons. Therefore, I have drafted Non-Disclosure Agreements for everyone to read and sign.”

One of the younger ladies stood, walked over to Melinda and said, “Please, I am my father’s attorney. I am Caroline Solomon.” She smiled at everyone and shook hands with everybody. Neil noticed she did not have a wedding ring on and that she was about 5’6” tall, slender, with long dark hair and very, very beautiful. She looked to be about thirty years old. She took the agreement, got a pen off the bar and

started to read it. Everyone was still while she paced and went through the document. She was done in less than a minute.

She looked at Melinda and said, "Let me explain it to the family." Melinda nodded and agreed. "This legally requires us to keep secret how we received whatever Dad is about to get and who gave it to us. This is standard and common language except for the provision that it is against the law to disclose anything. I for one think it is a wise move on their part. I have no trouble signing it and neither should you. This is why you made me go to law school. Sign."

They all laughed as everyone got a form and they all signed. There were a few questions, but Caroline fielded them easily. They collected the forms and returned them to Melinda.

Neil took the floor again, "Now that you have signed the NDAs, I can tell you why you must keep this a secret. The machine used to locate your package is classified and we are the owners. We work with the government to help out when they need it. But, here is the most important part. We have many more of these packages to return, many. And if word got out this was happening, we would have to stop. Let me show you what I have and you will understand."

Marty pulled the box out of its carry bag and gave it to Neil. He set the box on the coffee table in the middle of the room and opened the lid. He took the papers off the top and handed them to Ed.

Mr. Solomon moved his glasses down from the top of his head and read the paper aloud. Then he said, "My grandfather was a jeweler and hid these gold rings for my father to retrieve after World War II." He started to cry and his wife comforted him.

Melinda took the opportunity to answer some questions before they were asked. "There are nineteen hundred fifty-five rings. They vary in weight, but the total is twenty-two pounds even. At today's market value, the rings are worth slightly under four hundred thousand dollars."

The room went silent when they heard the number. Then Edward's wife said, "Well, this calls for a celebration. Let's get some food together, put on some music and break out the wine." They all cheered and everybody went to work. Melinda, Marty and Neil were led into the back yard where there were tables always set up for a get together. They were placed into comfortable chairs, glasses of wine were thrust into their hands. Even though it was only eleven thirty, they all received the wine with pleasure.

Caroline Solomon brought out a tray of cold cuts and crackers and put them on the table in front of Neil. Melinda reached over and tapped Neil on the arm. He took the hint, got up and said, "Here let me help you with that." And she let him follow her back to the kitchen.

"So, Mr. Jacobs..."

"Neil, please. May I call you Caroline?"



“Of course, so Neil, that’s it? You return things you have somehow found in Vienna to the relatives of the Jews who died in the Holocaust?”

“You are the first family we have returned anything to, so I am not sure how to answer your question.”

“Oh, we are the first. I did not know that. I apologize for being so blunt.”

“That’s ok. This is new territory for all of us.”

“How are you and your friends related?”

“They are married and both my best friends.”

“Both? Interesting.” She smiled.

“Friends. And yes, I am single.”

“Tell me a little about yourself.”

They started chatting and drinking more wine. The wine fueled the conversation a bit, but there were other forces at work. They exchanged cards somewhere in midafternoon. She worked in New York City at a large and reputable firm. Neil told her about his parents living in the City and she had actually heard Neil’s mother perform. He lied and told her that he came to see them from Virginia where he lived all the time. He asked her if she would like to get together sometime and she said that she would like that very much.

Late in the afternoon, the senior family members and Caroline started discussing what to do with the money. It didn’t take long for Neil, Melinda and Marty to understand that they didn’t really need the money. They all owned homes in the same neighborhood and had good jobs. They immediately decided that they would start by paying off all the debt in the family including the remaining mortgages on their homes. Then Edward said that he would love to have everyone together for a vacation in Florida. Everyone agreed and started making travel plans. It was a blast.

Dinner was ready and they stuffed themselves. At the end of dinner, Edward announced that he knew exactly what to do with the rest of the money -- college for all the kids for as long as the money held out. And it was decided.

Neil, Melinda and Marty had to leave, but realized they had made a whole new family of friends. Neil and Caroline exchanged some private words and Neil got a handshake and a kiss on the cheek. Melinda had stopped drinking long ago and drove the men back to the airport. Once onboard the plane, they all crashed for the short hop home after all the food and drink. Melinda drove everyone home and they finally actually got some down time at their new homes.

After a few days they got together and talked about what treasure to try to deal with next. They all

agreed they should take care of the twelve paintings. The FBI had hooked them up with an investigating company in Vienna and had them searching the records for the residents of the building they found the paintings in. They could find no past residents and, with that, the paintings would go on the auction block and the owner of the building could retire with his cut. While they were working on figuring out how to sell them, Melinda said, "You know, this is way too complicated for us three. We need an attorney to help us or we could get into a lot of trouble." She glanced at Marty who had a sly grin on his face while pretending to look at the artwork.

Neil knew what she was getting at and said, "And that attorney wouldn't happen to be Caroline Solomon, would it?"

Melinda played dumb and said, "Why that's a wonderful idea, Neil. She's already in on our mission to return the heirlooms to their rightful owners. She's perfect. What a great idea, Neil."

"Wait a minute, it was your idea." They laughed, but Neil was excited. They decided that Neil would travel to New York for a dinner business meeting, get Caroline's opinions on the artwork and see where things went.

He called Caroline and it was clear she was very happy to hear from him. They set up a meeting for Wednesday night, two days away and it was settled.

Marty stopped by the next morning and said to Neil, "If you are going to go out in New York, you need some new wheels. Let's go shopping."

Neil gave in and let Marty take him to the car dealers in town. Neil took his tablet and looked over makes and models during the ride into town. Neil wanted to go with a Cadillac or BMW, but Marty would not have it. After shopping all morning, Neil settled on a Tesla, fully loaded -- really fully loaded. The bottom line price came to around one hundred seventy thousand dollars. Neil wrote a check, it was verified and he drove away.

The next day, he timed the drive to New York to beat the traffic and have time to see his parents. He spent most of the drive playing with all the new things in his car. He reached the city, then his parents place. They visited for a while with Neil telling them all about the past few weeks' adventures. Then he got to Caroline. He only talked about her for few minutes until his mother could tell that she was the one. She teased him about her and they all laughed as he left for his date.

He only drove a short distance, gave the car to a valet and entered the restaurant. He was exactly on time. She was not and he waited an agonizing fifteen minutes until she made her appearance. She had dressed up for him as he had for her. Neil had picked an expensive romantic restaurant and she approved. They sat at their table and chatted while the waiters took care of getting them started.

Then they got down to business. There was always the flirting going on, but they did discuss the art. She knew all the painters and knew they were looking at close to a half a billion dollars' worth of art. She took notes on everything and offered advice in general: Hire a law firm to handle the actual sale with Sotheby's. He took it all in and the food came. They ate, shared conversation and laughed a lot. Both clearly enjoyed the time together. When they were finished with everything, Neil payed and they had the car brought around. When it pulled up, Neil opened the door for Caroline and she slid into the cockpit. He closed the door, got a huge smile on his face and walked to the driver's side of the car. He slid into his seat and started the car. You could not hear anything over the radio that was playing some old jazz tune.

"Is this a new car?" She said as she took it all in.

"Yes. Actually, I was quite happy with my Subaru, but my buddy Marty made me buy something nicer. Our company is doing very well. And we are just getting started. The work we do will keep us busy forever."

"I could have guessed all that from just talking with you. Marty just wants you to have some fun."

"No. He made me get it to impress you."

She chuckled and hit him in the arm. And he laughed and said, "I'm sorry, but it's the truth. Hit him, not me. I really didn't want one, but Marty just bought one off the assembly line in Europe outside of Vienna. It's a super car and the company only makes like five hundred a year."

"Men? You will always be little boys. Boys and their toys." They laughed and she said, "This really is a nice car."

They drove in silence for a few blocks and then Neil said, "Would you entertain the idea of coming to work for my company as our General Counsel and full partner?"

She blurted out, "What?"

"You said it yourself, we need an attorney. Ok, let me try this one, you handle the sale of the paintings and restructure our business while that is going on and I'll give you five percent of every sale. We figure to get half a billion dollars out of the lot of twelve. You do the math on the handling fee."

"That's two hundred and fifty million dollars. That's unbelievable! I could arrange everything in a month and be done. That's just too much money."

"Ok, then join the company as a partner and we'll give you one hundred thousand dollars to help with your relocation."

"I want to talk to Melinda."

Neil pressed a button on the steering wheel and said, "Call Melinda." The phone dialed and Melinda answered and said hello.

Caroline said, "Hi Melinda, this is Caroline Solomon."

"Well hello. How are you?"

"I'm fine. So, I'm having dinner with this new friend tonight. Someone you might know."

"Hi, Neil."

"Hi, Melinda."

Caroline continued, "So we talked about your challenge with selling the twelve paintings you possess and he is driving me home now. He offered me a partnership in your company as your General Counsel."

"Great! So, you accept, right? Right?"

"Not so fast. Where am I relocating to?"

"Fairfax."

"And Neil offered one hundred thousand dollars to help me relocate."

"Yes. Do you need more? We could give you whatever you want, or you could stay out in the country with us. We have lots of room. We'd love to have you come."

"Write me a check and I'll start in a few days."

Melinda yelled yippee and said she had to go tell Marty. She just clicked off.

Neil said, "It was her idea. And just to be honest, I think she was trying to set us up."

"Do you think?"

"What?"

"Of course she was. She is so obvious. I'm an attorney, remember."

"I'm sorry."

"Well, I'm not. This is wonderful. I couldn't dream of a better job. Now tell me what you guys really do."

Neil told her the story from start to finish. The invention, earning money, spending money, getting shot at and all the adventure Neil had lived for the last few months. Then she said, "That's wonderful. And you have all these other pieces of history to give back to the owners. Did you say ninety million in gold?"

"Yep. It's in a garage at my house, a very seriously secured garage, as in by the FBI secure."

"Ok then. Ninety million dollars' worth of gold, just like that. Oh and let's not forget the paintings."

"There is a lot more. A lot more."

They pulled up to her neighborhood and got out of the car. He walked her to the door and they shook hands. She leaned in, pecked him on the cheek and said goodnight. He left and drove the long ride home with a stupid grin on his face.

## Caroline

Melinda planned to offer Caroline the use of her and Marty's guesthouse, but it needed a big cleanup. The cleanup Melinda had in mind was tossing out the old furniture and buying all new pieces, in just two days. The moving crew they hired arrived, cleaned the place out and off it went to the Salvation Army. Melinda and a few friends went shopping at a couple of high-end furniture stores and refurnished the entire two-bedroom suite. Fortunately, the inside didn't need painting and Melinda even liked the color. It had all been done before they bought the place. Melinda had an extra set of silverware and china that was nice and still usable and stocked the small kitchen with them. Of course, there were several trips to the grocery store for coffee, spices, some fruit and fresh flowers. Both Marty and Neil were smart enough to just hang around and wait for the next command to fetch something, put something together or give an opinion that would then be totally ignored. The weekend was long and they all couldn't wait for Monday morning.

Neil got up early, straightened his house for the fourth time and made some cinnamon biscuits and coffee. Caroline texted that she would indeed be there pretty much right at nine a.m. as expected. Fletcher, Marty and Melinda rolled up a few minutes early, went inside and got ready for Caroline's arrival. Caroline was right behind them and Neil went out to meet her at the front door. He escorted her in, introduced her to Fletcher and everyone shook hands. They stood around the kitchen island and had the pastry and coffee.

Fletcher needed the next half hour to take care of all the security questions and protocols. She read and then signed several documents, but she was a quick reader and an attorney, so it did not take very long at all.

A tour of the garage followed and Melinda took her around while the men tagged behind. They spent twenty minutes looking at the van that now had a few bullet holes in it. Neil demonstrated the system to Caroline and she was duly amazed. Next, they reviewed the current stock of treasures. Marty handed Caroline a clipboard that held a catalog and she listened to Melinda recount the stories perfectly. They lingered over the gold bricks for a time and then returned to the house. And from there on out, Caroline took charge.

Marty, Melinda, Neil and Fletcher all had laptops set up and running around the large open front room. Neil had his display up on a large new flat screen display. Caroline made the men set up her computer, a printer and bring in several boxes.

Neil cleared the large antique dining room table and Caroline went to work. "What's the computer

access situation here? Do you have a network?"

Marty answered, "All we have now is a shared cloud site that we use for business. It's secured and all of our houses are on personal Wi-Fi." Neil pulled up the list of program keys, logins and passwords for their computers, network, installed software and hardware and put it on the large display for Caroline to use while she got her computer set up. They spent the next hour upgrading Caroline's computer and installing new software. She used the time to ask all kinds of questions and took several pages of yellow legal pad size notes. She wanted to know a chronology of the short history of the company with emphasis on when and how they acquired assets. She was already deciding how to handle the tax problems that were ahead and what type of actual company they all should be. They got her online and Marty showed her the file layout on the cloud drive. She paged around, read files, asked questions and took more notes.

Together, they began to type up Caroline's notes into an accounting software so she could see what kind of legal structure to build around the company. Lunchtime came and they made sandwiches from things Melinda had brought over the previous day. In an hour, Caroline had a partnership contract written per their conversations. Then she went to work on changing their company's organization. They worked while eating and Caroline laid out what she needed to do her job.

She wanted an office in town that she could work out of and needed to staff it up. She asked for two more attorneys, an investigator, two paralegals and two accountants. Of course, everyone agreed and their first meeting broke up with Melinda, Fletcher and Caroline moving on to the logistics of getting their realtor, Will Murdock, to find them office space. Melinda called Will and he was free to help them right then and there. Considering their purchasing history with him, he dropped everything to work with them again.

Will identified several possibilities online and they all looked at the listings over their phones. They narrowed it down to a favorite quickly. It was a three-story older building that was once a beautiful home. It had been converted into an office long ago. It was vacant and had been on the market for several months. It had the right square footage and a parking lot that could be secured with a classy and strong wrought iron fence. The Echoes company made a cash offer and closed the deal later that day. Somewhere in there, they stopped by the bank and made arrangements to add Caroline onto an account so she could start spending money. The new building would be in their hands in the middle of the week and Fletcher got a security team scheduled to do their work first thing after escrow closed. Next, they scheduled Miss Nina to decorate the place. She showed some samples to the women and they made the choices. It would be all ready for office equipment one day after the security company did their install.

Caroline agreed to stay in the guesthouse and moved in that evening with Neil helping. She didn't

bring much with her and was going to return on the weekend after going home to get a few more things. Melinda made plans to go shopping on Saturday. It would just be less stuff Caroline would have to move was the excuse, like they needed an excuse.

They all worked one place or another into the night. The next day, Caroline hired her staff. She made some calls to friends and hired everyone by previous acquaintance or recommendation. They all passed security background checks without even knowing they were having one completed. Everyone was to start the next Monday. Two needed apartments to move into and the realtor went to work again.

Marty and Neil went to a Best Buy and purchased all the computer equipment. They bought the best and enough for the immediate staff and a few extras. That actually took most of the day and included a few trips across town to the store. The FBI technicians would be there when it was time for the equipment to be installed, probably on Friday. The property sale closed first thing Wednesday morning and the security installers went to work immediately. They took the whole day rewiring things, positioning hidden cameras and installing palm print readers on all the doors. Once finished, they showed Caroline the protocols they had put in place and she got it all quickly. Thursday, Miss Nina and her crew showed up with the new office furniture and accessories. The office was decorated in a classic oversized furniture theme with Persian rugs and really comfortable sofas and chairs. On Friday, the technical team went to work integrating the new personal computers with the security system and the office was then ready for actual work. The FBI delivered personal devices for the new people and placed them on everyone's new desks.

As planned, Melinda and Caroline went shopping to pick up things for the guesthouse and for Caroline in particular. She wanted new clothes for the new job and Melinda was happy to help her select things. Caroline particularly wanted help with picking out something for a date she was having with Neil that evening. With clothes shopping finished, they spent the rest of the day at a spa. When they got back to Melinda and Marty's home, Caroline asked Melinda to help her get ready for the date. They had a lot of fun deciding on makeup and jewelry.

Neil dressed up for the occasion and took Caroline out for a nice dinner in town. The evening was early when they returned to Neil's place. They talked, walked around the grounds and finally went for a swim. One thing led to another and Caroline stayed the night.

Sunday morning was beautiful as they laid around talking about a million new things. They swam all day and then Caroline left before dinner to get ready for the new office staff the next day.

The new hires all showed up to their new jobs early, but Caroline was there ready and waiting for her new team. She spent the morning in walking meetings with everyone, sometimes together and sometimes

one on one. Mid-morning, Fletcher showed up and gave them the security briefing. They were all working on classified data and could not reveal anything to anyone. The data they actually would be working with was to be coded to hide its nature. The story that was given to them was that the new firm had one client, a charitable foundation. But the foundation worked with the government sometimes and everybody wished to keep the relationship and the foundation a secret. The principals in the foundation did not want to bring any attention to themselves. They felt it would hinder their important work. Everybody understood and signed up.

They all settled in and made plans on what to do next. Accounts were created, documents filed that recreated the company and inventories were taken. Everything was squared away in a few days and Caroline and her new staff were ready to tackle their first real work. They were shown pictures of the treasures they needed to return and files were created. Investigator Patrice went to work utilizing the FBI's help in finding the families of the original owners of everything. Sotheby's auction house in London was contacted and plans were made for them to handle the liquidation of the twelve paintings. The art needed to be in the hands of the house within the next four days in order to make the next scheduled sale. The auction house would show the items in a catalog for a week before the auction and pictures and layouts had to be created. There were deadlines to keep. In the case of the paintings and their surprise existence to the public, press releases had to be prepared. Melinda helped with that and the wheels were in motion to get the paintings back into the public eye. It would be stipulated that all of the paintings would be loaned to museums for quite some time as a condition of purchase. The staff expected many of them to be picked up by museums anyway.

And another job from the CIA came in. The Agency wanted Echoes to take pictures of specific buildings in London, since they would be in town for the painting sale anyway. Fletcher kept important people aware of the team's activities and schedule. The Echoes primaries saw an opportunity and were taking it. There were eighteen pictures that needed taking. They agreed to do the job for free considering the millions in gold they had previously been paid.

Neil and Marty went to work finishing and fitting the new van that had just been delivered. The new supporting law firm liquidated the gold bullion quietly and cleaned up other loose ends that Neil, Melinda and Marty didn't even know they had. The FBI supplied the company with false identity papers for any travel from now on. And more accounts were created to cover the new credit cards that came with the IDs.

Some of the treasure was moved to the law office and stored securely there. It just became a hassle to only have pictures for the staff to work with. So, they made use of the security systems the Bureau had



installed in the building.

Fletcher made the arrangements for Marty and Neil to get some training in weapons handling. They learned a few simple tactics and how to use the guns up close or from a distance. They all hoped the training would never have to be utilized, but they had fun with it as well.

Neil spent several evenings with Caroline in romantic settings and things were going well between them. They had agreed to take it slow considering their working relationship, but both of them laughed at that after a few days.

The paintings were crated up for travel. The van was finished and tested and tested again. They made several visits to the airplane to get it ready as well. Finally, when everything was ready, the van was stored in the plane, the paintings were put onboard and the now four Echoes primaries got on the plane and left for London.

Caroline spent most of the flight visiting with everyone getting to know the feel of the plane and their travel routine. They flew during the night to take advantage of the daylight in London. There was an early morning fog and drizzle when they landed. A security van was waiting for Caroline and she took the luggage and the paintings. She dropped the luggage at the hotel and went by Sotheby's to deliver the artwork.

Neil, Melinda and Marty went to work. The computer planned their route and ordered the target buildings in the most efficient path. They reached the first building at eight a.m. and got the picture easily and without notice.

Everyone working at the famous auction house was waiting for Caroline to arrive with the paintings. The van pulled into the secured garage and the painting crates were taken upstairs to a large working room. The paintings were laid out on a table one by one with the employees studying and admiring every one of them. This was one of the biggest events at the house in years. A team of handlers went to work on the paintings, restretching them on new sets of stretcher bars. Caroline and the managers retired to an office to talk about preparing the artwork. They needed new frames and she let them make the selection, never taking into consideration the cost. These pieces required expensive frames to bring the top dollar at auction. Agreements were signed and Caroline left them to their work.

Meanwhile, the van crew took two more pictures and moved on to the next target. It was a row house and taking a picture would definitely attract attention. They got out of the van, swung the boom out and prepared to snap the photo. A man came out of the house, walked up to Marty and asked what they were doing. Marty gave the standard answer of working on the utility lines and pulled out the permits to show

the man. He appeared to buy the story and let them finish. The resident walked back inside and closed the door waving and smiling. The team finished up the shot, stored the boom and drove away. What they didn't see was the resident come out of the house and take pictures of the van with his phone. He forwarded the photo to another man with a text message.

The van continued on its route and finished the day's work around four in the afternoon. The drizzle kept coming as they pulled the van into the airplane for the night. They caught a taxi to the hotel and met up with Caroline. She had made the lodging reservations and they had two rooms between them, much to Neil's delight. They rested for the remainder of the afternoon and decided to have dinner and catch some jazz together in SoHo. It was a most pleasant evening with everyone chatting and getting to know each other. Neil, Marty and Melinda shared looks between themselves every time Caroline said something witty or insightful. They were simply confirming their shared belief that Caroline was the perfect choice for a new business partner *and* an excellent match for Neil.

The next morning, they all went back to work -- Caroline to the auction house and the rest of them to the airport to get the van. They retrieved the vehicle and went to work on the remaining buildings. Fletcher joined them, having spent the night in the airplane. He loved the peace and quiet and was quite content with the simpler lodging. When the group reached their third target, they picked up a tail. Several men around the city were on the lookout for them. When the lucky one spotted the van, he made a phone call and a car with two occupants started to follow the van. The Echoes team didn't notice as their followers went from building to building with them. When they finished around noon, they drove back to the airport and the men in the car got perfect pictures of the van, the Echoes team and the aircraft. Neil, Melinda and Marty taxied back to the hotel and met with Caroline as she was finishing up her work. They had lunch together and the ladies announced that they would be off shopping for the afternoon. The men found a non-tourist pub and settled in for a bit. When they had enough, they went back to the hotel and met up at the gym. After a short workout, they went for a run. That didn't really go too well considering how unfriendly the downtown streets of London are to joggers. They finally found a park and did fine inside its fences. Caroline texted Neil and asked him and Marty to join the ladies for dinner. The message included the restaurant and time. Then just two more words, "dress up".

The best clothes Marty had with him were one pair of slacks, one long sleeve dress shirt and one sport coat. Neil had almost the same, but with two pair of slacks. They both needed to buy suits and they only had three hours. They left the park and headed to where their queried phones said the best tailor in London was located. A man at a corner took a few photos of them as they walked north at a brisk pace.

The man had tailed them from the airport, watched while they had lunch, taken a few pictures, then and later, when Neil and Marty went into the hotel. The man had bribed a bellhop at the hotel and gotten their names. He was beginning to get a profile together of the two men and two women. One of the women wasn't on the van team and he knew little except that she was beautiful and tall. He had her name and would pass it on in a few hours when he felt he knew what he was dealing with. Of course, they had all checked into the hotel with the traveling identification papers the FBI wanted them to use. It wouldn't be that easy for the Echoes foursome to be identified unless someone was very persistent. The man noted that three of them used a utility van to work all morning and then took time in the afternoon to shop and exercise. The hotel was expensive, as was their tastes in restaurant by the price of today's lunch. The man would send in his report with as much detail as possible.

The Echoes group met for dinner at the finest restaurant in London, Hibiscus – Mayfair. The ladies were shocked when the men arrived in beautiful new suits. The women were decked out in new dresses, jewelry and fresh hairdos.

The man watching them had seen enough, phoned in his report and went home. The homes where the first man took the picture of the van and the second where the Echoes team started to be followed were raided by the British police and they found nothing. The homes had both been quickly abandoned. There was residue of bomb-making material in one of the bedrooms and nothing more. The police got fingerprints and quickly figured out who they were now looking for. Four men, all with Pakistani passports, were now the top priority for every law enforcement agency in the world. At the moment, the Pakistanis were in a cheap motel room where they had a long-range view of the Echoes cargo plane. They had changed their appearances to match their new false identification papers. At the moment, they believed, correctly, that the people associated with the cargo plane were the direct reason that they had been discovered.

The Echoes team was also being watched by two agents. The agents had seen a Pakistani man taking pictures of them and were in the process of following him. The dinner ended and the women produced tickets to a show in the theater district. They took a cab and enjoyed the show. Caroline and Neil held hands through the entire production. They went back to the hotel and both couples zipped up to their rooms.

The next morning, the Echoes primaries casually went to the airport and flew home. The Pakistani men watching the plane notified others in their network and a man was dispatched from Washington to watch for the aircraft in the sky over Andrews Air Force Base. He saw it fly over him later that day.

Caroline went back to work the next day and started watching all the news reports about the

discovery and sale of the art. While away, Caroline's team worked on understanding Austrian laws regarding property rights. Then they looked at how the art world deals with discovered masterpieces. Investigator Patrice worked to plan the next building examination run in the city. They had plenty to do and had identified or not identified the present owners of the rest of the treasures.

Caroline looked at the schedule and decided to put off connecting with the new owners of the treasures until after the sale of the art. The press conference and release about the paintings discovery went off without a hitch and the secret was now out. The art world was stunned. The discoveries dominated the news with the big question being the identity of the owner. The media kept interviewing art historians and specialists on property rights. Some wanted to stop the sale until clear ownership could be established, but Caroline and her firm were prepared with legal documents sighting clear ownership to the Foundation. There was one successful postponing injunction submitted, but it was overturned the next day by Caroline and the British courts.

The auction was scheduled for the next day and Caroline and Neil left for London to be present for the event. Their flight landed without incident and their protectors saw no surveillance while they were in London. The couple walked the evening streets of London, had a random dinner at a restaurant they passed by and walked some more. They caught some sites and did some tourist things. They ended up back at the hotel around ten p.m. and were in for the night.

The next day, Caroline and Neil slipped into the back of the Sotheby's auction room as the auctioneer started the morning's sales. Many other items were auctioned before the last ones were presented -- twelve masterpieces from the impressionists and the realists. Each painting's creator was well known and these paintings would fill gaps in some of the artists' lives. It was all very exciting.

Finally, the first of the twelve was brought out and the bidding started. The auctioneer started at ten million dollars and ended at seventy-six. The next one brought twenty-five million and the rest of the paintings varied in price with twenty-five million being the smallest and eighty being the highest. It took three hours to go through the process of taking the previous art out and bringing the next one in. The auction house had to run through all the history of the piece before the bidding started. Of course, that information was important, but the bidders were chomping at the bit to move through the lot. There were many bidders represented by agents who had them on phones. Bidding was exciting and complicated in some cases. Altogether the sale totaled six hundred sixty-seven million. After commissions and all the other fees, the Echoes coffer was now fatter by five hundred twenty-two million dollars.

## Road Trip

Neil slipped away while Caroline signed papers, arranged money transfers and concluded business with the auction house. While doing all that, she let it slip that the Foundation had more articles to sell. The auction house representatives asked a few questions, but got nothing for their trouble. Caroline clearly knew how to handle business negotiations. They had picked out a meeting place for her and Neil to meet, a pub one block down the street. Neil made a deal with the security men that were watching over them and told them his plans. They were traveling by train next and Neil wanted to be alone with Caroline for the trip. They protested. He insisted and, when the issue escalated to the Deputy Director, she agreed to Neil's request. However, the couple would be watched until they got on the train and were clear of any tails.

Caroline walked into the pub and Neil waved her over. She sat down in the booth and the waiter stopped by and took her drink order. This time, Neil had a surprise for her. He had purchased train tickets and they were going to spend the next few days touring Scotland and Ireland. The train left in a couple of hours, so they went back to the hotel, packed up and left for the train station. The first leg would deposit them in Edinburgh around 9 p.m., where he had booked them into a nice B&B. Neil had gotten them a private cabin on the train and, when they left the station, they were sitting knee-to-knee holding hands talking and watching the city turn into the country. Neil had his laptop open, tracking them on a map as the train rolled on northbound. He would look at the sites coming up ahead and they would talk about them as they got closer. He had fun pointing out the less famous ones like Lloyd's Pharmacy and National Windscreens. They had lunch sent to the cabin and ate as they chatted. They were having a great time telling each other about their pasts. They told family stories and Neil learned that Caroline had actually been to a concert his mother gave a few years back.

They closed the window curtains after lunch for a bit of rest and got up in time for dinner. Caroline helped Neil get dressed in a nice suit and then made him go wait while she got ready. Thirty minutes later, she walked into the club car looking like a model off the cover of the hottest fashion magazine. Neil's mouth actually opened and stayed that way until she sat down. She reached over and gently pushed his jaw closed and said, "I guess you approve."

"You look amazing. Yes, I approve."

"You look pretty good yourself." He leaned across the table and gave her a quick kiss. It was still light outside and they watched the countryside roll by as they ordered dinner. They had a nice bottle of wine and a fantastic dinner of grilled fish. They told more stories and then talked about the Foundation.

Caroline had some amazing plans and shared them with Neil as they ate. He truly thought they were all excellent and only had a couple of suggestions. She liked his ideas and was glad for his kind input. With dinner long over, they returned to their cabin and collected their things as the train pulled into the station. Neil got their baggage, while Caroline got a cab to take them to the B&B. It was a long drive across the city and a bit into the country, but it was worth it. They were greeted by the retired couple who owned the bed and breakfast and were shown to their room, with all the warmth and friendliness of a family member. It was late so they unpacked and went to bed.

They woke to the sounds and smells of breakfast and were excited to get moving for the day. Together, they booked an all-day tour of the city and surrounding sites. It was a private tour in a nice car. Their guide arrived exactly on time after breakfast and introduced himself as Ross. They saw famous castles, toured museums, visited a few small historical sites and ate some great food. Ross knew to answer questions and not bother them until they asked. The first stop of the day was to buy a new camera for Caroline. Four thousand euros later, she was ready to go. It was most enjoyable and Caroline turned out to be quite a photographer. At the end of the day, they booked Ross for the day after next to expand their sightseeing tour into the other cities and landscapes. They stayed inside the B&B that night because it was quite cold outside, no precipitation, but chilly nonetheless. They sat by the fire in their room and watched old American movies until they turned in rather early.

They got up first thing the next morning and bundled up before they ventured out into the city on their own for the day. Of course, Neil wanted to go antique shopping. Caroline had never said anything about her like or dislike for antiques in general, so this was new ground in their relationship. Before Neil broached the subject of antique shopping he said, "If you could decorate a home any way you wanted, what style would you go for?"

She saw right through his question and said, "Neil, I love your antiques. You need to stop buying them piecemeal and plan your rooms better. But I love the style. You need more Persian rugs though. Can we stop in Pakistan on the way home?"

"Sure."

"I was joking. Let's try to find you some nice things. I wonder if this city has rugs. Let's check it all out. Now we've got a busy day. Let's hit it."

The couple had the B&B owners ring them up a cab to take them to their first shop, which they found through a query on their phones. They ended up finding some wonderful furniture pieces and a couple of rugs as well. It didn't really matter to them about the cost but, even with shipping costs, they saved thousands of dollars on the purchases. They stopped and bought hot drinks along the way and ate a nice

lunch at a café. All in all, they had a wonderful romantic and expensive day.

They walked the mile back to the B&B that evening, stopping for a drink to ward off the chill. Caroline was sitting across from Neil at a booth and said, “I want to talk about the future.”

Neil swallowed hard and said, “Ok...I’m with you.”

“We’ve only known each other for three weeks and I feel like you’ve been my best friend for ten years.”

“I’ve loved every minute of our time together.”

“I’m glad you said that, because I was wondering if it would be okay if I moved in with you.”

Neil started laughing and couldn’t stop. She laughed too at first, but then didn’t think it was that funny. Neil held up a finger indicating for her to simply wait. When he finally composed himself, he reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out a ring box. He opened it up and let her see the engagement ring, then said, “I bought this two days after we met and have been carrying it around every day and night since then. I love you. Will you marry me?”

She got up, dashed around the booth and slid in next to him. She kissed him and then said, “Yes.” And they kissed some more. They both texted family and friends with the news. That went on for an hour, then finished the walk back to the B&B for the night.

Back in Virginia, the new staff was busy settling in and figuring out how to work at this crazy business. Now that the paintings were liquidated, everyone agreed that they needed to find more avenues of charitable causes. They created scholarships, made general gifts to colleges, contributed to Holocaust museums and anything else anyone could identify. Of course, each donation was checked out before receiving anything and the staff identified a few organizations that were more about profit than providing a worthwhile message.

The Echoes Foundation charter was redrawn after they finally established the paths that the money was going to take as it left the Foundation’s accounts. The Foundation had found its stride and the team of money managers and attorneys knew exactly how to handle contributions. Plans were set up to keep financial reserves at the right level to sustain the gifts for a long time.

The Echoes company was presented with a couple of contracts, but nothing that could not wait until Neil returned. One of the jobs was a small request for ten building pictures in Colorado, but could wait as well. Somebody was just curious about something and had a budget.

Ross arrived right on time and had an itinerary all worked out for Neil and Caroline’s day, which they

approved. Neil and Caroline enjoyed a tour of the sites just outside of Edinburgh with Ross providing commentary for the day. They took some great photos, ate some wonderful food and got back to the B&B just in time for dinner. They went out that night looking for music and found a pub with a local ethnic band playing. They listened for a few hours, strolled slowly back to the B&B and stayed inside for the rest of the night.

The couple got up late the next morning and caught a train to Glasgow and then a flight to Belfast. The train ride was a short few hours of beautiful scenery. They spent a lot of time standing in the one open platform between the cars. The rest of the train had enclosed vestibules. Caroline would watch for photo opportunities in the scenery and asked anyone passing by to take a picture of her and Neil together. They had a nice lunch while they traveled and spent a lot of time holding hands and looking happily at each other. Neil was looking at the engagement ring and said, “You know that you can trade this ring for the exact one you want, don’t you? It won’t hurt my feelings. I always thought it might be a placeholder until you picked out one you really like.”

“Neil,... Sweetheart,... I wouldn’t care if this were a Cracker Jack’s ring. This will always be mine. I don’t really care as long as you are part of the package.” They kissed until someone walked by.

The train reached the destination and they took a shuttle bus from the station to the airport. They sat around the airport and talked and talked while waiting for their plane. They called back to the States several times and gave updates to everyone on their travels. Finally, they boarded a small plane and took off for the forty-five minute flight across the Northern Irish Sea.

They arrived to a light, but steady rain. This was Ireland after all and the rain kept the Emerald Isle emerald. They took a taxi to Benedicts, one of the nicer hotels in the city. It was just four in the afternoon when they were done checking in and the couple decided to go for a walk to get to know the city in general. They took off in a misty rain ducking into the quaint stores that were everywhere. But Caroline had an idea, searched on her phone, found what she was looking for and they started walking at a brisk pace. Neil was kept in the dark until they walked up to Lunn’s, a family jewelry store.

They were helped by one of the Lunn family members, who paid full attention to Caroline and Neil since the shop was slow that evening. Caroline told her story and the sales woman made several suggestions about sizing and adding mounts to the sides of a solitaire. Then she brought out jackets that might work as well. Caroline decided to adjust the size of the ring Neil gave her and not modifying the design at all. But she did buy a matching jacket with three smaller diamonds on each side. Then she surprised Neil by picking out a ring for him. He had never worn rings and had a hard time deciding. He ended up with a gold band with a simple crosscut groove pattern cut into it. While he was deciding on



that, Caroline saw some necklaces she liked and picked out six different ones. Some were going to be hers and some would end up as gifts. They were just wrapping their business up when Neil said, “What about getting your bridesmaids gifts here? They have a wonderful selection, great prices and several of the same things.” Caroline thought that was a great idea and decided on seven identical diamond charm bracelets. The store threw in little charms with Caroline and Neil’s names engraved on them to attach to the bracelets. They left the store just as it was getting dark and the owner closed up early after the big sale.

When they were hungry for dinner, Neil and Caroline searched on their phones and found the most recommended restaurant, Darcy’s. It was a fair walk from the jewelry store, but the drizzle had stopped and they were at least staying dry. When they got to the restaurant, they were seated immediately and treated very, very well. They tried a sampler plate to get a taste of several local foods all in one meal. As dinner ended, Neil noticed a band setting up. Darcy’s turned out to have live music that night, so they moved into the music area and stayed for almost all the band’s sets. They even gave a try at dancing to the music with the band actually helping them figure out the steps. It was a small intimate crowd of mostly locals who welcomed the young American couple into their lives. They all had fun enjoying the fabulous music of Ireland.

Neil and Caroline slept well at the hotel and woke up the next morning raring to go. They had a light breakfast and decided to make this visit a real road trip. Neil went back to the airport and rented a car. He returned to the hotel and picked up Caroline, who had checked out and was waiting by the curb with their luggage. Neil had upgraded to a rare Ferrari that was in the lot and they took off going south. They thought they would see Belfast in detail when they had come full circle around the island. Neil had to get oriented to driving a car on the wrong side of the road from the wrong side of the car. He thought if they were going to go to all that trouble, why they didn’t switch the gas and brake pedals too. They drove nice and easy, stopping at every photo opportunity available on the ride down to Dublin. They had decided to stay in Dublin a few days and checked into the Merrion near downtown. Before the day got away from them, they managed to get in one important local site. They went to tour the Dublin Castle, which is now a government office but filled with a wonderful history. While they were there, the couple talked to a couple of the locals who were tour guides about the rest of the city, its sites and restaurants in particular. The guides’ advice turned out to be excellent and they had dinner at Tucci’s Steakhouse. It was still early when they finished dinner, so they went next door to hear more typical Irish music. They had a blast, made new friends again and got back to the hotel very late.

They slept in and ordered room service for lunch after the late night. It was raining pretty hard, so it was easy to be lazy tourists. The rain backed off to the usual drizzle in the early afternoon, so Neil and

Caroline ventured out to see the museums, monuments and other common attractions right around the city proper. They had to get in some shopping and bought Irish-made quilts, woolens and sweaters. They had most of it shipped home because of the bulk. Even with the shipping, the prices were well below those back home, so they bought gifts for everyone. The rain turned heavy again near sundown, so they decided to hunker down for the night in their room. More room service and more watching old TV while they cuddled on an oversized couch under one of the wonderful handmade quilts the hotel made available in their rooms.

The sun came up to a beautiful clear day and Caroline and Neil took advantage of it by checking out of the hotel and heading south. They stopped at every historical and picturesque site on the way to Cork and still got there in time to see a few things around that city. They found a quiet hotel, checked in and asked the desk person to recommend a good restaurant. She did and they went for a twenty-minute twilight drive to a wonderful little family place right outside the city. They enjoyed typical heavy Irish fare and could not resist hanging around in the pub next door to wait for a band to start playing. They listened for a bit, decided not to dance this evening and headed back to the hotel for the night. They were getting tired of the late nights and partying.

Their good luck with the weather held and they drove directly to Galway the next day after searching for and finding a couple of very nice antique dealers in the city they just could not resist. This time, Caroline took the lead looking for some specific items, like bedside tables and bookcases that would fill the holes in Neil's house that was now going to be their home together. They found a hotel, had dinner and called it a night considering how tired they were from all the shopping. They got up early and left for the long country drive to Belfast. They stopped at everything interesting again and checked back into the same hotel they had stayed in a few days before. They also ate at the same restaurant they had on the previous visit and were surprised when the staff remembered them. They made reservations to fly home two days hence and then shopped into the evening at some nicer clothing stores. They had to buy another suitcase to accommodate everything, even after shipping so many of their other purchases home. They finished sightseeing the next day and went out dancing again to celebrate their last night in the British Isles.

Caroline and Neil were ready to return home when they turned in the rental car, waited and finally boarded their flight home. Together, they reviewed all of the pictures Caroline had taken as they passed the time during the long flight. They landed at JFK and took a taxi to Neil's parents' house. They celebrated the engagement with Neil's mother making his favorite chicken and rice casserole for dinner. Neil was pretty much ignored as his parents fawned over their soon to be daughter-in-law. Neil waited

until they were all done with dinner and surprised his parents with the gifts from Ireland. Then, they looked at almost all of Caroline's pictures and Neil's dad had to check out Caroline's new camera. He said he really liked it and both Caroline and Neil immediately knew what to get him for his birthday next month. They stayed the night there in Neil's old bedroom and left in the morning to spend the day with Caroline's family. The exact opposite happened with them at the Solomon home. They all waited hand and foot on their future son-in-law and Caroline was ignored by everyone, except when they wanted to see the ring and hear the engagement story again and again. Neil and Caroline started handing out presents as soon as they got there and didn't finish for an hour. They ate all day long and finally, late that night, Neil and Caroline extricated themselves from the family party and caught the last plane from New York to Dulles.

The office threw Caroline an engagement party a few days after she returned to work and that was followed up by another party back at her parents' neighborhood with family and old friends. And a date was set for the wedding itself. It would be two weeks after the wedding planner said she could have it ready. They used Miss Nina, as that was part of her many services she provided. Caroline moved in with Neil and, with help from Melinda, the women from work, Neil's mother and Caroline's mother, sisters and cousins, arranged the house just so with all the new antiques that had arrived. What they really added were the homey touches like doilies, vases, family pictures and other items men hardly ever think of. Neil even got some of his childhood inventions displayed in a hallway, while Caroline printed and hung some of Neil's family pictures. His mother gave Caroline access to a cloud account that had all their family media. A lot of the things were taken from Caroline's house in Jersey, which she sold to a cousin who was starting a family with a very reasonable family discount. And now, they needed picture frames for all of her new travels photos. That made several visits to various stores including a unique custom frame shop. Neil picked out two very special photos Caroline had taken in Scotland and had them printed on canvas. Caroline decorated the guesthouse with her mother making the final decisions. Everyone gave Caroline's mother that nod knowing she would be spending more time there than anyone. In fact, Caroline's parents and family started visiting and staying a few days on the weekend as soon as the decorating was concluded. Fortunately, Neil liked them and welcomed them into his life. Whenever Neil was asked why there was an armed security person watching the garage, he told the truth -- that there was some valuable equipment the company owned and stored there and insurance required it.

Caroline and Neil were inseparable except when they had to take care of company business -- even then, they still worked together often. Every chance they got, they would work together. Neil even started

*Nazi Echoes*

to cook at home just to spend time in the kitchen when Caroline was there trying to make dinner. They went for bike rides, swam and worked out together. They were starting to understand the special things about each other, but there were constant pleasant surprises all the time. Simply put, they were in love.

## The Bauers

Paul Bauer was a diamond merchant in Vienna and traveled around Europe extensively for his work. He was also a business acquaintance of Abe Solomon who owned a neighborhood jewelry store near his home. When Hitler first came to power in neighboring Germany, Bauer knew his life was about to change forever. He knew many people in influential positions because of his business and they would let it slip that it might be time for all Jews to move before the coming storm. He must take his family and flee before the occupation he knew would come. He set up an account with some money in Paris preparing for their relocation. Shortly thereafter, he decided to take no chances and left well before the invasion occurred. But the people leaving the country were already being searched and he could not risk taking his entire inventory with him. He could get away with a small sample case as he always had, but that was it. He had no choice but to hide his company's diamonds in a metal box in the wall of his home. He cut open the wall, placed the box inside, plastered and painted the patch himself. He believed he could return in a few years and retrieve it. It was as safe as he could make it where it was.

Paul's wife had passed away many years before and he had never remarried. He gathered up his family, his daughter Marie, her husband Arnold and his granddaughter Greta and made the several day train trip to Paris. The ride was long with all the local stops, but made even longer with their papers being checked and rechecked. Besides that, all their belongings were rifled through by the military and police every time their papers were checked. Many people traveling were dragged off the train and made to wait in the stations. Paul and his family managed to pass all the checkpoints -- with difficulty -- but they passed. They arrived in Paris and settled in the Argenteuil area of the city. It was a part of town he thought he could hide in and weather the coming occupation in relative safety. He purchased a small neighborhood grocery store and settled in. He survived the eventual German occupation of France by staying far enough off their radar in the outskirts of the city just as planned. His daughter and son-in-law helped to run the store and, between the three of them, they made a manageable living. They were there three years when Paul Bauer died from a heart attack, taking the secret of his hidden diamonds with him to the grave.

Marty, Neil and Fletcher flew to Colorado to take pictures of the houses and cabins in the woods that Homeland Security contracted. They took off with their new armored utility van and upgraded C-130 Hercules aircraft. They installed more insulation panels and their little temporary bedroom was built in to stay. They bunked it out to accommodate six people, just in case. Weapons were loaded permanently

onboard and a complete computer communication system was installed in the “bunkroom”, as it was being called. They left early in the morning, chased the sun across the sky and landed only one hour later in Mountain Time than they had left in Eastern Time.

They touched down at the sprawling Denver International Airport, taxied to their temporary private hangar and got ready to work. The two security people assigned to babysit the airplane were a couple of Army MPs with some serious hardware. It turned out the assignment would take several days because each targeted building was a cabin in the high forest of the Rockies located many miles apart. Neil had written special software to handle the different environment they were now working in. It measured the density and composition of the earth, made adjustments and requested another sample after recalibrating itself. Each of the ten buildings were at least twenty miles apart on mountainous roads. They headed west up into the higher altitudes and snaked their way to the first building after using the rest of the morning to get there. They took their picture from the road in front of the cabin more than one hundred feet away. It was perfect. They turned around and left for the next target about thirty miles from where they were. They were able to get that picture and one more before the night caught up with them. Neil was doing his written analysis report for the day and spotted the makings of a fertilizer bomb in the second cabin’s outbuilding. He told Fletcher and Fletcher called it in. After some back and forth, the decision was made to put a watch on the road, in and out to the target cabin, to make sure nothing comes or goes without them knowing it. They were going to do nothing until the rest of the pictures were taken and Echoes was well away safely.

The three men ate at a small diner in Keystone and then spent the night at a Walmart parking lot. They agreed to rough it and sleep in the van to keep a safe watch. They stretched out on cots and were out for most of the night -- between being awakened by snoring bunkmates and having to go to the bathroom.

Paul Bauer’s granddaughter, Greta Hays Kurz, was now seventy-six and still ran the store. It had changed and been made over many times during the years, but it was still named Bauer’s Market. She was something of a crusty old bird who smoked and drank heavily. She had long since passed on being a practicing Jew and adopted a life without religion. She had simply worked all her life just trying to exist year to year. Her only son Nolan was in jail for running a car theft ring ten years earlier. She would not live to see him get out and she didn’t care. She hadn’t visited him in years. However, Nolan had a wife, Lucinda and they had a daughter, Rachael, who was now sixteen. After Lucinda divorced Nolan, she continued to have bad taste in men and gravitated toward the tough lower life section of the man market. Together, the three females had survived a rough life. Greta tried to make a better life for young Rachael,

but she looked like she was going to follow in her mother's footsteps if things didn't change.

Everybody read the bio on Greta and was concerned. They didn't want the money she would receive from the sale of the diamonds, around three million dollars, to completely ruin her life. Everyone had heard of the stories where lottery winners' lives were destroyed by the money rather than making it the wonderful dream it should be. So Caroline called the first all-hands meeting of the Echoes Foundation even though Marty, Neil and Fletcher would attend from out of town. They would take time out and Skype in to the get together.

The office had a massive conference room with several large sitting areas with couches and coffee tables. They pushed a few things around and, when they were ready, Caroline started the meeting.

"The dilemma before us is that we don't want the blessing of this treasure to ruin Greta's life, rather than make it better. We cannot withhold the diamonds from Greta, but we can help her deal with the newfound wealth. I have talked to several of you and you have had wonderful suggestions."

She turned on a projector and showed a bulleted list that read:

- Offer her financial counseling
- Offer her personal counseling
- Offer to help her relocate to start a new life with a new name

That was it, short and sweet.

Marty spoke, "I like every one of the items up there and I can't think of any more. However, here is the problem in my mind -- presentation. How do we tell her about the money and lead her down the path to take advantage of the things we are offering? I think we all agree that giving her the money and running away would be a mistake."

Melinda said, "Absolutely." Others nodded in agreement. She continued, "And I was wondering how to get her with the program." She turned to Patrice and said, "Can you find out if Greta has any friends that might be able to help us help her, like a banker or anyone?"

The investigator replied, "Sure. It would mean feet on the ground and would take a week, but sure."

Caroline said, "Fine, then we have an action plan. Patrice, please get started on that as soon as you can." Then she looked at the entire group and said, "A short meeting. I love short meetings. Thank you." Everyone stood as the meeting ended. However, they all ended up hanging around and getting to know each other a little better for a few minutes. They all finally drifted away and went back to work.

In Colorado, at the Walmart, the three men had gotten up early for the meeting. Outside, a good rainstorm that was predicted to last for days was in full swing, complete with thunder and lightning. The weather both helped and hindered them in their work. It kept them somewhat hidden from view from the direction of the cabins, but it made driving on the unpaved roads a real challenge. They had seven pictures remaining and hoped to do four that day. It was good that they started early, because the roads were becoming too difficult for the heavy van. They had to backtrack twice to avoid closed low water crossings, but still managed to get two pictures before noon. The good thing was that no one took notice of the van anywhere they went. The bad thing was that it was becoming too treacherous for the van on the muddy, hilly roads. They managed to get in the last two pictures for the day taking risks that they really should not have. They phoned the contract manager and they decided it would be okay to pass on the last three targets. The contract manager said something about those three being only ‘nice to haves’ anyway; that they had already found what they were looking for. They knew the perpetrators were gathering bomb-making materials, but they didn’t know which of the sites they had narrowed it down to would be the right one. Of course, the contract payment was reduced to a corresponding percentage.

The three men arrived in Denver after a three-hour slow drive on the interstate through the driving rain. When they reached the airport and the plane, they loaded up, got into the air and fought over who would take the first shower. It actually was just a hot sponge bath, but it felt great after two nights of roughing it in the same clothes. They flew home and the company was eight hundred thousand dollars richer. A few days later, the van got new all-weather, all-terrain tires and they added some more emergency equipment like tire chains, cable and a come-along hand cable puller. They were going to consider a front wench as well when they could talk about it more.

Four days later, Patrice reported that she had found a banker acquaintance that they might be able to use. They talked it over and all decided that Caroline would lead the notification meeting, along with one Associate, Montgomery Dassault. He looked really good in a suit and tie and he spoke French.

The diamonds were sent ahead in a diplomatic pouch and were waiting at the bank of Greta’s friend, Maurice Chandler. He was the manager of the local branch of a big bank that held the mortgage on Greta’s grocery shop. He had known her for thirty years. They weren’t exactly friends, but it was the best that could be found. The Echoes Foundation had arranged for his bank to receive the stones and place them in a safe deposit box for the time being.

Caroline and Montgomery arrived in time to meet with the bank manager before the day ended.

After the pleasantries, Montgomery started it off, “This is a delicate matter regarding one of your



customers, Greta Hays.”

Mr. Chandler replied, “Yes, Greta, she has had her accounts here for years.”

“She has come into a substantial amount of money and we are here to make arrangements for the transfer.”

“Yes. We can help with that. We are always here for our longtime customers.”

“We are hoping that you might be able to help us personally.” Montgomery went on to explain the situation as discreetly as possible. The manager agreed to call Greta and ask her to come down. She was in and out all the time anyway. He made the call and she would stop by the next morning while her daughter-in-law was working at the store.

Montgomery made contact with the others that would participate in this event and confirmed the meeting time. He and Caroline went back into the city and enjoyed a nice evening in Paris. The next morning, they all met at the bank a half hour before Greta was to arrive. They visited and planned the next steps.

The visit was all scripted with everyone knowing their parts down cold and ready when Greta arrived. She was greeted by Mr. Chandler and escorted to the conference room where she was introduced to Montgomery and Caroline. She was obviously surprised by all this. Once seated, Chandler said, “Greta, these people have some wonderful news for you.” That eased her nervousness and Montgomery took over.

“Mrs. Hays, your grandfather, Paul Bauer, left somethings in Austria when he brought you to Paris. He hid it in a wall of the home he had there. It has been recently discovered and we wish to return it to the rightful heir, you.”

“I barely remember my Grandfather. What did he leave?”

“You may remember that he was a diamond merchant.” Chandler brought out the safe deposit box and passed it to Caroline. She pulled up the lid, took out the original metal box in which the diamonds had been hidden, set it on the table and opened it. She lifted out the leather bag inside and set it on the table in front of her. She then got out a velvet cloth from her purse and laid it out. Then Caroline gently poured the diamonds out of the bag onto the cloth.

Montgomery said, “These diamonds are worth approximately two point eight million euros.”

Greta was dumbfounded and finally said, “This is mine?”

“Yes. After taxes, this is all yours.”

She got up and danced around the room a bit and hugged everyone, saying thank you over and over.

When she calmed down, they brought in the first visitor. He was a financial advisor from a

prestigious firm in downtown Paris. The FBI had highly recommended the firm from some dealings they had with another agency of the United States government a few years before. The advisor was introduced and Montgomery said, "He represents the Foundation that returned the stones to you. He is a part of the service we offer to anyone receiving an inheritance of this size."

They carried on a long conversation about the money and Greta listened politely. It was clear she wanted to get her hands on some cash and celebrate. They reminded her of her confidentiality agreement. She settled down and started to listen again. She took the advisor's advice and held off making any important decisions for the day. At this point, they gave her a thousand euros as celebrating money. She slipped it into her purse and was ready to go. They held her up and brought in the next person to assist Greta -- a female professional personal counselor. The others left the room while they chatted. A half hour and a box of tissues later, Greta had a different look on things and life in general.

As planned, everyone departed except for Caroline and Montgomery. Montgomery started, "Greta, there is one more option for you and we would like you to consider it strongly. We can give you a new life in a new location, if you would like. You could take Lucinda and Rachael and disappear together to start over. You could leave all the unpleasant people in your life behind, or you could just move and deal with them as you wish. If you haven't figured it out, we wish to make sure this money blesses you and not ruin your life, as it often does to people without a support system."

Greta understood and said, "Thank you. Where could we be moved to?"

"Almost anywhere you want. You have enough money now to pretty much do anything you've wanted to do."

Greta got up from her chair and walked over to a window. She stared outside for a minute and then quietly said, "Could we move to the country with a house overlooking a vineyard?"

"Yes, Greta. You could."

"I would very much like to do that." She started crying again. Caroline got up and hugged Greta while she finished crying.

Caroline and Montgomery worked with the local people to get the ball rolling. Greta told the story in her neighborhood that she had an offer on the store that she could not refuse. She was going to retire and live off the profits in a small town south of Paris, where Lucinda had some distant relatives. A bunch of her acquaintances wanted to know more, but she stuck to the story, said goodbye and disappeared. She lied and said she would be back to see them often. All the arrangements were made and the three ladies moved into a nice hotel in Paris while their new home was picked out.

A woman from the financial advising company was assigned the task of helping Greta, Lucinda and Rachael while they purchased their new home. She also made sure they attended the individual therapy sessions they all wanted. She took them on two trips into the country to shop for homes after picking the general locations from the web. Nothing they looked at struck their fancy on the first day. The next time they went out, they found it. Greta knew it the minute she saw the home. They had a grand time and stopped to buy new clothes along the way. Somewhere in there, the girls received makeovers from an expensive salon in Paris. New clothes, a new look, new attitudes and a drug- and alcohol-free existence was what they all wanted, particularly Rachael.

They found a twenty-four hundred square foot cottage-style home outside of Limoges two hundred and fifty miles from Paris. The home had a view to die for with enough acreage for a large garden. It was a short walk to the shops around their home and just a ten-minute drive to reach the metropolitan center of the city. Once the house was in escrow, they concentrated on cars. They bought a new Peugeot sedan for Lucinda and Greta and a fun 208 model for Rachael.

New advisors were set up in Limoges to help them stay on track. They cut all ties with the old life and began to establish new, better ones. Lucinda started to act like a new person befitting the updated look and wardrobe. She started to work out at a gym and soon made some nice new friends.

Rachael finished high school with honors and went to one of the universities in Paris. She wanted to be a medical doctor and was well on the way with excellent grades.

Under a doctor's care for the first time in her life, Greta started to feel better and actually made some friends as well. She even met someone who wished to date her.

The staff at the Echoes Foundation thought all was as well as it could be and the whole process became a model for the next case. Echoes celebrated each new piece of good news that came from Greta, who they stayed in touch with closely. Greta really made everyone in the firm believe in what Echoes was doing as a company. It was very satisfying work. Rachael and Montgomery were becoming pen pals over email and he was taking a personal interest in her education. He helped her with her homework, went to visit her several times for "work" and became sort of a surrogate father to her. His wife joined in and even sent care packages to their new special young French friend.

The firm had been busy parsing out money from the sale of the gold bullion to the identifiable crewmen who were victims of a hijacking by the Somali pirates. The figure of around three thousand dollars was selected as the surprise bonus. Any more and it would be too conspicuous in the news. It certainly could not be given back to the insurance companies that paid the shipping lines and everyone else for their

losses. That would attract too much unwanted attention. Neil took solace that it would be a pleasant financial bonus for the sailors, if not life changing. The rest of the gold money was split into several accounts and a number of Holocaust-related charitable trusts were created or beefed up. The Echoes primaries had a heart to heart talk with the entire staff and made the decision to expand to include scholarships for the arts as well. They gave gifts to university music scholarship programs across the country, given in the names of their parents and loved ones. The donations were small and private enough to fly under the radar of anyone that might be watching.

## Baghdad Bombs

It was the middle of the night and cars with red lights flashing pulled up to both Neil and Marty's houses at the same time. Fletcher was taking the lead at Marty's and the agent on duty that night in the "garage" at Neil's house roused everyone out of a sound sleep saying there was a situation and the team was needed right now. They all threw stuff into bags and were ready to go in an instant. Neil did not want Caroline going out in field, but she would not let them go without her. If Melinda could supply support, so could she.

Fletcher briefed them on the short drive to the airport. They were on their way to Munich to meet up with the rest of the support and security team and then on to Iraq. The military had gotten an intercept that indicated there would be a barrage of coordinated car bomb attacks any day now. They wanted Echoes to map the outskirts of the city, looking for the staging areas for building the suicide vehicles. And they wanted it done as fast as possible.

They got to the airport hangar, flew out of the cars and ran up the plane's cargo ramp as it warmed up for takeoff. They taxied immediately and were in the air in less than five minutes. They all grabbed cots in their newly finished bunkroom and hunkered down to finish sleeping. They all woke up hungry with four more hours to go before reaching Munich. Fletcher took the lead on making breakfast straight from the freezer and pantry. He said he could microwave with the best of them. Everyone was really glad the airplane and van had been stocked with supplies just for these occasions and thanked Melinda over and over again. After breakfast, Fletcher coordinated communications with the mission commanders and managed to get a map of designated target buildings in Baghdad. Caroline got her office going remotely and was told they were fine and had enough work to do for the next six weeks. She could relax about them. They figured correctly what was going on when Caroline told them she was on the Hercules.

Melinda took a few minutes to show Caroline how to use some of the guns and rifles laying around. Fletcher helped out and rambled off a complete lesson on using a handgun. Caroline got every word. After a while, she settled in next to Neil and they talked about their wedding plans more than Neil would have liked. He was a good sport about it and Melinda saved him a couple of times. When they talked about the honeymoon, Neil asked if Caroline would let him make the plans -- that he wanted to surprise her. She gave in immediately and was glad to have one more thing not to worry about. Neil had a couple of things in mind to knock her socks off. Somewhere after breakfast and work, almost everyone slipped into the sweat suits stored onboard and kicked back to some music or reading.

Melinda requested a connection with one of the soldiers that was waiting in Munich and sent him on

a buying mission to the PX for more supplies. She gave him a credit card number and he was happy to help out. With about an hour to landing, Neil got his Sig P226 out and got one of the men to show him how to break it down and reassemble it in regulation style. Neil followed his example and was soon flying through the routine. He practiced at least thirty times before they landed and got faster every time.

They landed without any problems and taxied to their hangar where a team of soldiers was waiting. The plane was fueled, the supplies the soldier brought back from the PX were loaded and all the men and equipment were fitted into the underbelly of the craft. They were back in the sky as fast as possible for the next four hours and forty-five minute leg of their journey. Those already comfortable on board helped the new men get settled in. They had some food and changed into easy clothes. A couple of the same men that were on the mission to Somalia were present and they were all glad to see each other again. The friends caught up and visited until everyone calmed down and relaxed. After all, it was midnight local time. Everyone wanted to meet Neil's beautiful fiancée, Caroline. Neil stuck right beside her while everyone congratulated them on their engagement. One of the men even started to talk about wedding plans with Caroline. He had a sister in Alabama who was a wedding planner.

Neil went off to the side and practiced his work with his pistol. One of the men saw him and offered a tiny bit of advice on how to hold the piece differently. It did indeed improve his speed. Once the word circled the plane, everybody wanted to see Neil in action. He obliged and all were duly impressed. Then timers came out, a small wager was made and the fun began. They went four rounds with all the men stepping in or out of the competition until it was down to the best four times. One of those times belonged to Neil. The final round was timed and Neil got third out of the four. Then he made the winner critique him and that made him faster still. Marty let the cat out of the bag and spilled that Neil was a mechanical engineer. They all spent the next hour playing with their guns.

They landed in Baghdad at five a.m. to a cold night wind. They taxied a long way to their bombproof hangar. Once they had begun the offloading process, they received their first set of orders. Command wanted them to start right then and there to snap as many pictures as possible before dawn. The team jointly decided that the van would venture out on its own with only two soldiers visible as the drivers. Four more were crammed inside the vehicle with Marty and Neil in case something went wrong. The other men would be in their own armored carryalls just a block away. Neil wanted to work the boom remotely using the cameras thus not exposing the operator to any danger. Safety would depend on vehicles parked in the street and how far back from the street the houses were, but it was the wise option.

Melinda and Caroline were invited into the command building for the operation. Just twenty minutes after landing, the convoy left the base through the main gate. They drove four long, tense miles to the

target neighborhood and went to work. The solo utility van eased onto the targeted street, stopped, setup, took the picture and reset the boom for travel. They were only there for sixty seconds, but a man saw them. He walked out of a house across the street when they pulled up and watched them work. Then he got on a cell phone and made a call when they were almost finished. There was a bounty on information pertaining to a mysterious utility van that had been seen in London a few weeks before. The man thought he had hit the lottery jackpot by making the call.

The van moved out and went to the next stop. They took that picture just as the sun rose and people were beginning to stir in their homes. After the first man called, the network was woken up and the second stop was called in as well. The third building had a garage with an old car in it and enough explosives to obliterate a city block. That information was radioed back to base after Neil reviewed the picture and the computer identified the materials. As the Echoes team moved out and went for the fourth picture, a squad of attackers was converging on the third house.

Neil and Marty were riding in the back of the van sitting at the console studying pictures when a Rocket Propelled Grenade hit them. The van was doing about twenty miles an hour and the strike point was square on the lower side between the front and rear tires. The van was blown to the side and into a building, but kept on moving thanks to the armor and the fact that the tires had been missed. They called for backup and it arrived just as gunmen on the next street opened fire. The driver pulled the van off the cross street and stopped. The men in the van spilled out and returned fire. They killed the two shooters after just a few shots. Three armored personnel carriers surrounded the Echoes van while the bodies were collected. The men hopped back into their vehicles and all of them sped back to the safety of the command base.

When the soldiers got to the third house, they stormed it and found no one at home. Not a real big surprise considering the shootout. They cleaned up the mess and turned the problem over to the locals. Command quickly got all assets looking into the whereabouts of the people who had been living there. They were looking at drone footage and even reviewing some satellite imagery as well.

When the men pulled back through the base gates, they kept going to the command center and the hangar where the plane was parked. Melinda and Caroline were there when Neil and Marty climbed out of the van. They hugged and hugged and Caroline started to cry. Neil consoled her as they worked their way to the side of the van that had been hit by the blast. It was dented like it had scraped the side of a building and nothing more. Neil walked up and wiped the blast residue off the side and it looked pretty good.

Some of the men hanging around saw what was happening and Marty said, “Would you help clean this up as best as it can be, please? We need to get back out there as fast as possible. There may be more. This time we go in force, but we are going to get the job done.”

And that was the way it was. They were reorganized and a new route was developed. This time there was a convoy of five armored vehicles and more than twenty men. They had air support from two armed drones and perimeter protection from the Iraqi Police and Military. They stormed out of the base compound and went to work again.

Back home, the Echoes Law Firm was not sitting on their hands. Two of the female lawyers were in San Francisco at the Sotheby’s office there for the sale of two boxes of jewelry that had no owner. It was an open auction that was held every Thursday. The items had been on display for two weeks and it was time to execute the sale.

There were over twenty pieces that were expected to go for between one thousand and thirty thousand dollars. The two associates were getting their first taste of an auction and being in the City by the Bay. They had arrived two days before to be available to sign papers and answer any questions they could about the items. But that was work that only took a stop by the store on Sansome Street right on the edge of the financial district each day, so they used the rest of the time to take in the sights. Of course, they rode cable cars and ate at Fisherman’s Warf, but they really enjoyed the museums in Golden Gate Park. They toured Alcatraz and had drinks at the Top of the Mark restaurant on the highest floor of the Mark Hopkins hotel on Nob Hill.

The day of the auction came and the Echoes representatives were all over it with Skype connections back to the office where everyone was watching the live feed. They had a white board set up to tally the totals when they came in. It made the office room look like a horse race run-board in an old illegal gambling parlor. The auction started and the first piece of theirs finally hit the auction block. It was a gaudy ruby ring and fetched twenty six hundred dollars. They had to wait a few items until another one of theirs showed up and it was a beautiful necklace and earring set. The sale seemed to stall at twenty thousand dollars, but two shoppers got in a bidding war and ended at thirty-two grand.

It took the rest of the day but, one by one, all the items were sold. The estimates held true and the total for Echoes after commission was two hundred two thousand dollars. The money was transferred into a trust account and a new file was opened for more scholarships. The two attorneys stayed another day to visit with a friend of one of theirs from college. They had a fine visit and flew out the next day from San Francisco International Airport heading back to their new homes in Virginia.



Meanwhile in Baghdad, the convoy pulled into the first target neighborhood and took a picture with soldiers fanned all around the van. There was also a line of men a block over on either side. They were not taking any chances. They all wanted to finish this assignment by the end of the day. Certain local men in the neighborhood got on their cell phones as soon as they saw the van. Every one of them did not hold to any religious or patriotic beliefs -- they made the call for the promised cash.

The first calls got more men alert and willing to take a chance for money. That meant that in a very short time the bomb makers knew the convoy's every move. They got orders to finish the job they started -- destroy that vehicle and everyone inside with it. By the time the van took the fourth picture, men were in position to attack at three locations. Their movements in the streets were captured by a drone's cameras and relayed to the command center where they informed the men in the convoy exactly where the enemy men were. When the convoy moved to a different area, they passed right by one of the three points where the attackers were stationed. Their commander on the ground made a wise and instant decision to not attack. He knew their weapons were too light to hurt the armored van and that it was too heavily protected with the support vehicles and soldiers ringing it. The van went on to take another dozen pictures before it encountered a second group of attackers. Their commander talked to the first one and drew the same conclusion after seeing the firepower and backed off. The convoy hit the last area and started to work again.

Echoes was still being watched and the local men were still waiting for an attack opportunity that never came. The van was on the second house with only five houses remaining when Neil saw enough in a picture to order a unit of men to go in and secure the building. The van with a couple of support teams headed for the next picture site and was a half mile away when the raid started. The remaining soldiers used a series of standard moves to surround the house and the garage in particular. The team leaders had the wireframe picture of the building Neil and company had taken just moments before. It showed men preparing a car bomb and four more men inside the house itself sitting around a table with a computer in the middle of them. Of course, this was now twenty minutes old. They got set, the leader made the call and the op began.

Flash bang grenades were slid into the garage by two men who were able to sneak up to the walls of the structure on each side. There were enough broken boards and other openings in the walls for them to toss the grenades inside without having to cut or open anything at all. A millisecond after the flash bangs were tossed, the side door of the garage was pushed open and four soldiers stormed the place. They found two men still working on the bomb itself. One of the men working close to the detonator was shot when

he reached for it. The room was secured in twenty seconds.

At the same time the garage door was breached, the front and back doors of the house were smashed in and the teams moved inside quickly. Two of the men had laid down in a side bedroom to sleep and the other two were still sitting at the dining room table watching TV remotely on their laptop. They were drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes. Those two were taken easily, but when they entered the bedroom door, one of the men had had enough time to grab a live grenade, pull the pin and toss it at the door. He cowered against the wall as it went off and was killed instantly as was his companion sleeping on the cot across the room.

The soldiers saw the grenade coming and dived as fast as they could. All were clear when it went off except for one man, who got some pieces from the door in his leg. The injury was serious, but not life threatening. Everyone moved outside as quickly as possible expecting more booby traps or any other surprise that might be lying in wait. All the men were outside with the Iraqis flex cuffed on the sidewalk when they got a call from Neil. He had found another.

The commander made the call immediately. They left enough of the local military and police to handle the captured men and keep everyone away from the garage and headed out on foot for the next house.

Neil and his van finished taking the pictures and were sure the remaining area was clear. They were now headed back to the base when the men reached the last car bomb house. The picture Neil had taken clearly showed the same types of things as the last two active houses. It was empty of people, but it looked like the prep work on this bomb was completed. They approached the house, which was at the end of a block and set away from the other houses on the street. This time the men approached with blast shields and full bomb protective armor. But first they sent in a robot to see what they were up against. The men thought they were significantly protected by their distance and the equipment they were wearing and carrying. They underestimated the amount of explosive. The robot entered the side door to the garage and the bomb exploded.

The car bomb had been remotely detonated in the garage from a few streets away by a man waiting for just the right time to get as many soldiers as possible. He was watching from behind a storage shed and pressed the button when he thought it was the right time. The blast was immediate and massive. It took out four of the men instantly. Four others were blown back across the street. The rest were protected by distance. The four survivors blown across the street were helped by the other men and medics that were always on hand. Once away from the blast zone, they were loaded into the waiting ambulances. They were taken to the base hospital; two of the men had lost limbs, one a hand and the other a foot. The

other two were beat up with internal injuries and would never see combat again.

Neil's van made it back to the compound and they immediately went to the base hospital where the wounded were being treated. Melinda and Caroline were already there waiting for them as they climbed out. They hugged and hugged again and then cried. They waited an hour before the first report came out on either of the two injured soldiers. One had his left hand sliced off by a piece of flying metal. He had no other injuries and was in recovery. They cried for him and waited some more. The last man was still in surgery. It was another hour later when that doctor came out and told them that the injured soldier had lost his left foot. It was mangled by the blast and the surgeons consulted several specialists back in the United States on the best way to proceed several times. He too sustained no other injuries and was now in recovery. They cried again and went back to the plane to get some sleep. They reached the airplane and were surprised to find orders to evacuate immediately waiting. All the soldiers they had picked up would be staying. The four Echoes principals boarded the plane with their FBI handler and friend, Fletcher. It was a sad departure except for a short speech from the base Commanding Officer.

“Your country owes you a great debt. You saved countless hundreds of people today by finding those car bombs. The sacrifice the soldiers made today was an unfortunate but necessary act of war, nothing more, nothing less. Take heart in the fact that together you all acted with courage and honor under the worst of circumstances. It is an honor and privilege to have worked with you.” He saluted them. Marty saluted and the rest just kind of waved. They boarded the plane, it started and taxied onto the runway. There was no other traffic and they were in the sky as the sun set heading home.

They all ate some food and crawled into bed to sleep. After a few hours when they were fast asleep over Portugal, they got a video call from the President of the United States. It was a communications officer requesting a chat, but once she saw that they were in bed asleep, she gave them ten minutes. They got squared away and took the call. After quick introductions, the President just wanted to thank them personally for their work. No one knew what to say, so Melinda just said that he was welcome. The President had been following their activities by reports from every one of their contracts including the side business in Vienna. He loved hearing the latest tale, said he admired them greatly and offered to personally help with any difficulties they might have in the future. Marty said something about it being a pleasure to be helping their country. Then the President announced that he was going to give them all the Presidential Medal of Freedom. They were shocked and delighted. He told them a little about the medal and its history. They were about to sign off when Neil said, “Mister President, I would like to take you up on offer for assistance immediately.”

“What do you have in mind?”

“I want the men who were injured today to receive the very best of everything and for the families of the ones who were killed as well and I am asking for your personal attention to each of them, Sir.”

“I would be honored to fulfill that request.”

The President was kind of chatty and took the opening to ask about everyone’s families. He was particularly excited about the engagement and asked jokingly if he could attend the wedding. They were tired, the President recognized it and finally let them return to sleep. They all got settled back into bed and slept almost the whole flight across the Atlantic. They landed, drove home and spent the next few days decompressing from the excitement. They didn’t notice that several FBI agents were now watching their homes to protect them from whomever recognized the van in Baghdad.

## The Friedjungs

Simon Friedjung and his family had lived in Vienna for thirty years and Simon worked hard to provide a good life for them. His older brother had died and Simon had taken in his widow and three daughters as part of his family. That meant the family consisted of Hildy, his wife, their two sons, two daughters, his sister in law, Gertrude and her three daughters. The house was crowded all the time with young people ranging from just out of diapers to early teens. Simon owned a door hardware manufacturing company that did business all over Europe. He had developed many new ideas for the process and had patents on several of them. His business thrived due to his innovation and hard work and he became a wealthy man.

Herr Friedjung's wife and sister-in-law were a part of the higher society social scene and were friends with many important artists and politicians. Simon had no taste for the phoniness that often passed in those circles and just indulged their activities while trying to avoid most of the functions. He enjoyed being at home with all the children, helping them to read, write and play. And they loved him right back, always wanting to hang around with Grandpapa. He loved to play with each and every one of them and it did not matter in the least if the child was a boy or girl. One of his favorite things was to design intricate mechanical toys and have them made at his plant. It was a special evening when he announced that a new surprise was coming home from the "toy factory" as they called it. And then came Hitler.

Simon recognized all the signs of things to come, listened to the people in the know and prepared for a relocation. His plan was to move the women and children to Paris and set sail for the United States as soon as he could wrap up affairs in Austria. Part of wrapping up affairs was to figure some way for his collection of five oil paintings, all by Pierre-Auguste Renoir, to travel with him to America. He had international banking connections, so moving money was no problem; but the paintings were another story altogether. He had some jewelry, but he planned to sell it quickly and convert it to traveling cash.

He sold his machine plant to a competitor saying he was retiring, which was true after all. He only had to make two calls to find a buyer. His facility was in a prime location close to the railroads and his machines were in perfect shape. He gave his workers parting bonuses at the closing party, shed a tear or two with them and enjoyed some hard liquor together one last time. A few days later, he swung by the plant and turned over the keys to his business to the new owner. The whole plant sale process took two weeks and the signs of the impending invasion were everywhere. He thought and thought, but could not find a way to bring out his amazing art collection. With no other option, he decided to hide the paintings in the wall of his beautiful home and hopefully, some day after this madness was over, he could return and retrieve his beloved paintings. When he was doing the wall work, he grabbed a shoebox and

deposited several of the tiny little mechanical toys the children had left behind. On top of the toys, he laid newspaper clippings just for fun as a sort of time capsule for when he returned.

He carefully sealed the wall letting the plaster dry and then the paint. He packed his bags and with great sadness left his home of eighteen years with the dream of starting a new life in America. He was in that strange state of being both happy and sad at the same time. The first leg of his journey was by train into Italy. He walked across the city to the railway station and waited for his train. Simon believed he could catch a plane from there to Paris, but he was just one short day ahead of the *Anschluss*. He boarded the train and, surprisingly, it left on time. He was worried about everything but managed to settle in for the three hundred and seventy mile ride. That didn't last long though, because it was a few stops out of Vienna when the train halted and sat. People made inquiries to the porters, but they knew nothing except that they were ordered to stop and wait.

After sitting on the train for eight hours, the passengers were ordered off. The Nazis had entered Vienna and borders were expected to be closed without their permission to pass. And so Simon waited with the other passengers, who were mostly Jews just like him. They huddled in the station and tried to get some sleep, but it was difficult with the dread everyone was feeling. Finally, the next morning, there was action. A car full of German soldiers pulled up to the train station and started searching through everyone's travel papers. A husband and wife were taken away during the search and then an entire family was removed. Simon was questioned, searched and allowed to reboard the train. They waited an hour in constant fear before the train crept out of the stop.

The train continued to travel slowly and stopped at each station for a long time while soldiers were set up to approve every move between every station. Every time they reviewed Simon's papers, he gave the same answer: He was on a business trip for his company back in Vienna. He gave them the name of the person that had just purchased his company and they bought the story, so far. They had marked his papers showing that he was a Jew and he was treated with less and less respect as he traveled on -- but at least he was moving.

Two days later, after what should have been a four-hour train ride, he crossed the border into Italy. He switched trains, waited in the station for his next train to arrive and made a fairly smooth trip into France and up to Paris. It was the long way round, but the safest. He forgot all about trying to fly and opted to continue by train. Simon reunited with his family in the evening of the next day. They had been worried sick and he never let on that he was as well.

From Paris, they traveled by train north to the port city of Le Havre. They waited almost a week to get tickets and when their ship disembarked, they thought the worst was behind them. It seemed they

traded old challenges for new ones with every new day. Simon had purchased the best tickets available, but the cabins were still cramped. The food was bad and the service was worse than on a train. They endured the poor passage for the twelve-day voyage, landed in New York and made their way through immigration services without too much difficulty. Simon spoke passable English and, with his leadership, the family checked into a nice hotel in downtown New York City and got organized. Simon purchased a small machining business in Brooklyn and a fair-sized row house nearby. They got used to the neighborhood and the neighborhood got used to them. Again, Simon worked hard building a company that made small armament parts. When the war came, he got richer. His familiarity with machine shops in general helped him to reorganize the layout by process flow without too much trouble. His employees started to produce more things more efficiently. And he started to hire women sooner than his competitors, which helped him stay on top of his contracts better than the others were able to once the shortage of men began when the United States joined the war.

Simon Friedjung never made the trip back to retrieve his precious paintings. He suffered a stroke and then another and another until he finally passed away. He never shared the details of his family folk tale and the legendary secret treasure he had stashed back in the old country. For whatever reasons -- his success in America or the challenge of actually recovering the art -- he never went back and never convinced any family member that it was indeed real.

Homeland Security had identified a terrorist threat and needed Echoes to “search” a couple of buildings in Baltimore and a couple more in New York City. The threat was classified as Immediate Credible Severe, meaning it was from a trusted and verified source that a planned attack could come at any minute and that, if the terrorists were successful, the resulting damage and loss of lives would be devastating. Homeland Security was paying two million dollars for the contract because of the danger and need for haste, but the Echoes friends were more interested in stopping the terrorists than getting the cash. It took just minutes for Fletcher, Neil, Marty, Melinda and Caroline to get their things together. They were taken to their hangar at Dulles International Airport and took off in the van for Baltimore. They had been met by a new friend at the airport, Agent Smith and she would be riding along. No one believed her name for a minute and, when she saw their skeptical faces, she said, “No, my name really is Smith, Janet Margaret Smith.” They all laughed at that statement and thought that she must get than a lot. She knew the operational side of the mission, but not the details around what these people and their van brought to the table. Once she was briefed, she was astounded by the capabilities of the system. She was older than the friends by a few years and looked like she belonged on the cover of a fitness magazine.

Agent Smith got into the van with the others and took a seat by the rear. Then she said, “I am overdressed.” She was wearing a business suit with a nice short skirt.

Melinda said, “Come on. I have an idea.” And she took Caroline and Janet out of the van, with the small carryon bags they had brought with them and walked over to the airplane. As they were walking up the ramp, she continued, “Between what Caroline has in her bag, what I brought and what is on the plane, we can help out. Once up the ramp, Caroline dug into a storage footlocker and pulled out tennis shoes, sweats, windbreakers and anything else imaginable. They laid it all out, emptied their personal bags and took off a few pieces of clothing. Then they quickly picked out what they could wear and dressed. The bags were restuffed with more clothes and they took off down the ramp running. They climbed into the van and all the men smiled.

Marty was driving with Fletcher riding shotgun. The drive to Baltimore was just over an hour and the three girls chatted while Neil worked at the system terminal. They found themselves coming into Baltimore and were relieved to find the traffic flowing nicely. This mission was time sensitive after all. They pulled off the main freeway artery into the neighborhood where the two target houses were located. They took a good look around and drove straight to the first target house just two blocks over and three down. They took a picture without notice and with no one getting out of the van. They eased away and drove to the second target. They took its picture, again without notice and pulled out of the neighborhood. Marty pulled into a strip mall and parked. Neil had analyzed both the images and there was bomb-making material at the first house. The image showed one woman inside the older building cooking in the kitchen. Neil showed the others the material; Agent Smith immediately verified the threat. The other building showed nothing unusual. Agent Smith made the decision and said, “Okay, let’s head out. We can get to the two targets in New York before the sun goes down if we hurry. I need to call in the first house results now. They’ll need to get it neutralized as soon as possible, but they can’t go until we are through with the two targets in the Bronx.” She made her call and they took off on the three or four hour drive to New York City. Agent Smith also ordered up an escort and the van was led all the way to the Bronx by a state trooper at a speed of close to ninety miles per hour. The drive took just two short hours.

Fortunately, the traffic was leaving the city as they were arriving, but it was slow-going in the downtown evening congestion anyway. They took I 95 up and across the East River onto the Cross Bronx Expressway. They pulled off at Westchester Avenue and wound their way through the tight neighborhood streets until they found the first house. The streets were alive with people and Fletcher decided to get out and work the boom to field any questions from all the kids around. Sure enough, just the presence of the truck drew the attention of every child running around. Marty stopped and Fletcher got out saying, “Just



looking for pipes and cables.” He worked the system and was done in less than forty seconds, start to finish. He hopped back in the cab and Marty pulled slowly away. Neil could tell immediately that there was nothing in the house of any curious nature. The second house was four blocks away and they made their way there interrupting several street games taking place. The same thing happened in this neighborhood with the kids and Fletcher was ready again. Forty seconds later and they were moving away. Neil could tell this house had nothing in it as well. Smith made another call authorizing the take-down of the Baltimore house. Then she reported the negative results on the New York targets.

Simon Friedjung’s four children and three nieces had twelve children. Two had died, but ten were still alive and living fairly close to each other around New York City. All of the ten were easily located and the Echoes team was ready to drop another bomb on a family.

The firm sent certified letters to all the children, requesting that they come to a local hotel conference center, rented to accommodate the crowd that surely would show up. All the notice said was that their family had a significant inheritance coming and they should all gather at the hotel to hear the details in two days’ time. As expected, they all appeared, including all the spouses and some older children who were representing deceased parents. The Echoes Law Firm had successfully dodged phone calls made to their office in the last days from Friedjung descendants trying to get details on the inheritance. They got nothing more than the same statements that were made in the letter.

The house in Baltimore had been raided and then the cops sat on it. Two males showed up and were taken into custody along with the woman they already had arrested. It was a big win for Echoes and for Agent Smith as well. They had stopped a serious and real threat quickly preventing what could have been a horrible tragedy. Smith and Fletcher dropped the four Echoes friends off at Carmine’s on W 44<sup>th</sup>, a favorite spot of Neil’s parents. Since they were in the city and had the night to kill, Neil had called his folks to see if they were free and they were. The van went to a secure hangar at the airport and Smith and Fletcher disappeared for the night.

They had a wonderful time catching up. Melinda and Marty had known Neil’s parents for years and they really enjoyed each other’s company. Of course, they wanted to hear all about the treasures. They talked until they were the last customers and then went their separate ways. Neil’s parents took a cab to their home and the two young couples checked into the Casablanca Hotel for the night. They coordinated with Fletcher the next morning and they all drove back home after realizing it was probably quicker than flying. Besides, Caroline and company had work to do taking care of the Friedjung family the coming

weekend.

Finally, Saturday morning came around and the Friedjung family was at the hotel early with everyone anxious to hear the news. The five paintings were arranged around the room with white cloths covering them for the moment. The entire Echoes team was present including the necessary financial and personal counselors. It really was a large group and they were all wondering just how this would all play out.

When everyone was present, gotten coffee and taken a seat, Caroline took the lead. “Thank you all for coming. I represent a foundation that is in the business of finding lost things and returning them to their rightful owners. The items they find were the property of Jews who fled Austria from the Nazi invasion in 1937 and had to leave these things behind. That is all I can tell you until you sign some papers about keeping your inheritance and the foundation a secret.” She had to repeat the statement several times before it really sunk in that, until they played the legal paperwork game, they were going to hear nothing else.

That took almost half an hour even with everyone wanting everyone else to hurry up. They were simply curious and anxious as anyone in this situation would be. This was an honest family of tradespeople. They owned a construction company, a plumbing company and a local automotive garage among other things. They were getting by, but always working hard to do so.

Once the legal items were out of the way, Caroline moved on. “Your grandfather left five paintings and a box of newspaper clippings and toys in Vienna when he left before World War II. The box of clippings and toys will be here on this table for you to review. Anna will help you any way she can.” Anna stood up and waved. The paintings were uncovered and everyone oohed and aahed at them. “These paintings are all by Renoir and are very valuable. They will shake the art world when they are revealed. The value of these beautiful masterpieces is approximately one hundred thirty-two million dollars. This figure will significantly vary when the paintings are sold at auction, should you decide to go that route. After commissions and taxes, dividing that number by twelve, you would each receive about eight million dollars.”

The room erupted with everyone exclaiming something, standing and hugging each other. They took a fifteen-minute break and let the family look at the paintings, the toys and the clippings. They finally settled back down when Caroline had them return to their seats. “The first decision that you must make and it must be unanimous, is to keep the paintings or liquidate them.” They all started talking amongst themselves and Caroline said, “Is there anyone here that would like to consider retaining the paintings?” All were silent.

“The Foundation has a proposal to make to you. First, let me make clear that the Foundation makes nothing off the sale. And it pays entirely for the services we are about to offer. You pay nothing, although you all certainly could afford it now.” That got a laugh and she continued, “Waiting for the inheritance could take weeks or months before you see your money, since we will have to sell the paintings and deal with a few other legal hassles. Therefore, the Foundation can give you each seven million dollars right now -- today -- and the balance once the paintings are liquidated.” That got more cheers. “Well, I assume from the reaction, that you would like to go with that plan.” More cheers and applause. “Excellent. We have two more speakers and then some more papers to sign. Then you shall leave here with most of your money.”

The next speaker to get up was the president of a highly regarded financial advisory company with an office near where the heirs lived. “Congratulations everyone.” He introduced himself and continued, “The Echoes Foundation is paying for my company to help you and I want to assure you that our services are free to you. At the end of this meeting, we will have tables set up for each of you to visit with a Financial Counselor and together you can make arrangements for your money. We can assist with establishing accounts, paying off debt and helping you prepare for the possible change in lifestyle that this money will bring. We are here to help you. Thank you.” There was lots of applause and head nodding from the family.

Then the last speaker got up and introduced herself. She was the owner of a local family counseling office. “Again congratulations. The Foundation has wisely hired us to help you with any of the personal challenges that come with this wonderful blessing. Records of lottery winners show that a fair percentage of them end up ruining their lives from the money. This much money can bring out the best *and* worst in people. It is the Foundation’s wish that this inheritance makes you *better* off, not *worse*. To that end, my team of counselors is here to help with any personal difficulties you now have or will have in the future. And that offer is certainly not limited to the inheritance. If you would like to address challenges in your life with your marriage, anxiety, depression, with alcohol or substance abuse and addiction or anything personal at all, we are here for you. Thank you.”

Caroline said a few more words and dismissed the heirs to meet with the finance team. There were placards around the room and each family had their own two-person team. The first family took just ten minutes. They went off to the side and talked amongst themselves until more family members joined them. The last family finished up after an hour, the meeting was over and the family party was just beginning. They agreed to take over a restaurant around the corner from their houses to celebrate inviting everyone. Per previous agreement, the Foundation officers and support teams would not join in their

family celebration. They all agreed that staying in the background was the wisest thing for everyone to do.

Marty and Melinda flew straight home. Caroline and Neil stayed a few days to visit with her parents and family. A few days later when everyone was home, they met and discussed the visit with the Friedjungs. Four of the families immediately set up college funds for their grandchildren. Almost all paid off mortgages and other debt. All wanted between ten and fifty thousand dollars put into their personal accounts immediately and the rest of the money put into easily accessible longer-term accounts. It looked like they were on the road to a wise financial future. The office got a call from the counselors informing them that four appointments had been scheduled for the family. Everyone considered that to be excellent news and quietly celebrated the small victory.

Two weeks later, the five paintings went up for auction and fetched one hundred forty-three million dollars. After fees and percentages were paid back to the building owner in Vienna, the Foundation was able to bestow another one point four million dollars upon each of the Friedjung heirs. The money was transferred and everyone thought business was concluded with the Friedjungs. Two days later, the Foundation got a donation of one million dollars from the entire family with a heartfelt thank you letter.

While the Echoes team was away in New York, Fletcher and the FBI upgraded the security around the primaries' homes and the hangar where the plane was kept. They installed more cameras, motion detectors and other surveillance devices. They believed the terrorist leaders that wanted the Echoes team dead were still active and that they had a long memory for unfinished business.

## The Drug Enforcement Agency & the Weisskopfs

Neil, Caroline, Marty and Melinda took a week off after all the excitement. Marty and Melinda used the time to travel and unwind. They went to Puerto Vallarta, Mexico and did the tourist thing in a resort. They slept late, ate and drank way too much, took boatloads of pictures, rode horses into the jungle to see waterfalls, parasailed behind a ski boat and didn't think much about home. Caroline and Neil stayed home and continued to get things a little more organized at their house. Caroline had always dreamed of owning a horse and so, with the stable and plenty of room to ride, they bought a pair of beautiful mustang mares from a farm nearby. They hired a young college student, Jana, to take care of the horses and moved her into the bunkhouse next to the stables. She groomed and trained the mares and kept them ready for riding anytime. It worked out well and she became friends with one of the FBI security guards who watched the garage.

Caroline had little experience with the animals, but was a natural at riding; with Jana's help, she quickly found decent trails in the hills behind their ranch home. It was a very pleasant week, but somewhere in there, Fletcher notified them that they had a new contract. The Drug Enforcement Agency, DEA, wanted the border between the United States and Mexico scanned for tunnels. The plan was to start in San Diego and scan across California all the way to El Paso, Texas. The DEA believed there were several ranch homes hiding an end of a drug and human smuggling underground highway.

The operation would take almost a week and the DEA wanted it done as fast as possible, of course. When Melinda and Marty returned from Mexico, the Echoes primaries talked the job over. Caroline and Melinda opted out of this contract using the real excuse of preparing for the upcoming wedding, which was now only three weeks away. That left Neil, Marty and Fletcher to make the trip and do the work, which they were glad to do since it kept them away from the wedding planning nightmare.

The three men were picked up, taken to a grocery store and then to the Echoes airplane where they spent time stocking up on supplies before they took off. When preparations were finished, they gave the word and took to the skies headed west. Once they were at cruising altitude, the team settled in for the long cross-country flight. They spent the time talking to their families back home, dozing off and studying up on the upcoming assignment. The C-130 landed at a remote field outside of Chula Vista, California under the late afternoon hot sun. The DEA had a hangar set up for them to use as the operations command. The plane taxied to the hangar, shut down and was refueled then and there. The ramp was lowered the van was backed out after being stocked with as many supplies as the small refrigerator could hold. The van was taken to a temporary paint spray booth set up on the far side of the hangar and painted

to match two other vans that would accompany the team on their trek. The plan was to act like a utility crew working on the power lines that ran along side of the border road. The agency had identified several possible target buildings to focus on as the convoy passed. But the DEA really wanted the whole border mapped once and for all. Neil estimated they needed to take pictures every quarter mile to capture it all. If they could take two hundred pictures a day, it would take about three days to do California, five to do Arizona, two to do New Mexico and only a few in El Paso Texas. They were not even sure Texas needed to be mapped with the Rio Grande River defining the border, so it was not in this contract. They would progress as far as they could in the time allotted and be paid five million dollars for the work. A motor home was added to the caravan for the crew to sleep in. Continuous air support from drones or helicopters and the whole agency were put on high alert for the protection of the assets. The DEA expected no threats from the smugglers, but the Agency was taking no chances. And the raids that would follow were going to happen long after the Echoes team was home safe and sound.

It took a few hours to get coordinated after the van paint job and all, but the team was finally set and started the long, slow trip across the bottom of the State of California. They set a good pace once they cleared the city and got faster as the day went on. The road beside the border fence was kept up and in good condition, so at least that wasn't a problem. One of the agents riding along for support was enlisted to spell Marty from swinging the boom out and back. That gave Marty the opportunity to sit next to Neil and learn to read the photo file better. They all realized that, in order to keep up this pace, everybody would need a break, so Neil set up a rotation after an initial training. By noon, they were well along, located right across the border from Mexicali. The stop and go driving was keeping the engines running hot, but they were okay for now. Then Marty spotted the first tunnel -- however, it looked abandoned. They kept going and the next photo showed an active tunnel. They could actually see people walking along inside. This good news was radioed in and the team broke for a quick lunch at the next picture-taking site. Lunch consisted of passing out sandwiches to everyone to eat while they kept moving.

They pressed on, but the terrain became a challenge. At one point, the crew had to backtrack a quarter mile, so they started verifying a route by using the helicopter to help out. The Sonora Desert is constantly changing with gullies washing away and new ones starting. With help from a chopper above, they were now making better time and would reach Yuma very soon. Everyone was reminded by Command to stay alert. They did not want any missed data because somebody got too tired or bored to do a good job. It was getting to be evening as they passed through Yuma, when they got a tunnel hit and then another and another. It was unexpected that three active tunnels would be found so close together. The surprising explanation they came up with was that each tunnel had been independently dug by different smuggling

groups.

Night fell and they were just getting settled when Neil got a call. He almost didn't take the call because the number was blocked and then he remembered the phone was his FBI issued cell. He answered and was surprised when it was the President of the United States, himself. His people had been working with Melinda and Caroline on scheduling an award ceremony at the White House. With the sticky wedding plans and the President's busy schedule, everyone wanted it tomorrow. That meant Neil and Marty would catch a plane home right now and suspend the current mapping operation for twenty-four hours. With the President personally calling, Neil had little choice but to agree and the wheels were set in motion.

A State Department plane would take them from Yuma to D.C. within the hour. The work caravan would hunker down somewhere safe for the day. They were thinking of the Yuma City Police Department Compound Lot where they store cars. Neil asked the chief officer of the mission what the cost of the men were for a day of losing productivity. He quickly calculated the pay scales and all the other zillion factors and answered about eighty thousand dollars. Echoes knocked eighty thousand dollars off the final bill for the inconvenience.

One vehicle split off from the convoy and took Marty and Neil to Yuma's airport. The plane was waiting and they ran to board. They were greeted by a host and provided every nicety the plane had on board. They opted for pillows and blankets and slept on the government jet as it raced through the sky. With the time changes, they landed in Washington just at daybreak. They drove home, got cleaned up and all four Echoes primaries drove into the city together in Neil's Tesla. Security cars positioned ahead and behind them escorted them on this drive. They got to the White House right on time at ten o'clock for the short ceremony. But more importantly, they were invited to lunch.

They were met by a very nice lady, who gave them a short tour of the place while she escorted them to the East Room. They were joined by several members of Congress, their friends from the FBI, two members of the Joint Chiefs and some Cabinet Members. All of them wanted to hear why they were receiving the medal and Melinda kept them enchanted with the stories -- as much as she could tell. They waited nearly thirty minutes for the President who used the lame excuse of talking to the President of Mexico for his tardiness.

The President wasted no time and his ceremony coordinator took charge. Everyone was directed to stand just so and, when the coordinator gave the go ahead, the President made the presentations. He started by making sure everyone understood the classified nature of these particular awards. The actual ceremony lasted all of four minutes and then there was fifteen minutes of picture taking. Finally, they all

adjourned to the State Dining Room for a buffet meal. The entire event was surreal to the four recipients. Just a few short months ago, they were simple working stiff. Both the men were wearing their finest suits from London and the women wore their dresses from there as well. Melinda had her hair done at a salon into ringlets, while Caroline went with a beautiful French braid. Both of them had obviously been shopping for jewelry and were wearing matching earrings and necklace sets. They all looked magnificent but were simply overwhelmed by all the ceremony and attention.

Seating was assigned by placard and their table had just two other guests -- the President and the First Lady. Once everyone was seated and the informal hellos were concluded, the President and First Lady wanted to know all about Neil and Caroline's wedding plans. After that subject was exhausted, the First Lady quietly asked to hear the story of the events that led up to their award. Melinda narrated the story while the others quietly listened. At the end, the First Lady said, "Well, it's about time we gave this award to someone who did a little more for their country than just be a movie star." They were all flattered and the conversation moved back to the wedding. Jokingly, Caroline said that the First Family was invited. The First Lady laughed and said that she would check their schedule.

The lunch wound down and the President had to get back to work. So they said their goodbyes and he and the First Lady excused themselves. The same woman who met them earlier appeared and escorted them back through the security maze out to their car. They beat the afternoon traffic and were home in forty minutes. They had looked at their medals after they were moving homeward and all agreed that receiving these tokens of appreciation was indeed a wonderful honor.

When they got home and the women were safely tucked in for the night, the men changed clothes, drove back to the airport and met their jet ready to depart. They climbed aboard and headed southwest back to Yuma. The laptops came out and they caught up on company status reports.

They landed, drove across town and reached the caravan around midnight. They slid into their bunks in the RV among the sleeping men and women and were out as soon as their heads hit the pillow. They were thoroughly exhausted by the events of the last twenty-four hours. First thing the next morning, they found Fletcher and showed him the medals. The story of lunch with the President and First Lady was told several times during the next few days with several people wanting to hear it twice. When everyone was ready, including the support teams, they started the long trip across the Sonoran Desert. At times, they questioned the value of mapping this "line in the sand", but Neil wanted to continue just to see what things might be discovered, even if there was little or no indication of human movement. Three times, the agents pointed out immigration trails in the dried gullies and washes, but nothing was found underground.

Back in California across the border from Mexicali, Neil spotted something interesting. When they



went over the Imperial Fault, he saw a detailed map of the side fissures that looked like little hairs off the main “crack”. He noticed that his software painted the side fissures different dots of color and there was a pattern. It looked like a temperature weather map or a colored topographical map. Neil wasn’t sure, but he thought it might be an indication of unbalanced stress. These fissures are constantly shifting and changing the stress differential with every move. These moves were mini-quakes that roll naturally around this area and are felt by nothing and no one except the sensitive measuring machines they had now. The bigger the stress differential when they shift to relieve the pressure, the bigger the quake. Neil thought he might be able to predict earthquakes.

Isaac Weisskopf was a quiet bank employee in Vienna where he lived his whole life. He married Bracha, had three children and worked hard as a bank teller. As soon as everything seemed well with his life, Bracha left him for another man, took their three boys and moved to Israel. Isaac was a ruined and defeated man for years after that, feeling stupid to have never seen it coming. Isaac finely got over his depression by diving into his profession and concentrating on doing a good job for his employer. His hard work and dedication paid off and he was promoted to loan officer. He held that position when the *Anschluss* rained hatred down on him.

Isaac had always lived with his parents and brought his young bride into the house and then their three boys. It was a large home with plenty of room for everyone. When his wife and children left, the house seemed to lose its sense of purpose. His parents were kind and good people, but old and beginning to need more and more help all the time. He felt like home and the world were now a dingy gray. And then his parents died.

They died six months apart with his father passing away in his sleep and then his mother out of grief for the man she had loved for sixty-two years. Oddly enough, Isaac felt relieved of all the junk that was cluttering his life. He started dressing better and having a generally sunnier disposition. He was constantly clearing away the things left behind and no longer wanted by his parents. When Isaac was a boy, he fashioned a hidey-hole behind a piece of wall paneling in his bedroom. He never told anyone about it -- even his wife who slept in the same room for all of five years. He had some old toys and other mementoes stowed away in the hole; but with the coming storm, he added a bunch of jewelry that belonged to his mother and some personal correspondence and notes.

Isaac was one of those apathetic Jews who thought they could weather the German occupation and so he stayed when others were fleeing. The Nazis immediately identified Isaac as a Jew, closed the bank and Isaac lived on savings he had withdrawn just hours before the bank was shut down. He estimated that he

could live on the cash in hand for almost two years if he was frugal. However, he didn't need all that time. Only three weeks later, he was yanked from his home in the early morning and loaded into a truck with other Jews, many of whom were his friends and acquaintances from the bank. He was taken to the train station where he waited for two days with others as afraid as he was. Their number was growing every few hours as more trucks arrived. A train pulled into the station and took more than half the people away. The rest, including Isaac, waited another day and a half until another train arrived and loaded them up. The yards behind them were still continuously refilled with Jews as Isaac boarded the train into a cattle boxcar. They traveled for three days to a work camp where Isaac was forced to be part of a labor detail. He became the clerk of a group of machine operators and cataloged production quotas and statistics for his German overseers. He did that for almost a year and had hopes that he would survive while others vanished without a trace. His hopes were dashed when he was shipped off again. This time to a concentration camp where he was murdered by gas a week later, standing naked with thirty other men in the sealed chamber.

Isaac was lucky in that his wife left him for a good man who raised his three stepsons as his own. The oldest boy died a hero in the Israel Six Day War in 1967. His second son had passed away peacefully after a good life in 2003 and his youngest died that same year. Isaac's second son had only one son, Dori, who was still alive and living in Tel Aviv. He was a radio sports commentator of some fame in Israel. He had married three times and had one daughter that he never saw. Isaac's youngest son had two daughters, one who died in a car accident when she was only twenty-four and Ashar who married a banker named David Felman. She was now fifty-four. She too lived in Tel Aviv and was a part-time nurse while her husband was a veterinarian. They had one son and he and his wife just had Ashar's first grandchild.

In Tel Aviv, two of the men from the firm would handle the Weisskopfs' notification. The jewelry was valued at around fifty thousand dollars. The bios on the two surviving grandchildren of Isaac Weisskopf showed that they were stable, well-adjusted law-abiding citizens. Considering the relatively small size of the inheritance and the solid constant lifestyle of Ashar and Dori, the Echoes staff opted to not get financial and personal counselors involved. Letters were sent to both Ashar and Dori with the same mysterious message that was necessary at this stage in the game. Phone calls followed up and a meeting was set for the next day. The Firm men set the time and place -- in the evening at the Crowne Plaza Tel Aviv Beach Hotel.

The three adults, Ashar and her husband, David and Dori arrived on time and were led to a small

meeting room off the main reception area of the hotel. Introductions were made and the guests were told no more than the mailed letter said. The secrecy aspects were taken care of with the signing of the NDAs and the heirs clearly understood the reason for all the hush-hush. They were all professional intelligent people and it took only a few minutes to handle the legal papers. After that, the meeting became casual and pleasant. When the value of the jewelry was revealed, both Dori and Ashar were very happy, but not crazy with the windfall. This amount of money was less than a half year's salary for each of them. It would facilitate paying off some bills and taking a nice vacation, but little else. Both were content to wait for the sale of the items before they got their actual money. Once all that was decided, they spent an hour looking at the other things Grandfather Isaac had stashed. Ashar cried several times as she reviewed things about her family's past that she had never known about. Dori and Ashar talked in hushed tones for a moment and then Dori declared that they wished to keep the jewelry. And that was that. Ashar had looked at the pieces and wanted them kept in the family for now. She was thinking about the lessons it could teach the young people in their families. With business settled, the heirs went home and the Firm's attorneys went out to eat before they traveled home.

The Firm asked to stay in touch with the heirs and offered help with anything at all in the future. The cousins readily accepted the kind offers and they touched base with the Foundation regularly. They even became patrons and helped out whenever they were asked.

Ashar asked for a favor a few months later. She wanted to know the family ancestry to share with the kids. The Firm easily discovered the information tracing the Weisskopf heritage back seven generations and had a great time doing it.

## Birmingham Bad Boys & Earthquakes

Neil, Marty and Fletcher continued on for three hard days and nights over the rough terrain until they were in Sasabe, Arizona. They rigged some powerful lights to the top of the van and worked into the darkness just to get done quicker and it worked. The border crossed mountains at times, which forced them to take pictures too far away from the “line” and sometimes the pictures were blurred and incomplete. But the Agency understood and left them to do the best they could. It was highly unlikely there would be any tunnels out there in the mountains anyway.

The work was monotonous and boring. Neil, Fletcher and Marty were talking it over and decided to shorten the shift rotation to one hour. So it was Neil’s shift at the picture analysis station. He moved to passenger side seat for an hour and worked the boom arm externally. That meant he was getting in and out of the cab every five minutes. Then he moved to driver and that gave him new respect for being able to drive the rough roads as smoothly as possible. His next shift was an hour off in the RV and he ate some food and talked to Caroline on his cell. Next, he shifted to picture analysis helper where he was actually mostly trained. Then back to analyst to finish the circle of shifts. The support team started doing the same thing and the men liked the changed routine. With the addition of the lights and everyone always fresh, they worked until midnight and started again at six.

The DEA team crossed into New Mexico the next day and found more of the same challenging terrain. Everyone was anxious to get to the end of the road in El Paso, but the pace and pattern of the work set the speed, not the anxiety of the individual team members. The DEA believed there was a possibility, albeit a remote one, that tunnels would be found there.

Marie and Stefan Zachowski ran a string of markets across Vienna and a few neighboring cities. Stefan had built up the stores over many years and was quite wealthy in 1936 when he started worrying about the Nazis coming to power in Germany. He started taking the bank money and converting it to gold sovereigns. He bought mostly British gold because of the exchange rate at the time, but he had some Austrian and German gold too. When his bank account was almost empty, he had gathered some 3500 coins and paid about thirty-five dollars an ounce for it. He neatly bagged the coins for travel into seven ten-pound leather rolls and stashed them in a large secret floor safe in his home.

Marie and Stefan had twin sons, Albert and Johann. They were both twenty and attending University in London. Stefan wrote often and told his sons to not come home until he let them know when things were safe. That turned out to be never.

Marie and Stefan had their stores confiscated, their house searched and the things they had accumulated over the years stolen from them soon after the invasion. A horrible four months later, they were collected and shipped to an extermination camp.

Albert and Johann stayed in London and joined the British to fight in the war. They survived and started families in Birmingham. While in the service, the brothers made several friends who were connected to the underworld crime family that basically owned the city. The brothers never finished school and went into the lucrative business of their new friends. They rose through the ranks of the syndicate and were soon targets of law authorities. They were always on the edge of being caught but managed to stay out of jail with the help of expensive lawyers. Al's two sons followed into their father's business, while Johnny had two girls who he married off to men who were working for him. Al's two sons, Stefan "Stevie" and Raymond "Ray", were soon the Godfathers of the business and they produced several boys who kept the underworld family tradition going. Johnny's two daughters had several children who were sucked into the business as well.

One of the granddaughters, Virginia "Jenny" Reynolds, was sent to a good finishing school where she met and married an American from Montana, James Heygood. He was a rancher's son and took Jenny away from her family to the wide-open spaces of the northern United States. She took to horses and started the Horse Heaven Ranch where she had been saving the lives of wild horses ever since -- her life and family in England left far behind.

New Mexico was a bust as far as Neil was concerned. The terrain forced them to be too far away from the border to get any meaningful data. But they did the best they could and slowed down significantly to plan for the best route possible. The caravan reached the outskirts of El Paso and stopped for the night. They stayed out in the desert, far from prying eyes and made the best of it. They celebrated a bit by grilling up steaks purchased from a store in Yuma. A nice old-fashioned barbeque was put together with everyone eating his or her fill. They all crashed after dinner to be ready for an early wrap-up of the project the next day. Too soon their alarms went off, the support teams beckoned and they were ready to go. They wound in and out of several neighborhoods, but attracted no attention at all.

If all went well, they would be done at noon, so Fletcher ordered up the plane from San Diego to come to El Paso. It would be waiting when they reached the airport. Neil wanted to go back to San Diego and spend a few days before heading home. So the Echoes team offered to ferry one support van and all the bodies they wanted transported in the plane.

They had no trouble taking all the pictures, but they were disappointed to find no tunnels. Neil had

been paying attention to layout and traffic patterns of the area and developed an idea. He had everyone follow his lead and began to map the homes around town. He systematically went through the whole city on both sides of the Texas-New Mexico border in an hour and a half. As he suspected, he found four houses with suspicious basements. There was a crowd of people in one, boxes in another and the other two looked like they were set up as a bunkroom/bedroom. Neil passed the data to the DEA lead officer accompanying them and said, "This one's on us."

Everyone went to the airport or grabbed a hotel for the night. The Agency took Neil and Marty up on their transport offer and eight men and a van traveled with them in the Hercules back to San Diego. The passengers all took advantage of the stocked airplane where everyone ate and drank their fill and changed into easy clothes. Beer magically appeared and they relaxed having been part of a job well done. The Agency men and women were gifted the comfortable attire they were wearing when they left. Fletcher, Marty and Neil went into San Diego and got rooms at the Sheraton down by the convention center.

The next morning, the three met in the lobby and Marty and Fletcher wanted to know what Neil had in mind for the day's activities. He was having fun not sharing his plans and told them they were going fault hunting and nothing more. Marty had an idea what was going on, but Fletcher was clueless. They rented a car and drove north to the University of California in La Jolla. Neil found a directory and located the Jacobs School of Engineering. They wandered around for a bit and finally located the office of Professor Tara Hutchinson. Her class schedule was posted on her door; it was early, but she was in her office before a ten o'clock class. Neil introduced everyone and asked for five minutes of her precious time. She granted his request and listened as Neil told her a story. He saw that she was skeptical, so he pulled out several printouts and put them in front of her. She studied them for a few seconds and said, "These are incredible. How did you take these?"

"I cannot go into that at this time, but I assure you they are real and only four days old."

"I need to see more."

Neil realized he had her hooked and said, "Cancel your ten o'clock class and let's go for a ride."

She did and they all left for the airport where the C-130 was parked. She was duly impressed when they floated through security. Marty pulled the van out of the plane and they all got in for the short ride to the nearest fault line, the Elsinore Fault. It was just a forty-minute ride and Neil used the time to show her all the pictures he had taken of the Imperial Fault a few days before. She was amazed.

"This is nothing short of a revelation in fault mapping."

"I stumbled on this doing other work and thought you might like to see it in action."

Fletcher now understood everything that was going on and stepped in at this point to give her the

security briefing she needed. She understood the implications and agreed to everything. She signed the necessary papers and the conversations grew more serious and excited. Tara and Neil chatted about the abilities of the system and she quickly understood everything. She made the same leap that Neil had made a few days ago regarding the detail of the software and the physical system in general.

She took charge of where they were going; when they reached the area, she directed them to a specific spot that she liked because it was near a stationary seismic recording unit. The unit was tied remotely to their offices back at the University and she wanted to compare the new readings with the ones from her hardware later on.

They got out of the van and walked the site with Tara explaining what was going on under the ground below them. When everything was ready, they took the picture. She was in the van watching in real time and saw the same thing that Neil had seen. The variations in color of the earth near the main fault indicated stress and the compaction that comes with it. After studying the picture in detail, she had them move to another site. They took another picture and the software stitched the two photos together. She wanted more shots and they gave them to her. When she had seen enough she said, "If we had a string of these machines along the faults, we could predict their movements. We would finally have the early warning system that every seismologist dreams of."

It was getting late in the day and they packed up and drove back to the airport. They parked the van in the plane and drove Tara back to the University. On the ride, she detailed the project she had in mind. She needed eight of the units.

Neil said, "I was afraid of that. You are going to have to give me some time. This technology is vital for our national interest and sharing it with you might put it at risk. I truly understand the significance of what this could do for the world, but it is a complicated thing you are asking. Keep this a secret from everyone and I will be in touch within a week. We can stay in contact, but I don't want you to assume I can make this happen. We will try to find a solution but, as I said, this is complicated."

They dropped Dr. Hutchinson at her office and drove back to the city. Together, they walked from their hotel to a restaurant called Dobson's. They were greeted and taken care of by the owner, Paul Dobson. He selected the food himself, starting the team off with the famous Mussel Bisque and finishing with the Seared Sea Scallops. They had a great time at dinner and retired to their hotel for the night. Everybody called home and visited even though it was the middle of the night in Virginia.

The next day, all three met for breakfast, checked out of the hotel and drove to the airport for the flight home. The plane was waiting and ready to go when they arrived. They boarded and settled in for the long cross-country flight. They made a joke out of the fact that if anyone complained about the travel,

they would be reminded of flying in coach on the standard commercial carriers. They landed, drove home and slept the night away after visiting with loved ones.

The Echoes primaries were watching the news the next day, when the announcer detailed a report on a massive DEA operation along the Mexico border. A tunnel was discovered and closed down. The team found out later that three tunnels had been found, a major human smuggling ring was broken and lots of drugs and money confiscated with over fifty arrests being made. That report came from Fletcher shortly after the airing of the story.



## Horse Heaven

Wedding plans were going full-bore, taking up most of the time of the women and a pleasant chore arose that Neil and Marty volunteered for as soon as they got wind of it. The Firm had agonized over the dilemma regarding the Zachowski inheritance. The staff had run the whole scenario by their legal friends at the FBI who had helped them understand the structure and history of the family. They all concluded that giving the treasure of seventy pounds of gold to the four equal heirs in Manchester was simply the wrong thing to do. They were in a unique position legally to do whatever they wanted with the gold. The more they studied the situation, the clearer it became. The only living family member that could be counted on to use the money legally was Jenny Heygood.

Jenny's husband died some years ago and she ran the ranch and the horse rescue sanctuary with the help of her two sons. The Firm was sure that the money would open new avenues for her to use in her passion for horses. The coins were shipped to Bozeman where Neil and Marty would pick them up and deliver them to Jenny. The Firm had sent the usual vague certified letter informing her of her inheritance and to expect two representatives. They followed up by email and confirmed that she would be around when they arrived in a few days.

Neil and Marty packed for some western action and caught a direct flight from Dulles to Bozeman. The trip was pleasant enough with both men being glad to be away again from the challenging world of wedding preparations. They rented a four-wheel-drive Jeep at the airport and drove across town to pick up the gold at a secure transport company office. That process took only a short time and they grabbed some food for the hour and a half drive to Jenny's Horse Heaven Ranch.

Bozeman, Montana lies on the main I-90 highway that runs through the State. The city spreads up into the hillside south of the highway. When heading east, it doesn't take long before you hit the prairie that covers most of the State. Jenny's ranch was small by her neighbors' standards; but it took a half day to ride a horse across at a walking pace. Marty was driving with Neil navigating and they found the entrance to the ranch easily. Signs directed them down the main road and past two forks. The main house was just as one would expect -- it looked like the picture postcards of a dude ranch with corrals, a bunkhouse and a nice neat row of guest cabins. Half of the cabins had cars parked in front with the guests probably out riding. They parked in front of the main house and followed the signs to the check-in desk. Marty and Neil walked inside and told the lone girl operating the desk that they had an appointment with Mrs. Heygood. She let them know Mrs. Heygood was in the stables and would return in a few minutes. They eased into the lounge area and took seats among a few other people who were killing time in the late

afternoon.

Jenny came in and walked over to the men. They stood up and introductions were made. Her British accent seemed out of place coming from this woman dressed for ranch work, complete with leather gloves stuffed in the rear pocket of her worn blue jeans. The image was completed with a red bandana around her neck and well-worn cowboy boots.

They walked behind the reception desk and into a nicely appointed western ranch office with several racks of antlers on the walls.

“Well gentlemen, I have enjoyed the mystery behind this visit, but why don’t you get down to the real reason you are here.”

Neil spoke, “Have you ever heard the name Stefan Zachowski?”

“Yes. He was my great grandfather who died in World War II.”

“Do you know how he died?”

“No. My parents and grandparents were never very talkative. I guess they learned that from their line of work.” She obviously knew of their illegal business dealings.

“He was an Austrian Jew who owned a string of markets before the invasion of the Nazis in 1938. His stores were taken from him and he died in a concentration camp at their hand.” She was obviously surprised by this revelation and was now keenly interested in the story. “He and his wife, Marie, did something a lot of Jews did knowing the storm was coming; they hid money in the walls of their home hoping the Germans would overlook it and they planned to someday retrieve it.” Neil waited a moment for her to grasp the gravity of the story. “We found it, traced it to your family and that brings us up to today.”

She wanted to know just how much money they were talking about, so they spent the next five minutes giving her the NDA briefing and signing papers as fast as they could. Once that was taken care of, Marty said, “There is a complication with the ownership of the find.”

“My family back in Manchester.”

“Yes. Exactly. Through the course of our investigation we learned of your family’s dubious business concerns.”

“Yes, I expect you would. My mother did one thing right in my life. She pushed me away from the family business and I have never looked back. My mother is still alive and we talk every once in a while. However, I haven’t had anything to do with them in years and I intend to keep it that way. My sons don’t even know what the family business is. I assume they are still active.”

“Oh yes. And therein lies the dilemma.”

Neil said, “The foundation we represent in partnership with several government agencies believes it would be wrong to return the money to them, so we found you.”

While Neil was speaking, Marty laid out the small boxes of coins on the desk unopened.

Neil kept going, “We have checked all the applicable United States, British and international laws and we can legally bypass them and give the money to you. If you want to share with them, that is your business, but we cannot in all good conscious give it directly to them.” She was listening intently and watching Marty cover her desk with the boxes. “Your great grandfather converted his cash to gold sovereigns and here they are.”

Marty opened one of the boxes, pulled out a leather pouch and poured the gold coins onto the desk while Neil said, “Stefan bagged them up into ten pound lots. There are seven of them. The value may be greater than the market price of gold because of the coins’ history, but there is approximately one point three million dollars’ worth of gold sitting on your desk that now belongs to you, before taxes of course.”

Jenny was flabbergasted. When she could speak, she said, “A million dollars?”

Marty corrected her, “One *point three* million dollars.”

She quietly repeated what he had said. Then she thought of something and spit it out. “And your company gets a sizable finder’s fee, right?”

“Our foundation gets nothing if the treasures we find can be traced to the rightful heirs.”

“And if you can’t find anyone...”

Marty helped out, “Then the money we make on the sale of whatever we find goes into the work the Foundation does, which is now mostly college endowments and scholarships. We also make significant contributions to other foundations dedicated to teaching about the Holocaust.”

She softened up by these remarks and Neil wrapped it up with, “Our company makes a very nice earning finding things for certain government agencies that wish to remain anonymous as much as we do. Our foundation could not continue our work if the world at large knew about us.”

With her suspicions off her chest, she said, “Well, let’s celebrate.” She walked over to a bar and presented a really old bottle of scotch saying, “I save this for special occasions and I think this qualifies.”

Neil and Marty joined her and just smiled as she poured the deep brown liquor into three quarter-full glasses. They all downed the scotch and she poured another for herself; but Neil and Marty put their hands over their glasses and said they had to drive back to Bozeman. That statement made her say, “Nonsense, it’s too late. You stay here with me tonight and I’ll show you how to celebrate Montana style.”

The men looked at each other and Neil said, "Why not."

"I'll get you a couple of cabins and you meet me back here at six for a party you won't soon forget."

They helped her store the gold away, moved their rental car to one of the cabins, cleaned up and returned to the main building right at six.

Jenny was across the parking lot in an open area next to one of the several corrals. Two to four horses occupied each of the corrals, their heads poked over the fence trying to get some attention. Everyone was coming in to get a drink and mingle for a bit while the chuck wagon and cooks prepared a barbecue feast. Jenny found Marty and Neil and dragged them to her table. She had transformed herself from a real live cowgirl to a beautiful hostess. Her two sons were at the table with two girls next to them, all drinking beer. Everybody introduced themselves and then Jenny told her sons about the gold for the first time. They all freaked out and hugged and hugged and hugged. Her older son, Jonathan, said, "What are you going to do with all that money, Mom?"

She replied in a heartbeat, "I'm going to buy the Jenkins spread and double the size of this operation."

It was obvious that the boys approved of Mom's plan by how much they all continued to hug and hug and hug some more. Marty and Neil got drinks and rejoined the group at the table. A hostess came round and took everyone's dinner orders and left them each with a small numbered piece of paper. They all chatted until numbers were called out and then they each retrieved their orders from the chuck wagon. There was plenty of baked beans, potato salad and apple cobbler to accompany ample servings of barbecued meat.

As the meal was finishing, a band formed from within the crowd started playing country hoe-down music and a bunch of people started to square dance. Neil and Marty joined in the fun until the party broke up around eleven and people drifted off to their bunks.

Marty and Neil were awakened at six a.m. by a phone call and told to be outside ready to ride in ten minutes. Jenny had told them to stay for the day, that she wanted to show them what she was going to use the money for and that was all she would say.

They dressed in their working clothes, grabbed some coffee and headed out to the front of the compound. Jenny was waiting for them, walked up and said, "You boys are missing a few things. Come with me." They followed her into the main building and into a gift shop. She made them pick out cowboy hats and tough leather gloves. Marty and Neil went with the flow and didn't bother to ask what they were actually going to do.

Once back outside, she asked some questions, “Either one of you an experienced rider?” They both said they had a little bit of history with horses, but not much. She continued, “How about firearms?” They both pulled out their concealed handguns from rear waist holsters and held them out for Jenny to see. She saw the handguns and smiled. “Good, that’s a start. Why don’t you go put those back in your room and I’ll take care of you.” They took off and returned within a minute. She had gone inside to retrieve something and was standing there holding a couple of western belt holsters with a serious western revolver in each one. She handed them to the men and said, “If you need to use a gun, you need to get to it quickly.” They strapped the holsters on and she led them into the stable. “Grab a bridle off the wall there and let’s go pick you out a couple of rides. They walked down a row of horses and stopped at one. “This is mine for the day, Daisy.” Jenny threw on the bridle and got it hooked up. She led her horse out and stopped at another stall. “This is Bob. We sometimes run out of cool horse names and my youngest son named him. Neil, Bob is for you.” She stood there waiting for Neil to get ready and he did a pretty good job with little help. They kept moving and stopped at Marty’s mount. “This is Betsy.” Marty got his horse ready and they all led their mounts down the aisle a bit and stopped at another tack room that was dedicated to saddles. Jenny walked in and pointed at the saddles the men should grab. They picked their saddles up and walked back to the horses standing by patiently. They threw blankets and saddles onto the horses’ backs and watched Jenny as she finished saddling up Daisy. They followed her lead then led the animals into the open. She led them over to a fence, tied Daisy to it and said, “I want to take you to that stable over there before we get going.”

They walked the short distance and entered the large barn. They approached a man who was working in the stable. Jenny interrupted him and introduced him to Neil and Marty. He was the onsite veterinarian, Dr. Peter Marcell. She asked Peter to give the visitors a rundown and what he did and then a little information about the animals kept there. All of the fifteen animals stabled at the ranch were rescued animals and some were not in very good shape. Jenny helped with the stories about each horse and then said that they lose one animal for ten that they save. Most of the horses are wild and simply cannot find enough food to survive. The ranch routinely takes food out to the open fields to supplement their normal diet in the winter and summer when the weather kills the food supply.

A few of the animals are brought in from the outside by the animal protection agencies and Jenny takes all that show up. When the horses are healthy enough, they are trained for sale to hobby farms like Neil’s, or they are released back to the plains. A few are simply kept around and literally “put out to pasture” to enjoy their old age in a peaceful and loving environment. At any given time, there are about fifteen horses being treated and another fifty kept near and used for the guests to ride and care for. The

majority of her acreage is used for grazing and, at any given time, there are about three hundred horses in four distinct herds using her land to live on.

They finished the tour and walked back to the horses. Neil and Marty told Jenny that visit was a real eye-opener. She simply said that they hadn't seen anything yet. They mounted up and headed east. They weren't but a few hundred feet down the road when she broke into a trot and yelled back, "Best keep up, tinhorns. We've got a lot of ground to cover."

They rode hard for an hour, came to a lone hilltop and dismounted. Jenny pulled out binoculars from her saddlebag and started to scan the plains. She found what she was looking for and passed the binoculars to Neil, saying, "Over there" and pointed. Neil found what she was pointing at, recognizing that it was a vast herd of grazing horses. They were beautiful in their peacefulness, strength and sheer numbers. Marty got a good look as well, then they mounted back up and Jenny led them to the herd.

The riders approached it slowly and rode along the herd's fringes without spooking them into a run. Then she told them to get ready for some hard riding and started to push the herd into a gallop. Soon they were riding in the middle of the running animals. It was glorious for Marty and Neil as they just rode along not really having any control while their horses got into the herd's groove. Jenny led them out of the front of the pack and let the herd find its own way. She slowed down and led them to another small hill to talk. She scanned the plains again, found what she was looking for and told them to have a look. Neil asked what he was looking for and she simply said, "The chuck wagon. Lunch!"

They rode on and came to a large group of guests who were out for an all-day ride. Marty and Neil had met many of them the night before and were welcomed warmly. This lunch was more down to earth with chicken, beans and a fresh green salad. They all ate quickly with Jenny pushing them, saying they still had a lot of ground to cover. They said goodbye and retrieved their mounts for the rest of the ride. Jenny took them out even farther and found a spot on another small hill. They dismounted and she explained her plans as she set up empty water bottles on a small rock outcropping. She pointed off into the horizon and said, "This is the start of the land I want to buy. It goes from there," she pointed south and then north, "to there." They took in the magnificent view for a moment, then Jenny continued, "I'm just not sure I can sustain the business with all this to take care of."

She just looked for a moment and then said, "Let's see how good you are with those Colts."

She let the men shoot first and Marty hit two bottles with two shots. Neil took three shots to hit his two bottles. Jenny stepped up for her turn, did a quick draw, fanned the hammer and hit her two bottles with an impressive display of good old fashion gun play. Then she told the boys that this was always a hobby sport for her and her husband. They all emptied their guns, cleaned up the mess, reloaded and got

on their horses.

Marty pulled next to Neil and said, “Neil, I have an idea.”

Neil replied, “I bet it’s the same one I am having.”

Marty smiled and said, “Let’s help her. Let’s get rid of the gold, figure out how to help her buy this land and keep a sustaining fund for continuation of her business.”

Neil added, “And I do believe the Foundation might want to offer the business an ongoing partnership.”

Marty just smiled more and finished up with, “Excellent.”

They rode back, put up the horses and gear, cleaned up and met for a working dinner where they brought in Melinda and Caroline via Skype. Caroline knew exactly what to do to accomplish the goals of buying the new property, expanding the business and keeping it sustained with some creative use of the Foundation’s resources. Jenny and her sons could not be more pleased with the idea. Caroline dispatched two of her team to fly out to Montana and take care of everything.

The next day, Neil and Marty drove back to Bozeman and caught a flight for home. All in all, everyone agreed that this was one of the best things the friends had accomplished to date. Besides, now with this new partnership, the Virginia people could enjoy this wonderful place any time they wanted and be received with open arms by their new friends.

## Mr. & Mrs. Caroline & Neil Jacobs

The friends got back into the routine of being at home quickly. Though the truth was that these people really didn't have a routine anymore. Everything just happened as it happened. There were several more reveals coming for the family members of the men and women that left treasures in Vienna. No government work contracts were pending as of that moment, but that could change instantly. However, right now, they had a wedding to get through.

The wedding was just four days away, on Saturday morning. As much as Neil would have liked to elope without a big ceremony, Caroline wanted her big church wedding that many girls dream about. She had the church picked out since she was a little girl -- the Congregation Shearith Israel on West 70th Street in New York City. On Thursday, they would caravan up to New York and stay at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel for a couple of nights. The hotel had just reopened after two and a half years of renovation and Echoes had purchased a new luxury condominium for seven million dollars. The company hosted people in the City so often, that it actually made sense *and* was a good real estate investment. A room was set up for their security officer in the condo, leaving plenty of room for anyone else. Neil would be banished to his parents' house and that was just fine with him.

Neil started his designs for the Fault Stress Detector System. He had called Tara to let her know he was starting the design and she now needed to secure permission to bury the eight detectors on the fault. The government owned the property and usually cooperated with the University and other scientific groups conducting experiments and leaving permanent measuring devices on the land, such as unmanned weather stations. The Foundation was footing the bill for this experiment with everyone's support. Neil had a plan to keep the technology secret and secure. The mechanical part of the device was not the secret - the software and hardware of the sensing system was classified. Neil built a keypad into the van-based system that needed his code to run. It was foolproof by even the FBI's standards. He would do the same for the FSDS. He would also encase the whole unit in a cement bunker shielded by a two-foot thick concrete slab buried ten feet underground. These things would not go anywhere and no one could crack into them even if they did manage to actually get to the hearts of the machines. All the installation work would have to wait a month, after Neil and Caroline got back from their honeymoon.

Neil enjoyed a few days riding with Marty into the hills behind their ranch homes. The girls were too busy to pay any attention to the men, so everything went along smoothly until it was time to travel to New York. Then it seemed like everyone's hair was on fire. Neil and Marty dodged several bullets pretending to be busy with work but paid for it later by having to listen to all the problems and solutions and more



problems and more solutions.

Almost everyone slept during the three-hour afternoon drive to the City. The whole group went to the hotel since they had never actually seen their new property in person before. They settled in with everyone taking commands from Melinda. Caroline's sisters showed up and moved into one of the four bedrooms. Neil apologized to Marty then disappeared. Marty would be staying at the condo as the go-to guy for anything and everything anyone needed anytime, day or night. Thank goodness both Chinese food and ice cream are easy to find at midnight in Manhattan!

Neil exited the lobby of the hotel onto the street to hail a cab. The FBI agent assigned to his security was across the street watching as Neil walked onto the sidewalk. About two hundred feet away from the agent, another man was watching for Neil as well and pulled up his camera to take several shots as Neil got into a cab. The FBI agent spotted the other man and took several pictures of him as he shot Neil. The agent's pictures were immediately downloaded to Headquarters and run through the database of known terrorist suspects. They got a hit quickly. It was one of the men who lived in the London neighborhood where Neil had taken pictures. The FBI didn't know there were two other men around the street watching Neil as well.

Neil had a nice dinner with his parents and was sitting down to play a game of cribbage with his father when he got a call from Fletcher telling him about the man watching him. They were doubling the detail watching the Echoes principals. They were national security assets after all. Three agents were added as guests at the condo. Fletcher ordered a security system for the condominium and an emergency response crew from the Bureau was on the way.

Everyone was secured for the night except for Marty and his agent who continued to make the midnight runs for food and whatever. Eventually, they all settled down and got some sleep. Friday came and the wedding planner needed everyone involved with the ceremony to meet at the church for the rehearsal at six. That lasted forty-five minutes and then they went to the favorite family restaurant of Neil's parents for dinner afterwards. That dragged on until everyone was getting antsy and the party split up with all the men going back to Neil's family's home for the most subdued bachelor party in the history of the world. A few of Neil's old friends showed up bringing the total to just twelve young men. A number of the guys weren't drinkers and they ended up playing penny-ante poker. The bachelor party broke up at midnight and Neil crashed in his old bedroom and slept the night through just fine.

Neil was up around at nine the next morning, just in time for Marty's arrival to pick him up to be at the synagogue by noon for the one o'clock ceremony. They were going out by themselves for a bit to pick

up some things, chauffeured by the security detail. They lollygagged and killed enough time to be almost late. They swung by Neil's parents place and changed into their tuxedos. They looked great and took off for the ten-minute ride. They arrived and, following instructions, entered the synagogue through the side entrance. The groom and his best man were put into a little room and told to wait. And they waited and waited.

At five minutes to one, a wedding coordinator helper moved the men went into the cathedral area. As Neil turned to look at his bride, he noticed two agents against the back wall. Then he looked a little closer and recognized that this was a Secret Service detail there to protect the President and his wife who were sitting in the back row. As stunned as Neil was by the unexpected attendees, he could not help but focus on Caroline as she and her party came down the aisle. All the women looked great, but Caroline looked amazing. The ceremony went off without a hitch and they left as man and wife.

On the way up the aisle, the bride and groom stopped and shook hands or hugged several important people. When they reached the end row and Caroline saw the President for the first time -- she missed them coming in -- she stopped and just stood there for a moment looking at them with her mouth hanging open. Finally, Neil reached over, shook their hands and said that it was wonderful that they had come. Caroline came out of her stupor and made sure they were coming to the reception. The newly married couple were then escorted back to the altar where the wedding party was waiting for pictures to be taken. The guests made their way out and waited on the sidewalk where Neil and Caroline would exit. The wedding party hurried through the photo shoot and hurried outside to the guests. The crowd cheered and threw rice as the newlyweds slowly made their way to the waiting limousine. The President went next and then the others caught taxis or limos to the Waldorf Astoria for the reception.

The party started at two in the afternoon and went until six when the last guest left. The President and First Lady stayed and visited with everyone before they left around three. They even danced a couple of dances. Again, everything went off okay and no one would ever know of the security net that was surrounding them at the moment.

Neil really wanted the party to end so that he could spring the surprise honeymoon he had planned. He had told Caroline that he wanted to plan the three-week vacation and that he wanted it to be a secret. The crowd allowed Caroline and Neil to take off around five and the couple went upstairs to rest for a bit before heading to the airport. All Neil would say was that they were catching a redeye and nothing more.

At six, Neil and Caroline stuck their heads in at the reception and said goodbye to the few remaining guests. The security detail that would accompany them was packed and ready to go as well. A car was waiting and they got away without any trouble. The FBI agents watching the building could not spot

anyone watching the newlyweds besides themselves. The agents were out in quiet force and wanted to apprehend the man they had seen the other day. Today would not be the day.

The travelers arrived at the airport VIP Private Plane area and passed through the security with ease. They pulled up to a hangar where a smaller Lear Jet was waiting. Neil, Caroline and the two security agents boarded and the jet started to taxi as soon as everyone was seated. Caroline waited until they were at cruising altitude over the Atlantic before she started to make the sleeping quarters organized. She and Neil retreated to the small sleeping compartment and disappeared for the rest of the flight. They stopped in Lisbon to refuel; then took off again for Rome, their final destination.

The reception at the hotel finally wound down and everyone headed for any bed they could find. Once everyone was fairly settled, Marty and Melinda decided to walk down the block for Chinese food. The two men making up their security detail took positions in front and behind the couple as they started the walk. They reached the corner of the hotel at a cross street and waited for the signal to change. A man saw them exit the hotel and radioed a car sitting two blocks away in a garage. The car immediately took off and headed toward the hotel. Two men with automatic weapons sat anxiously in the seats on the right side of the car, ready to open fire on the walking group.

An agent at the far corner of the block spotted the approaching car and recognized the driver as one of the men on the watch list. He radioed to alert all the other agents and they immediately took up positions to take out the car. Two unmarked FBI cars parked on nearby corners moved to block the road that the car was headed down. The two agents with Marty and Melinda yelled at them to get down and move back. The agents drew their weapons and found places to take cover as the car was moving toward them. Marty pulled Melinda behind a doorway and took out his own gun. He and Neil had carried them ever since their business in Somalia.

The car reached the agents guarding Marty and Melinda and the barrels of their guns came out the windows ready to fire. Marty, the two agents and another two agents positioned on the street let loose with all they had and hit all three men immediately. The car veered across the street and rammed into a couple of parked cars. The spotter down the street started to run after he saw the shootout and the car crash. He got only half a block when two NYPD street officers took off in pursuit. The man drew a weapon but was put down by both the cops with perfect torso shots before he could get off any of his own shots. From start to finish, the whole exchange took less than sixty seconds.

The episode was all cleaned up and ready for the FBI's public consumption version in less than two hours. Marty texted Neil about the attack, but he was asleep over France at the time. The two agents on

Neil's security detail knew of it almost immediately. They had a Skype feed all set up for Neil and Caroline when they came crawling out of bed as they were approaching Rome. Neil and Caroline talked with everybody up at four a.m. -- which was only Marty, Melinda and Fletcher. Both newlyweds were ready to return home if need be, but Marty convinced them that the problem was solved and finished. The FBI believed that to be the case as well, so Neil and Caroline decided to carry on with their honeymoon.

The jet landed in Rome and the four passengers got into a waiting car and skirted the city, heading south along the coastal road. Needless to say, the shooting in New York put a serious damper on the festivities of the moment. But the beauty of the sights soon had them looking on the brighter side of things again. The ride was just over three hours and they stopped for lunch in Amalfi overlooking the ocean. They hiked down the hillside through the winding streets and had a wonderful lunch in a restaurant on the beach.

## Amalfi

The newlyweds were almost done eating when Neil said to Caroline, “I have two wedding presents for us. Would you like to see the first one now?”

“Yes, yes, yes!” She said this like a kid at her own birthday party about to bust.

Neil pointed to the mountainside to a row of houses located almost all the way up to the road far above. “The third house from the right is ours.”

Caroline looked up, spotted it and said, “Let’s go. Pay the check and let’s go.”

They dashed to finish lunch and walked up the hill to the road where the car was parked. They drove the half mile north to the house and pulled into the small driveway in front of a two-car garage. Neil got out and opened the garage door to reveal one empty slot for the rental car and a brand new BMW sedan sitting in the other space.

Caroline said, “Nice Beemer. Does it come with the house, or is this the second surprise?”

Neil said, “No, no. I forgot about it. Let’s look inside.”

They all picked up luggage and Neil led the way into the home through the small door that opened into the kitchen. The home was beautiful. The two agents searched the place while Neil and Caroline waited on the balcony looking out at the Mediterranean Sea. Once they gave the clear signal, Neil and Caroline explored the place. Caroline immediately wanted to stock the kitchen pantry and refrigerator. One of the agents agreed to go grocery shopping for them all, so Neil gave the agent money and off he went.

The home had two stories with all the bedrooms located downstairs except for the master suite. The garage was off to the right and the front door centered on the rest of the home. The front faced the little street with the backs of the houses across the street just a short distance away. Neil was lucky to have space for a little flower garden and the front door had a beautiful entryway with flowering vines hanging from brass pots. The top floor had an open floor plan with the kitchen leading the way to the garage. The master suite was off to the left and everything else was in the great room including a gas fireplace. The back had sliding glass doors across the entire wall that folded up into sidewalls to create a truly indoor-outdoor space. The deck was small but ran the full length of the house and garage and decorated with beautiful plants and plenty of comfortable outdoor seating. Their house overlooked others down the mountainside toward the beach. The Amalfi Cathedral stood out prominently in their sightline -- the center of many beautiful post card pictures. This place truly was one of the most wonderful on the already stupendous Mediterranean coastline.

Neil and Caroline walked the house with the two agents and decided on sleeping arrangements. No one felt like cooking anything more than coffee, so the group decided to eat out, take out and call for delivery for most meals. Of course while grocery shopping, the agent had picked up Italian wines, soda and beer. He also bought a couple of *antipasti* platters made with a variety of farm-fresh meats and cheeses from a restaurant attached to the grocery store.

The house had been furnished with staging furniture, rugs and wall hangings. Neil and Caroline decided that it all should go and they would shop in Naples first thing the next day. Neil was already thinking antiques, but Caroline had a different idea.

Once settled in, Neil said, "Do you want to see our other wedding present?"

"No. This house will do." And she punched Neil in the arm. "Of course I do!"

"Ok, come on." He grabbed her hand and walked her to the balcony.

Once they were looking down at the small bay, he pointed at a seventy-foot yacht and said, "I named her "Sweet Caroline".

She threw her arms around Neil's neck and kissed him. "It's beautiful. When do we get to go aboard?"

"Anytime you want. I thought we could wait a few days before taking a weeklong cruise around the coast. But if we are going to have furniture swapped out, it might be better to take off sooner."

"That sounds great. Do you know how to drive it?"

"Not yet. But the broker is going to give me the training whenever I wish. He said that after one cruise around the bay, I'll be able to handle it from there on out. I will talk our two bodyguards into learning how to pilot it as well. How about if we get trained tomorrow afternoon after shopping? We could take the time to stock the galley too."

That all sounded great to Caroline. They had heard from New York and Virginia that everything was well. Extra security was set up everywhere, though the FBI felt that the threat from the one group was over. So, she and Neil finally settled in to enjoy themselves.

The building owner in Vienna where the twelve masterpieces were discovered had thought long and hard about what he would do with his cut of the proceeds. His portion turned out to be millions and millions of dollars, all of which he had kept secret from his wife of almost thirty years. He added up his assets and debts: Between the rental apartment building, his own residence, his long-term savings and his day-to-day cash accounts, his net worth was a little less than one hundred thousand dollars. A few months ago, that was a lot of money. Now it was chump change in the grand scheme of things.

While waiting for the big check, he thought of all the things that would change in his life. He looked hard at his options and, the more he studied them, the less he wanted to share his new wealth and the rest of his life with his faithful spouse. He thought about the messy divorce option and decided on a much cleaner idea. He would just disappear. He thought about faking his death and could not really figure out a foolproof way to pull it off. That left the obvious decision. He would just take the millions and disappear. Rio de Janeiro was his dream destination, a land of constant party and plenty of girls for the rich Austrian retiring to a life of fun and sun.

The money was just a few days away when he confided in a friend about the way he was coming into such wealth. Ignoring his Non-Disclosure Agreement, he blabbed all about the people who approached him with the treasure hunting idea. He told of the van, the incredible 3D picture of his building, the paintings and most of all about the nice Jews who were just being Jews by hiding the treasure. He was one of the Austrian residents that still thought Jews were a blight on society and were the cause of all the trouble in the Middle East. He swore his friend to secrecy because he believed that he had no one to tell anyway.

But his friend did have friends. Ones with a shared philosophy when it came to the Jewish people. The building owner's friend had met another friend through association in the Austrian Freedom Party, a far right-wing group of bigots that had gained a foothold in the political system. The information delivered to the party caught the attention of another member, the secret leader of an ultraviolent faction of the so-called Freedom Party. The leader put the wheels in motion to identify the people who were actively returning the property. He believed that the treasure should have gone to the Austrian government and that the families of the Jews had abandoned the loot and, therefore, had no real claim to it at all. With the information gleaned from the building owner, his investigators quickly discovered the name of the foundation behind this miscarriage of justice.

Neil, Caroline and the two agents met in the kitchen after resting an hour and went out for dinner in their new adopted city. The foursome headed for a small family-owned restaurant nestled amongst the art galleries and other shops prominent on the tiny winding streets. They decided to walk the quarter-mile to where the houses stopped and the businesses began. It was still early evening and the art galleries were wide open. Neil noticed the closing times on the door signs and knew they would pass back after dinner with time to stop into a few of them. Dinner was pure light summer Italian fare that kept going with another and another course. The owners fawned over the new neighbors who were also newlyweds. They brought extra desserts to celebrate and made sure the wine glasses were never empty. They also

recognized the familiar signs of bodyguards at the neighboring table and took care of all of their needs like they too were family.

They finished dinner with just enough time to visit two of the shops if they hurried. Neil had seen a piece that caught his eye at one of the galleries and was dying to show it to Caroline. It was an odd brass large figure eight that looked like stacked blocks on the bottom gave way to a smooth surface at the top. After careful study, Neil loved it more, but Caroline hated it. However, she would consider it after she had the house remodeled the next day.

The next morning, they awoke to a beautiful day of sun and a light breeze off the water. They all snacked on the food in the fridge and Caroline noted the appliances in the kitchen were to her liking. When everyone was ready, they took both cars and drove over the mountain to Naples. The two agents split up with one accompanying Caroline and Neil and the other in the rental car by himself. He was on a shopping mission of his own. He would locate and contract with a top-notch security company to install all the needed features -- cameras, door and window alarms and motion detectors -- in the new house.

Neil and Caroline had taken many pictures of the house to show to the interior designer they would be hiring. They had three designers on a short list and found the first one quickly in an upscale part of downtown. They immediately hated the first person who wouldn't have time to do their job for a long time. They moved on to number two and hit the jackpot. The design company was between jobs and clearly understood the situation. They were glad to accommodate the unusual schedule and could be ready to go the next afternoon. Then Neil and Caroline went shopping for all the necessary items. They really only needed to choose enough items to let the designers know their taste and the designers would do the rest.

The newlyweds had discussed the style for the home on the ride out. Caroline explained her ideas, but Neil still wanted to fill the place with antiques. After further discussion, Neil gave in to Caroline remembering a saying his father used to say, "Happy wife, happy life." And that was that. They would be going with Mediterranean but modernized to make use of smaller pieces rather than the oversized ones that were typical of the Mediterranean style. But Caroline did give in on the art piece Neil liked the night before. Their shopping only took two stops and then it was back to catalogs at the designer's office. After an hour of boredom for Neil, they were done. They met up with the agent who contracted the security system and had lunch at a lovely outdoor café near the designer's office.

Although any threats against Neil and Caroline were minimal since their travel plans were carefully guarded and they were using fake names, they were still on edge after the attack in New York. Several times, Neil was glad for the Sig P320 nine mm in his rear waist holster. Meanwhile, the agents had



dressed down for the day and looked like regular tourists.

Plans for the next week were finalized: The house would be emptied after the group left on their cruise. The security team was to come in next and then the decorator could have the following few days to get it all together.

Caroline, Neil and the agents went back to the house after lunch, gathered up their things and walked the half mile to the waiting yacht broker. He met them and ferried them out to the boat -- a magnificent Maritimo M70 Motor Yacht. The boat was a brand new product right off the assembly line. It came in several configurations, but Neil went with the standard ones down the line including décor. However, he did order every available upgrade, of which there were plenty.

The broker showed them around and then helped them stow their belongings. The four Americans listened and watched as the broker explained and demonstrated various functions. He finally got to the flying bridge and started up the engines. He weighed anchors and started to put out to sea. He turned north and went about a quarter-mile toward a dock. He pulled into their permanently-rented birth and continued to show them around. The two agents left the boat and walked up the dock to a store. They quickly came back with arms of groceries that got stowed and they went for their maiden voyage.

Neil learned to drive the yacht in no time and one of the agents had experience on boats and was a natural. After three hours of instruction, they dropped off the broker and headed south along the coast. At Agropoli, just a few miles south, they docked and walked into town for dinner. They got several items to go as well and returned to the boat. They traveled a bit more south and anchored for the night. It was eleven o'clock and the agents went to their bunks while Caroline and Neil had business to discuss with Marty and Melinda. It was only six in the evening in Virginia and they connected easily with all the nice hardware Marty had set up for everyone.

## Tyrrhenian, Ionian & Adriatic Seas

Neil and Caroline had talked several times with Marty and Melinda and they enjoyed sharing the events of the honeymoon with their best friends. They chit chatted to get caught up and even walked them around the boat using the laptop camera. Then it was time for business. Neil had called the meeting and he took the floor.

“I would like to throw out an idea to you all. I think it is time that Marty and I stopped risking our lives and turn that side of the missions over to two hired hands.”

Melinda said, “But, then the secret would get out to the government and your security plan goes out the window.”

“No. No. I’m talking about bringing two guys into the company and I show them how to run the equipment. We keep the secret just like before. But the men we hire would have to be already proven at carrying out our missions covertly.”

Marty said, “And just exactly who would that be?”

“Master Sergeant Blake Truitt and Sergeant Joseph Waters.”

Everybody got what Neil was proposing now. The two men he named were the ones injured in Iraq; they had been on the Somalia mission as well.

Caroline said, “Perfect. And their therapy could continue while we train them on their new jobs.”

“Of course. That would be first and foremost.”

They talked a bit more about it and all agreed it was a good decision. Marty looked at his watch and grabbed his phone, saying, “I have their numbers. You want to call them now?”

“Why not. I love giving good news. These men have shown themselves to be honorable and qualified. See if you can Skype them in to our call.”

They cut the connection while Marty contacted the two men. Both were still in the D.C. area for their recovery. He was able to get both of them online and called Caroline and Neil back.

Once they were all settled on the call, the two men were anxious to know what this was about.

Neil started, “Gentlemen, we have job offers for both of you. We want you to work for us taking over the field work that Marty and I have done in the past.”

Blake held up his hand and said, “Thank you for the offer, Sir, but I do not require any charity.”

“There is no charity here. You will work for your pay and, trust me, you will earn it.”

“Okay. Keep going.”

Neil went on with the help of the others and described the history of the work they had been doing.

They made sure to emphasize the dangers they had been subjected to on their various missions. Blake and Joe would be the field operators of the system after they went through training in a couple of areas. Neil wanted them to learn to fly the C-130 and to speak German, Austria's official language. Their first mission would be to return to Vienna, map much more of the city, then to Warsaw and sniff around there as well taking probably twenty pictures. The project work would begin when the two recruits were ready and not before. Of course, they talked about compensation. Caroline suggested a figure and they both accepted it without negotiations. Then the Echoes primaries offered relocation and signing bonus figures and it was a done deal.

Earlier that evening, Manfred Guzman sent an email to his secret parties' members asking them to keep their eyes open for a utility van that was acting odd. It apparently only stopped for a few minutes in one place and then moved on. He included a pretty good description of the vehicle and his network was now on the watch. He immediately got two messages in return saying that the van had been seen a few months back. The message senders gave the times and locations as best as they could remember and both messages put the time of the sightings within a day of each other. Guzman was now sure he was on the right track and continued his hunt.

Neil, Caroline and the agents awoke to a perfect day. They shared the galley chores for breakfast and decided to keep going to Messina on the island of Sicily to pick up a few things. One of the agents had asked for a package to be delivered to him there. They took turns driving while they all enjoyed the scenery.

They made the trip quickly in the big, fast yacht; they floated into the harbor and found a public dock to tie up for the rest of the afternoon. One of the agents left to get the package while the others went on a shopping spree. Caroline had conferred with her sisters, her mother and Melinda to put together part of the list. Those conversations were mostly around kitchen items. They quickly realized the challenge they had getting all the items back to the boat. The agent who had to pick up his package was back at the boat and he started receiving taxis, carts and vans loaded with the purchased things. There were groceries galore but mostly there were pantry items, like spices, soups, canned vegetables and the like. They bought fishing poles and all the extra things that go with them. They purchased a few decorative things and lots of different sizes of nice warm sweat suits like the ones on the plane. Towels, nice china and silverware, glassware, flashlights, batteries and a few cases of wine appeared. It seemed like every store they went in had something they needed.

Then Neil saw a store he had been watching for -- a music store. He went inside while Caroline and the agent went in the store next door. Neil worked with the salesman and bought a guitar, a keyboard, conga drums and all the amps and mics needed. He had it sent to the boat without the others even noticing. Neil always wanted to play the guitar and he knew Caroline played the piano fairly well, so the purchase made perfect sense to him. The problem would be all the room it would take up.

Evening was approaching and the shoppers were hungry, so they ordered food to go from a nice restaurant and took it back to the yacht. The agent there had been busy loading stuff all afternoon and had the dock cleared out just as they arrived. They decided to leave port before dark and head out to sea to spend the night at anchor. They moved out for an hour while everyone put things away. Caroline gave Neil a "look" when she saw the music equipment but, in the end, she was okay with the purchase.

The biggest surprise came when the agent showed them the things in the package he had picked up. There were eight handguns, two rifles, two shotguns and boxes and boxes of ammunition. All of it was new and the agent had laid the boxes out on a bed. Neil picked up one of the handguns; they were all the same, a Sig P320 just like Neil's personal sidearm. The rifles were also Sig Sauer -- their SIG516 model. The shotguns were top-of-the-line Remington M1100s. There really wasn't much to talk about regarding the weapons. The FBI wanted everyone on board the boat to be well armed and Neil was just fine with that.

They had a great dinner. One of the agents knew how to play the guitar and showed Neil a few things to get him going. Without realizing it, Neil had purchased one of the best Taylor guitars, a Koa Series K26ce. He'd also bought a Yamaha P105 keyboard and Caroline wanted it set up to hear it as soon as possible. It wasn't that hard to get it going and the two agents had it set up quickly. She played a few minutes and pronounced it wonderful. They went back to unpacking and storing everything until they were too tired to continue. The agents turned in and Neil and Caroline went for a swim off the end of the boat under the beautiful full moon of the Mediterranean Sea.

The next day, they followed the coastline until they reached Crotona and crossed the bay to the heel of the Italy "boot". From there they hugged the coastline to Barletta on the Adriatic Sea side of the Italian peninsula. It was a long drive for one day, but Neil wanted to make it to Venice for all the things he had scheduled. He had special tour guides set up for two of their days there and concerts tickets for every evening. They needed to reach Venice by the day after tomorrow, so that would make the next day a long driving day as well. They had a great dinner onboard -- takeout from a great restaurant in the little town. Caroline used her new china and made a big deal of a romantic dinner. This time, the agents ate alone, but one stayed off to the side and pretended to be a waiter. He had fun with it and the dinner staged on the

rear deck of the boat was spectacular. Later, they all tried their hands on the musical instruments and, with a little discovery, it turned out that Neil was a natural on the congas. With one agent playing the guitar, Caroline on piano, Neil on the congas and the other agent working the sound mixing, they actually produced a couple of nice tunes. The excellent wines they had picked up and were sampling may have helped. They had gotten extra cases for the house as well and were trying them all, slowly. The agents had on/off duty schedules and the on-duty agent did not drink, such as it were.

The next day, they got far enough away from the shore and did some shooting with all the new weapons. The agents took turns driving while the other worked with Neil and Caroline on the training. Neil was way ahead of Caroline, so enjoyed helping her as well. They had walked the boat together and identified four places to hide the handguns that were easy to reach. The package came with extra stiff holsters that easily attached to the undersides of tables or within cabinets.

They reached Venice around four in the afternoon and putted into the city to the setting sun. They followed directions to a prearranged berth on the outer docks where they were met by dockhands that helped them get tied up. Since there was no security systems on the yacht yet, one agent decided to stay there for the night. So, Caroline, Neil and the other agent caught a water taxi to where they were staying, the Hotel Moresco. They checked in and went for an evening walk to a restaurant where the concierge had made reservations for them. As always, the agent insisted on a separate table near the door, so Caroline and Neil enjoyed a wonderful dinner together in Venice. They walked some more after dinner and finally returned to the hotel for the night.

Joe was single and Blake had a wife, Gina and two sons. Joe lived pretty much on military bases, while Blake and Gina had a home in Tennessee. Blake, his family and Joe were brought to Virginia to look for homes and get to know the teams they would be working with. They had a shared office in the Firm's building and got a briefing from Fletcher on the security setup. They signed all the legal forms and enjoyed an all-hands Echoes barbeque at Marty and Melinda's ranch house.

The recruits searched for homes. Blake's family avoided the pressure of selling their Tennessee house, because the Firm bought it outright at higher than market value. The loss the Firm would take would be considered part of the compensation package. They put in an equal bonus for Joe and he opted to buy a very nice condo in downtown Alexandria. It was brand new and he was moving in only two days after signing the papers. Blake ended up buying a very nice ranch house near Marty and Melinda's. It was much smaller, but was beautiful just the same with active rose and vegetable gardens. Gina loved it. They had pretty good equity coming from the sale of their home and, considering Blake's new salary, they

made an upgrade in lifestyle. The most important thing was the schools. And they just happened to have top-rated schools in the top-rated district they were settling into. Blake and Gina's new home was virtually empty due to a sudden transfer of some corporate big shot. They could move in a week, but the family needed to get back to Tennessee to say goodbye and make it a nice departure. The boys needed to say goodbye to all their chums and were both sad and excited about their new location. Blake's sons were especially keen on Marty's growing motorcycle collection and the invitation to ride horses at Neil and Caroline's anytime they wanted.

For once, Blake would be able to show his family where he worked and let them get to know the people and some of the work of the Foundation. Gina fully understood that the risks her husband was trained to take were still present in the new job. That he would continue to carry and use guns and be in risky situations was something he made very clear to his wife and she supported him all the way. The family had been deeply shaken when Blake lost his left hand and they worried sick over the future. Blake was being fitted with an experimental mechanical hand as a special favor to the President of the United States. The President had honored his word and taken a personal interest in both Blake's and Joe's recovery. Joe too was getting the latest and most advanced artificial prosthetic right foot.

After a few days of getting organized, the two men would start intensive full immersion studies in the German language. After two weeks of work at home via online self-paced studies, they would go to Vienna for further work with a private tutor for another two weeks. Somewhere in there, they had to manage to get flying time in with the C-130 crew that they would eventually be replacing on some distant future trips.

The FBI had their homes set up by their security contractors and the feeds from their homes would join those from the other employees. Gina bought a new, much needed family SUV and never stopped thanking Melinda for this opportunity. She shed tears several times in private conversations with Melinda.

Neil and company stayed in Venice three days taking tours, eating, shopping, attending evening concerts and generally seeing the sights. They kept shuffling back and forth to the yacht while the agents had security equipment installed onboard. The security was tied into the same operational security network the people in Virginia were on at the office and at home. Eventually, everything was packed and the boaters headed back down the coast of Italy. This time, they were in no rush and stopped often to look around and find more wine. They started joining wine clubs and having wine shipped back to the United States. And they started fishing. At one port stop, they hired a guide to join them on the Sweet Caroline and show them how to catch tuna. They caught their limit in one day and had the fish prepared, frozen and shipped

to Amalfi and Virginia. It probably cost more than if you just went and bought it at the local grocery store, but that was not the point. The point was to remember the experience while you enjoyed your personal catches. They filleted one of the fish on the boat, froze meal size portions and cooked the rest on the ship's grill for dinner that night. It was wonderful.

On this part of the trip, they sailed around Sicily and stayed two days in Palermo. From Palermo, they traveled a straight line to Capri and visited there for only one morning. Caroline was anxious to get back to Amalfi -- only a one-hour ride from Capri. They arrived back in Amalfi exactly two weeks into their three-week honeymoon.

The newlyweds spent the rest of the trip enjoying the house and making several day trips to Rome to see the sights. The house was better than Caroline could imagine. The furnishings fit the house perfectly and the security system was hidden into the surroundings without a trace. The weather remained summery, but always with a nice breeze off the ocean. They stashed the rest of the weapons in the house in the same hidden manner as on the boat. They visited the boat several times just to drop off things and move the music equipment to the house. The only thing that would be going home with them was Neil's new guitar. He was serious about learning to play.

The time came to leave and they all drove in the rental back to the Rome airport. They boarded the same private jet that transported them to Italy and slept most of the way home. No matter how much rest and relaxation they enjoyed during the vacation, Neil and Caroline would still need a few days to acclimate to being at home again.

## The Faults of California

Everyone at home was very happy to see the newlyweds when they emerged from hiding in their house. There were packages waiting at their door of things they had mailed home. Everybody wanted to see them in person and that meant a quick trip up to New York. They booked the NYC condo for a few days the following weekend to visit. Neil was glad of the delay because that would give him time to get all his photos together and there were many.

They dove right back into work, with Neil traveling to the production facility in California to see the seismic version of his “picture” taker. He wanted to get these things installed. The machines were almost complete and he met with the engineering firm that was building the pads and housings in the desert. They were ready to go, on schedule, for the first of next week.

The first of the wine club cases showed up at Marty and Melinda’s place, so they enjoyed a few wine tasting evenings together. During one of the visits, Marty caught Neil alone and said, “You want to tell me the real reason you and I are getting out of the front-line action?”

Neil knew he could not lie to his old friend and so he spilled, “I have a new idea and I want you and I to have time to pursue it. That’s all.”

“Okay. What’s the idea?”

“Near the top of the Sears Tower in Chicago, the wind blows at a constant ten to fifteen miles per hour. If we were to put turbines on a floor near the top, it could produce enough electricity to power the building. It would take but two years to make up for the investment in equipment and renovations. I would have to redesign standard turbines and dream up some kind of rotation system that moves the smaller units toward the wind and the larger ones to the rear as needed so the entire floor space is used efficiently to capture all the wind possible.”

“It seems like the math just doesn’t add up. How can that little square footage of turbines create enough power to accomplish your goals?”

“I know I can get X-amount of energy out of standard equipment. All it would take would be a three hundred percent boost in efficiency to make it happen. And I can get that through new turbine materials easily.”

“Okay. I don’t understand it all, but I’m in.”

They shook hands and that was that.

The Echoes Foundation had spent the last month lining up heirs of more of the family hidden treasures. A



family in Florida received a package of little toys and knickknacks their grandfather had hidden. It was of little value except for the sentimental aspect. The research had recovered much of the life story of the boy who had hidden the treasure. It was a heartwarming story of family and friends being torn apart by the *Anschluss* and finding each other after it was over. The family had been separated but all miraculously survived. They found each other again in the United States and provided one of the few happy endings from those horrible years.

Another family received some inexpensive jewelry, a handwritten note and a diary from a relative. She had died in a death camp, but the items left behind brought a family that had slipped apart over the years back together for reconciliation. The Foundation paid for the family members to travel to San Francisco for a reunion where the items were unveiled. The accompanying note said to spread the jewelry amongst the family girls -- but the diary was the real treasure. It dated from 1878 to 1941 and detailed the extraordinary life of a woman who moved with her family from the Holy Land to Europe; she'd written about her family, her education, her marriage and children and the end of her life in Vienna as a hated Jew. The Foundation helped the family to publish their grandmother's story for the whole world to enjoy and remember.

The day came when the special units built for earthquake detection were completed and delivered to the hangar where the C-130 lived. All were loaded onto the plane and Marty and Neil took off for a three-week working visit back to the fault lines in Southern California. The trip was uneventful, but Neil and Marty made good use of the travel time to test the new communication systems on the plane. They had instant video conferencing capabilities with home and could tap into the Foundation's security network. They enjoyed watching the view from the balcony of the Amalfi house as a screen saver of sorts.

They landed in San Diego in the early afternoon and were met by Professor Tara Hutchinson and several of her master degree students who would be working with Marty and Neil. They were anxious to get going and were ready with vans filled with tents and other camping gear. Neil had another idea that he had been tossing around in his head while on the plane. Rather than shuttling back and forth to a cheap motel nearly sixty miles every night, rent a motorhome. When he saw all the young kids with all their camping gear, he gave Tara an address not too far from the airport and asked her to head there first.

Twenty minutes down the I-5 and then out 94 to the east, they got off the freeway and arrived at an RV sales/service/rental lot. The salesperson Neil had called came out of the office to meet them as they parked. Neil introduced the group to the representative and Neil asked everyone to wait for a few minutes. Marty figured out what he was up to and pretended like he had no idea what his crazy friend was doing.

Neil and the representative went inside and found the manager who was waiting for them. They took chairs in the manager's office and sodas were passed around.

Neil started by explaining what was going on. They were seismology students and a professor from UC San Diego and he represented a foundation helping with a project. With the basis laid, Neil said, "I would like to purchase two of your nicest RVs, fully loaded and drive away with them within the hour. They will be purchased under the name of the Echoes Foundation, but will be donated to the school as fast as we can do the paperwork." He pulled out an American Express "Black" card engraved with his and the Foundation names and handed it to the manager. Then he said, "And there will be nothing to quibble over on the price because you are going to give me the very best deal you can, considering the use and ownership of the RVs themselves." They all laughed and Neil said, "Agreed?"

The manager said, "Agreed, Mr. Jacobs, agreed." They laughed some more and shook hands. The manager turned to the salesperson and said, "Bring up a Fleetwood Discovery please." He left immediately.

Neil said, "Thank you. When we leave here, I'll need to get supplies and bedding. Is there a Walmart nearby?" There was, just two exits down the road. Neil went outside and told the group what he had done. The kids were excited, as was Tara. Just then, the RV pulled up and the representative got out. He welcomed them aboard and they took a quick tour. It was wonderful. One of the students counted the bunks and said that someone would be sleeping on a couch. Only then did Neil let them know he was buying two RVs.

The Echoes Foundation owned a website that had been thrown up quickly and ignored completely. The content was vague with no real contact information and no real substance. A mission statement was posted about helping underprivileged students with scholarships and the like. An email address was present, but nobody watched for incoming messages. What was watched very carefully by the FBI was who was visiting the site. Of the forty-eight hits the site got since going up, forty were from businesses wanting to upgrade the site on various search engines so that they would attract more business, blah, blah, blah. Four were from Foundation employees looking for nothing in particular. Three were from the other government agencies they were working with who were just checking on things.

And then one came in that morning that had the FBI watchers up and active. It was an unknown computer in Vienna, Austria. Red flags flew immediately; sniffer programs were activated and a trace put on the IP address. The computer was owned by a Manfred Guzman. His name sent up more red flags, as he was on a watch list of white supremacist radicals. The officers on the case asked for guidance from

their bosses on how to proceed. They all talked about bugging Guzman's computer or even physically copying his hard drive, but the bosses thought it was not yet warranted. The agents were told to keep watching and inform the managers should the situation change.

Marty, Neil and everyone in the group arrived at the first site just after dark. They would have made it sooner, but Marty wanted to have a motorcycle/bicycle rack added to the back of each of the Fleetwoods. And then, of course, they had to stop and buy the bicycles and dirt bikes for the racks. They pulled up and situated the two vehicles door-to-door, leaving space to open the room extensions that popped out of both sides of these houses on wheels.

Once parked and self-leveled, they set up, picked bunks and unpacked the new bedding. It didn't take long before someone opened the wine and they all zeroed in on dinner. They opted for grilled steaks and baked potatoes. One of the kids was a part-time chef and offered to cook if they helped him lay the two kitchens out correctly. Everyone pitched in and they had a wonderful dinner, all seated around an extended dining room table. After cleaning up, they all slowly slipped away to call home, watch TV or actually do schoolwork.

Neil and Marty were outside looking at the sky when they both got the same text about the Austrian Nazi Party trying to track them down. They called Fletcher and he briefed them together over Marty's encrypted satellite phone speaker. There were more operations in work, but those reports were not in yet. Fletcher asked if he should tell anyone else and they authorized letting everyone at the Foundation know everything, but with no need to wake anyone up. They ended the call and went inside to do a weapons check. They had hidden all of their guns in their luggage and had not yet put on their handguns. It was time to pull them out and let the others know they were around if needed for snakes or other creepy things.

The vans rolled onto the sight at seven a.m., with Neil awake to greet them. They all immediately went to work. The dig was staked out and survey equipment helped define the digging area. They planned the backfill and where to stage the removed dirt. Once the operators were sure of the dig, they started removing the fill with precision. In one hour, the space was opened up for setting a cement pipe on end to hold the equipment. The large hole was backfilled to hold the pipe upright and the first unit was set into place. The hole was filled up to two feet from the top of the pipe chimney. It took several hours for the students to make signal connections and set the cabling up on temporary support towers. A cap was fitted over the top of the pipe and the form for the cement pour was built. The slab was to be two-feet thick and circular with the center at the pipe itself. It had a radius of twenty-two feet making it forty-four feet across

the circular slab. With the form complete, the cement trucks started their pour. It took six cement loads to complete the slab and the group stopped for the night as dark approached.

The cement trucks returned to their plant to be refilled for the next day's work. Everyone was amazed at how well operations went on the first day and was sure they would have some trouble somewhere somehow. The construction crew brought their own trailers and food, but soon joined the others in their nicer dinner accommodations.

They passed the night pleasantly and celebrated the success of planting the first of the eight sensors. It was performing perfectly and already sending readings back to the main system. Marty and Neil Skyped with their wives and everybody caught up on everything.

People finally started to slip away to their bunks, but a late night penny-ante poker game broke out around a campfire and went until one a.m. when a cold wind blew over their makeshift table; everything was cleaned up then and they all went to bed.

They were up early when the cement trucks called and said they would be onsite in two hours. Everyone slammed down breakfast and relocated to the next site. They started digging and immediately hit hard rock. They drilled some core sample holes and moved the digging area west a hundred yards. That proved to be just fine and they went through the same process as the day before without another hitch.

This night was more of a DVD-watching night for everyone after dinner. Neil had brought his guitar and tried to practice a little bit. Everyone turned in early to be ready for the same thing in the morning. They talked it over and decided to make a change of process. The crew that dug the holes would move out in a circle of three sites since they had down-time while the cement was poured. The workflow was much improved and, after two days, they had three more units installed. With five done, they had now crossed the fault and were headed back on the other side. They used the motorbikes to ferry the installers and testers between the three sites. After working hard for four days, they decided to take a day off and Marty and Neil went on long trailbike rides just to enjoy the desert. They took some great pictures and Marty even shot a rattlesnake that just wouldn't go away while they were taking a break on a rock. Of course, Marty had to take the skin and rattles back as a souvenir.

In Virginia, Blake and Joe had finished their online language lessons and were heading out for two weeks of study in Vienna. Blake's family had settled in, with the kids in school and into new routines with sports and other things to do. They had taken a day trip to the nation's Capital and had a great time seeing the sites.

The Firm had succeeded in cleaning up the backlog of treasures, but government jobs were piling up from several customers -- two around D.C., two in New York City and another drug-stash house search in Florida. The team kept busy giving away grants in several areas. They renovated a synagogue in London and one in Paris. These were both wonderful old historic buildings in the heart of the cities. New scholarships were set up at Brandeis University in Waltham, Massachusetts, just outside of Boston. The Firm was giving away almost half a million dollars for the first year and scholarship fund would continue at that pace forever with their rock solid long-term money management investments.

Melinda was worried about the work backlog and let the men, who were off riding dirt bikes, know that there was work to do. So, Marty and Neil decided to wrap up the work in the desert and head back home. No more lollygagging, as Caroline's father liked to say.

They needed two days to finish the construction and one for making final communication checks at the University where the monitoring was based. They finished the work in the two days planned, but they were long, hard days with several problems resolved on the spot by moving the dig sites. They wrapped up the project work late in the evening and everyone stayed for a small party. They barbequed and Neil had one of the cement truck drivers pick up a keg of beer. The night was hot and dry, the perfect weather for outdoor desert camping and partying. No one drove home that night and all got a late start in the morning.

The crews were up and gone early and the students, Tara, Neil and Marty headed back into the city. The Foundation decided to keep the recreational vehicles because of some tax rules, but gave the University priority access to them at all times. Melinda and Marty were already planning a road trip up the California coast later in the year. The folks back home rented storage units for the vehicles near the University and Neil and Marty stashed them and gave Tara a set of keys. They made sure to leave all the gas tanks full with everything ready to move at any time.

The next day, they all met early at the University and started the testing. Everything went well after some minor code adjustments to fine-tune the sensors. The pictures were astounding but, since they needed time to pass between samples to measure the changes, there was some waiting between pictures. By midafternoon, the system was recording minute changes in the fault that should, after a couple of actual events, predict significant earth tremors. Only time would tell as they gathered more empirical data, but early indications were very, very positive. Marty and Neil caught a late flight home and arrived at three a.m. Both Melinda and Caroline, along with their omnipresent security detail, met them at the airport. It wasn't long before they all were sacked out safe and sound in their own beds.

## Miami Vices

The Echoes primaries all spent the next two days preparing for the whirlwind work ahead. They were going to start in Florida with only Marty and Neil going, along with their FBI escorts. They would sync up with a DEA team in Miami. The utility van disguise was to be used again and everything was prepped. This was a three-day job and they would be spending down time sleeping on the plane. With all the upgrades, the plane was actually a very comfortable place and a most acceptable choice. Neil had laughed about it to Marty and Fletcher one time that he thought of it was like being on a cruise where you leave all your stuff on the ship while you go visit the places where the cruise stops. And it just felt like a second home considering all the time they had logged on board. During the work project, they would be shadowed by four cars that could pass for any of the thousands of fairly old, well-used cheaper cars that were everywhere. The agents looked like any of the people that might be driving in their rides. They were all very experienced and very well armed. They would also have aerial support and another ring of agency and police vehicles always just a few blocks away.

The schedule they had received showed nothing but flight time and mission planning meetings for the first day. Neil and Marty talked about the schedule and concluded they were going to be working with someone not familiar with their process. Certainly, security support was important and, if that was their reason for all the planning time, so be it. But if the reason was because of them, plans would be changed; they only needed a few minutes to get their bearings to let the software tell them what route to take. They packed, were driven to the airport, boarded the plane and took off immediately. Once at cruising altitude, Neil made a call to the men working in Austria. They all shared information about their work on both sides of the Atlantic. Joe and Blake were honest with their friends and bosses that they were actually a bit fearful of their first conversation with a building owner that would be spoken entirely in German. They didn't think they could sell the cover story that they represented a man who had evidence that there very possibly were valuables hidden in his building and that everyone wanted to remain anonymous, hence the Non-Disclosure Agreement. Marty convinced them that the second the owner hears the word "treasure", they would have the building owner hooked. That made Blake and Joe feel better. They had a very good working ability with the language and they had memorized all the legal speeches they needed to make. They rehearsed the meeting with their teacher and would be studying right up to the minute the meeting with the building owner started.

The men in Austria wanted a full briefing on everything Marty and Neil would be doing in Florida

and they would appreciate any videos they could create. Marty set it up so that pictures would be posted on a secure website as they were taken and a video scan of each stop from a camera on the top of the van would be there too. It would even include the comm-chat between all the people working the project, especially from Neil and Marty's side. Neil was glad to see Joe and Blake ask the questions they were asking and wanting data to study. With every intelligent question they asked, Marty and Neil were gaining more confidence that they had made the right decision in hiring these two men.

Neil and Marty landed in Miami to a muggy, hot, late morning sun and started sweating the second they left the plane to meet the team leaders. They were in a remote hangar at a remote airport with all the vehicles and operational folks staged in temporary workspaces off to one side. The briefing turned out to be more a demonstration for one of the big bosses. Marty and Neil obliged him and backed the van out of the airplane, set up the equipment and took a picture of the hangar they were in. It showed several underground cavities for pipes and cables. The building itself was pretty much nothing since it was basically one thin sheet of plain corrugated sheet metal. But the office area revealed a hidden safe the owner had installed years ago. The boss that requested the demo was suitably impressed and went back to his office. Now they could get down to the business at hand.

The planning was simple; the DEA wanted eight pictures taken. Neil had made it a practice of giving them a little bit more than the contract-designated quantity and it made the service worth every penny of what Echoes was being paid. They signed the operational agreement and Echoes would be eight hundred thousand dollars richer when the job was completed. During the briefing, Marty asked why they were waiting until tomorrow morning to begin. Wouldn't it be better to do this at night? He just threw the questions out there, not really having an opinion because he did not know the neighborhoods themselves. After a discussion with all the commanders, the Officer in Charge gave the order to move out and get whatever could be reasonably accomplished in this first outing.

Marty and Neil dressed in their work clothes and gathered the things they needed in the van for the work ahead. Their work clothes now consisted of body armor and a shoulder holstered handgun under their baggy utility worker coveralls.

The first stop was only half an hour's drive away, but the tactical commander wanted extra time to move some cars around when he saw the traffic flow from an eye in the sky. They would be shooting three sections, each fairly far apart. The first target area was a very rich part of town with security gates everywhere. When they got close, Neil decided he wanted to scout the area to do better planning. He was getting an uncanny feel for how good the system could work by the physical layout of the neighborhood. Was the ground sandy? How small were the streets? How far back were the houses set from the street?

What covered the area between the houses and the street? Was it cement or lawn or sand? All these considerations helped him determine how best to take the picture or pictures. He talked to the Officer in Charge and told him he wanted to be driven around in a car to see more of the neighborhood. They called in a local police car and the officer drove Neil up and down the streets of the area for fifteen minutes. The place they wanted to have the single picture taken in this neighborhood was extremely well secured with video cameras everywhere. But Neil noticed several others with the same high level protection. He had seen enough and was taken back to the van. Neil talked it over with Marty and Fletcher and wanted to take four pictures rather than the contracted one. Four photos would cover eleven exclusive homes when the shots were stitched together. Neil thought that was pretty good efficiency, taking only four shots to get eleven houses, not to mention the guest houses, detached garages and pool cabanas. Neil ran it by the bosses, they checked in with support and gave the go ahead. Really, they were anxious to get a deal on the coverage. That always looked good to their bosses. They pulled up to the first photo spot and got ready. No one was paying attention to their truck. Marty got out of the passenger side and manually worked the boom. A minute later he had it secured, was back in the van and they were driving away. They happened to hit the jackpot on the first picture, finding a full underground basement in the actual target home. The second picture revealed nothing and neither did the third. They found another nest in the last picture and Neil wanted to call it a night. The road traffic was getting heavy and the foot traffic was picking up as well. They had discovered two probable secret drug storage rooms and they both looked active with the presence of bags and other things laying around the rooms.

The investigator friend of Manfred Guzman eventually found the address of the law firm that represented the Echoes Foundation. He sent two sympathizers to take a look at the offices -- a younger couple that lived in the Virginia hill country. They put on business attire that pretty much covered up their many tattoos and found a parking place near the office. They carried a folder and shoulder laptops bags that actually carried a handgun instead of a laptop. They politely knocked on the front door of the building and received a recorded message after they pressed the buzzer by the door. The message stated that the office did not take unscheduled appointments, but a phone number was not given. The surveillance team finally noticed the camera up in a corner and left the premises. They reported to Austria what they had learned later that night.

The report on the basement discoveries was relayed to the operation bosses even though it was dinnertime; they didn't get a lot of good news in their business these days. Neil spent an hour explaining



the list of things he could recognize in the basements. They wanted to get a search warrant from a judge and that required facts and hard evidence most of the time. The FBI had already paved the way by briefing a local judge on the legal aspects of the pictures regarding the invasive technology used. They had to go through two judges before the third judge would see things their way and grant them the warrants.

Business was finally wrapped up when a buffet dinner was brought in for all the team. Most everyone was staying in a couple of nearby motels for the duration of the op, but all stayed for dinner to have dinner as a team. It was ten p.m. when everyone finished and disappeared into the night. Marty, Neil and Fletcher were locked inside the hangar and left alone to get some sleep until morning. After settling down and relaxing a bit, they worked their way into the quiet of their little office/fort inside the C-130.

They got up at around eight and fixed breakfast for anyone that wanted anything as they began showing up for another round of neighborhood mapping. The territory they had planned to cover that day was an hour away and could easily be done by two in the afternoon. That, however, did not leave enough time to also get the last target neighborhood. So they would do two short days of work and that was all there was to it. Marty told Neil in private that he was okay with the short days' work because he had never really been to Miami and wanted to go out for Cuban food and some local music.

When the commander gave the word, they got everything together and a caravan left the hangar for the one-hour drive. Everything was timed a little better this morning and the support team was in place when the van showed up to go to work at the first spot. The neighborhood was a rough looking "gangish" territory considering the gang graffiti everywhere. They did one last check in with everyone and Neil took the first picture of the day. Because of the ideal layout of the area, the one picture would get five houses, including the target house, of course. He got the picture and they moved out to target number two several blocks over. Again, no one took any notice of them and the picture was taken within a minute. Neil did a quick analysis of the first two pictures and discovered that something was wrong with the system. The pictures were washed out and out of focus. Neil ordered the group out of the neighborhood to find a grocery store parking lot. They only had to go a few blocks away before they found a Winn Dixie and pulled off to the side to park. Neil let Marty know what was going on and Marty told the others the team was down and on hold.

Neil pulled out tools and went to work. He opened the main system box and took a few of the connections loose to get to the main motherboard. As soon as it was exposed, he smelled the unmistakable odor of a burned out capacitor. He sniffed and searched and found it immediately. He knew exactly how to fix it, but needed to go to an electronic store for soldering equipment, supplies and a replacement

capacitor. He knew the exact kind by taking a close up photo with his cell phone and expanding the photo resolution until he could see the colored stripes on the capacitor. He searched the web and found a store, Alfa Electronics Supply on NW 72<sup>nd</sup> Avenue. He notified the commander that he needed a ride and a beat up 1997 Camaro arrived outside the van within a minute. He hopped in and was driven to the store by a very rough looking undercover agent. It was a fifteen-minute ride and they visited cordially sharing family information and current events. The agent just had a baby girl, number three and showed Neil pictures. Neil talked about being a newlywed and the challenges he was discovering every day. He gave Neil some really good advice, "Think of the little things that *bug* you as lovable, cute and endearing." They reached the store and Neil went inside. He had changed clothes but was glad he had his weapon handy; this was not the best part of town. But the store was large and he was the only customer as far as he could tell. A roving salesperson greeted him and helped Neil find his items quickly. Neil even grabbed a couple of things he might need in the future. He paid and went back to the car to find the agent on the phone to the office while waiting in the running car.

When Neil was in and ready, the man hung up and they took off. Then he said, "That was the commander. He just wanted a status even though there are about four GPS trackers on us and this car. Oh, well..." They got back to the stalled mission and Neil went to work on the system with his new tools and parts. Thirty minutes later, all was repaired and they were ready to go again.

They reorganized, cruised back into the neighborhood and started again. They arrived at the first picture spot and took another shot without any notice or technical problems. The picture was sharp and clear and the system was obviously working perfectly again. They stayed five minutes at this spot while Neil did a check on the picture quality and they still managed to not attract attention. Of course, while studying the picture, Neil was looking for the mission objective -- drugs. In the one picture, he spotted at least four probable stashes and distribution setups. He could recognize the processing facilities by the mechanical scales and other things usually on a kitchen or coffee table.

They moved on to the second spot and, again, easily took the picture and stayed in position for Neil to do a quality check. He spotted several stash hides in the five buildings in the picture. It was around two in the afternoon now and the traffic was beginning to pick up; so Neil felt a bit of urgency in finishing up the last two pictures as fast as possible. The third spot was a few blocks away and they moved to the location without any trouble. When they pulled onto the street, they spotted a problem immediately -- there was a real utility truck working on the street with a gang of laborers working on the underground water lines.

Marty had their van pull off to the side at the end of the street and he talked to the security men inside

the van. One of them knew the area very well and took the lead on the problem. He changed clothes leaving his weapons behind and putting on the full utility worker costume including belts and tools. He got out and went to talk to the crew. They laughed and chatted until the agent walked back up the street to the team. He got in, told them to move out and get the shot, everything was cool.

They pulled up to the right spot, took the picture quickly and drove away, waving at their fellow workers as they passed them. The last spot was around the block and they pulled up to it with no problem. It was now around two forty-five and the streets were getting crowded with young people. They were in the process of moving the boom into position when two teenage boys on bikes approached Marty, who was working the boom and stopped. They wanted to know what he was doing and were just curious kids. He gave them the “looking for underground cables” story answer; they bought it and took off. The team took the fourth picture and moved out, done for the day by three o’clock.

When they got back to the safety of the hangar, Neil revealed what he had seen in the pictures. There were plenty of false compartments under floorboards with something in them. Neil could identify at least eleven drug hits, some looking like dealers, with most being users’ stashes. There were no basements or any large quantities of drugs stacked or otherwise present. These were users or neighborhood dealers with some homes not worth busting.

The couple that Guzman had sent to investigate Echoes and approached the building were under surveillance from when they were cruising by the office even before they walked up to it. Their identifications were discovered a few seconds after their license plates were run. They were known white supremacists in the FBI database and now they were being watched full time.

Marty and Neil unpacked for the night and Neil let Marty give the technical briefing to the waiting commander. Neil found the agent that had driven him to the electronics store and asked him to join them for the evening. The agent phoned his wife and told her he would be working late babysitting the visitors from D.C. She bought the somewhat true story and the men agreed to meet at six to go out. That gave Neil, Marty and Fletcher a few hours to clean up, relax and get ready. They phoned home, took care of reports and rested up a bit. At six, Agent Rudy Sutherland showed up in a nice large suburban he had gotten out of the impound lot and together they created an itinerary for the night’s fun. He asked them about food and music preferences and guaranteed them a good time.

They first drove to a club where a band was playing later that night and bought tickets for the show. They were going to the *Ball and Chain* to see *New Groove City* led by percussionist Gumbi Ortiz. Ortiz is

an amazing player and a long-time member of Al Di Meola's touring and recording band. Al is one of the leading jazz guitarists in the world with over thirty albums to his credit. With tickets in hand and the band not going on until ten that night, the guys moved out to have dinner at Joe's Stone Crab restaurant in Miami Beach. The ride from the club to the restaurant was short as the crow flies but, since it really was the first time in town for the three men, Rudy drove around for a bit and gave them a narration of the city. He was very methodical in his description, as you would expect from a veteran undercover agent. He talked about the legal business areas, where the nicer parts of town were and showed them examples as he drove. Then he would weave the history and the culture of areas. He ended on a somber report of drug related crimes in the city and how many drugs pass through it. He was a wonderful host with funny stories about some of his busts and the people he dealt with. He wound up the tour by cruising up and down the main drags, watching all the neon lights come to life and the pretty people start to loiter around the outdoor restaurants, bars and coffee shops. They arrived at Joe's Stone Crab restaurant around eight and got a table immediately because the owner knew Rudy very well. It was as if he had made a reservation, but he had not. The food was fantastic and they all had a variation of the signature stone crabs dish. Stone crabs are quite different in taste and appearance from the western Alaskan king crab, being saltier and grayish in color with dark blue claw tips. They are heavenly when cooked right. The men all ordered good sized meals and each ate every bite. When dinner ended, Rudy took them outside for a short walk to the beach where he again played tour guide host, telling them about the people enjoying the sand in the early night before it was too dark.

Finally, they drove to the club, parked and went inside. It was about fifteen minutes before the band started and canned music was playing with people already dancing. They ordered drinks, with most of the guys getting sodas and chatted until the band started. The band was introduced within a few minutes and they started with a hot salsa number that filled the dance floor. A couple of women asked the guys to dance and Fletcher was the only taker. It was easy to see that he loved to dance. He was on the floor and grooving like a native in no time. The other men watched and smiled at their friend having a good time. The band played for an hour and a half and the show ended. Afterwards, as Neil and company were getting up to leave, Gumbi Ortiz himself came out from backstage and visited with the crowd. He stopped by and thanked the men for coming and chatted for at least five minutes wanting to know where everyone was from and why they were in town. He was a genuinely nice guy, not to mention being a virtuoso on the conga drums.

The group left the club although the action was picking up for the rest of the night. They drove back to the airport and were dropped off by Rudy who promised to return for the last workday of the operation.

They sacked out with full bellies of crab and drink.

The morning came whether they wanted it to or not. But after some coffee, they all got ready to go out for the last neighborhood's run. They had previously agreed to leave the hangar at nine and everyone was ready to go right on time. They rolled out and made the trip fairly quickly, considering a couple of accidents still lingered from the earlier rush-hour commute. The team pulled into neighborhood; it was as run down as yesterday, maybe worse. They moved directly to the first target and hadn't been stopped more than ten seconds when a car drove up and blocked their forward path. Two rough looking Hispanic men got out and walked up to Marty. They hassled him about what he was doing on their turf and finally went away with a twenty-dollar bribe, laughing. The picture was taken and the two hoods would never know how close they came to having an army come down on them.

The van eased off that street and moved on to the second target only two blocks over. One of the support guys had been shown how to work the boom and wanted to do it on this stop. Marty gladly obliged. The agent was outside when the same car containing the two men from the first stop drove by really fast with another car following. The pursuing car opened up with a machine gun and riddled the side of the van with bullet holes. The last bullet caught the agent working the boom as he was drawing his weapon. The shot hit him in the chest where his vest absorbed the bullet. It still knocked him over. The rest of the support team, hearing one of the agents call in that they were under fire, came flying in and pinned in the two cars that attacked the van. They were trapped at the end of the street. All four men in the two cars were out on the ground and handcuffed in a few seconds. They wisely gave up their weapons when they saw the firepower that was blocking their escape. An ambulance that was on standby flew in and took care of the downed agent. Marty and Neil's van was escorted off the street and protected all the way back to the airport. The job was effectively over.

Neil did an analysis of the two pictures taken that day and found several positives in the nine house coverage that both pictures provided. The commander told Neil that the full payment would be made even though two of the pictures were not taken. Neil had taken many more photos than expected and the van was decorated with a nice even line of bullet holes down the one side. Neil agreed with the commander's assessment and appreciated the full payment. All in all, the agency had gotten what they needed to put a serious dent in the city's drug traffic for a while. Marty drove the van up the airplane's cargo ramp, they closed up the back, taxied and got into the air headed north as fast as possible. Neil and Marty's wives were waiting for them at the next stop, New York City.

## Work, Work & More Work

In Austria, Blake and Joe had been busy with the owners of various buildings around Vienna. In one management agency, a woman who had received an email from Guzman talked briefly to Blake and Joe, who then met in private with the branch manager. She thought it odd and decided to send an email back to Guzman that night. She even wrote down a description of the two men including the kind of suits they wore, their accents and what she guessed their business to be. She was wrong on several points, but the damage was done.

Blake and Joe worked continuously with the Firm identifying targets for the return trips. The count was fifty-two and growing every day. They hustled the leads the Firm was giving them. They stopped for a working day-trip with their teacher as a wrap-up lesson. They were almost fluent in German and certainly capable of getting around in the business world. They drove into the countryside with the teacher going on and on about the surroundings and testing them on noun memorization. It was a very intense day of travel and study.

They did one more day of work in Vienna and flew home the day after. No one paid close attention to them during the rest of their stay. If anybody was following or tracking them, the two would have noticed. They were trained to notice.

The flight from Miami was busy with calls to get organized. The first thing was repairing the nineteen bullet holes running down the driver's side of the van. The FBI had a body shop team waiting and went to work as soon as the plane was in the hangar. Marty and Neil would begin the work on the next contract the next day. This stop would be different from the last since they would be staying at their new condominium instead of on the airplane. A rental car was waiting for Marty and Neil and they left for the thirty-minute drive into Manhattan. New York was a place where they had to work in the daytime, so they had all of the three evenings free and Caroline and Melinda had everything arranged. They cleaned up at the condo and took Neil's Tesla, which Caroline and Melinda had driven, to visit Caroline's parents in New Jersey. They got there around five and, of course, there were a million family members present to party with Caroline, her new husband and special friends. They feasted on every food imaginable and then played board games until someone was crowned the winner. Tonight it was Marty. With a day of work ahead, they drove back into the city and snuggled into the nice beds at the condominium.

At nine a.m., Marty and Neil took off for the airport to retrieve the van and get to work. The photo ops were easy with no apparent notice from the regulars around the neighborhood. They were actually

doing two jobs, one for Homeland Security and the other for the FBI. They were contracted for twelve pictures, one point two million dollars for three days work. They mixed the stops between the two contracts with no one caring one bit. Neil stopped a few times to take pictures of skyscrapers. He wanted to know how high the pictures would focus as the building grew taller. They got to the first site and took a picture. A man actually offered to move his car if they needed the space. They moved to the next target and captured the image without any notice that they were doing anything out of the ordinary. They took two more and were done for the day just after noon. They parked the van and reviewed their findings with the officers in charge. The pictures revealed very little as far as actionable evidence. There were no large stacks of drugs or even smaller ones. There were no hidden basements. This looked like a pretty no-secrets, clean neighborhood. However, there appeared to be hidden gun safes in four basements. Two were empty and the other two held some odds and ends, neither were probably drugs. Neil and Marty left after the briefing to meet their wives for lunch. They stopped in at one of Neil's favorite Chinese food restaurants.

When lunch was over, they all went to a meeting that Melinda had arranged with the Anti-Defamation League. The Foundation ended up committing one million dollars annually to the League. With the resources Echoes had and were continually receiving, they were searching for more avenues to dole out the money they had laying around.

Everyone went back to the condominium in the Waldorf and relaxed for the rest of the afternoon. Neil and Marty actually got to sit and watch an entire live baseball game on TV. Neil's mother was playing a concert that night and they all attended. It was wonderful to hear a performance entirely of Bach and she was spectacular. Afterwards, they all went out for a late-night dinner at a new restaurant around the corner from the concert venue at Neil's father's suggestion. The service was slow, they had to return two things for being prepared incorrectly and, in the end, everyone agreed that the new place needed to adjust their recipes and their service. Everything was bland and not presented well at all. It would be a long time before they would try that place again. They all caught cabs and were back in their homes in a few minutes.

Through the duration of their trip, the primaries were protected by the FBI. There were no imminent threats identified, but they stayed vigilant nevertheless. They knew something was going on between the website hit by a known Nazi sympathizer in Austria and the perhaps not coincidental visit to the Firm's office by a pair of young White Supremacists who lived nearby. Everyone detailed to Echoes knew of the new situation and were on the alert for anything suspicious.

The next day started at nine a.m., the same as the previous day and Neil and Marty drove out to the

van and drove it back into the City where they could begin work. The neighborhood yesterday was a cultural mix of different religions, races and affluence all doing nicely together. But today, they were in the roughest part of Harlem. They opted to have one of the black officers assigned to them pretend to be the boss of Marty while Neil worked inside the van. Neil was only supposed to take two pictures, but he ended up taking four. When they were stitched together, they showed stashes between the walls, in the basements and in floorboards and they found several large safes. This neighborhood was in for a shakeup. They stopped to have lunch inside the van getting takeout from a 5 Napkin Burger place. They had to stop for the day because a protest movement was blocking the roads to their next assignment in Queens. The prearranged schedule had them doing the job in three days, but they were hoping to finish it in two. That was not to be. They parked the van back at the airport and got to the condo just in time to miss their wives. They sat around on their computers and worked the rest of the day until Melinda and Caroline returned. The two couples had room service and went to a Broadway show, *The Book of Mormon*. Afterwards, they all returned to their rooms and didn't get up until eight a.m. the next morning. The two women packed and drove back to Virginia in the Tesla.

Neil and Marty did their work in Queens without really knowing what they were looking for again. They found a few hidey-holes, but nothing overtly suspicious. They discovered no secret basements or any indication of anything out of ordinary legal existence. Neil concluded that it was a general fishing expedition and the fish were just not biting in this neighborhood. They finished the New York contracts and drove back to the airport. They loaded up and flew home just in time for Joe and Blake to return to pick up the van and plane and head back to Vienna to get to work on that city's next round.

Blake and Joe worked with Neil and Marty to complete their training on the system, the van and the plane over the weekend in order to turn around and return to Vienna, ready to begin their first live mission. Marty, Neil, Fletcher, Blake and Joe worked at the airport in the van for one whole day and then spent the next day studying old pictures. Neil, with help from everyone, constructed a backup motherboard for the system just in case it broke down again. Blake and Joe left Sunday night, flew overnight and arrived in Vienna Monday morning ready to begin their work. Fletcher was along for the ride to provide security, but Blake and Joe were loaded for bear with weapons and other equipment. The Hercules was parked in the usual spot in the usual hangar with the usual security all around the plane. Blake rolled the van out of the plane and did their setup tests.

Once ready, they drove into the city and found their first spot. With all the planning and practicing they had accomplished, they were ready. They stuck to speaking German to keep up appearances and just



for practice. They took a picture and moved on to the next site. They got in twelve pictures as the day went on and no one except an older gentleman on the sidewalk asked what they were doing. He bought the canned answer about looking for underground power lines and continued his walk quietly.

They had calculated that the whole operation would take four days and they were right on the money. One of Guzman's spies spotted them the last day and emailed it in. The van was gone and stored before anyone could track it. But some damage was done. Guzman now knew they were active again in his city and it made him angry. He could not sit by and watch his country's treasures be stolen by the Jew-loving Americans operating in his country illegally, he was sure. The plane was sent home for Neil and Marty to use to finish the last contract, which was back in D.C. for another look at something. Blake and Joe moved into a hotel for the next phase of the operation. Caroline and her investigator Patrice were on their way to Vienna to help with the legal side of the building owner contracts and the subsequent treasure hunts to follow.

Neil was busy analyzing all the pictures from Vienna. There were lots and lots of possible positive hits. Marty took on the task of finding a place for Neil to begin his work on other projects. Marty was looking at location, space and layout of the new "shop", as it was being called. He told no one, but he wanted to make sure there was plenty of space and lifts to work on cars. He wanted to help Neil with his dream car, a tricked out 1974 Chevelle. He found a perfect spot near their houses in a rundown trade's business park. The building sat on plenty of acres with a big parking lot. The structure was perfect. It was large with a double-deck office on one side and three defined areas for manufacturing, construction or development work to occur. Neil got the tour and the Foundation paid cash for the property. They needed upgrades to the place before they moved in -- more power, more air compressor drop lines, the offices updated, the HVAC system needed to be upgraded and they were going to see about the option of installing solar panels to offset their electric bills. It took two days for the contractors to be identified and go to work. One general contractor oversaw the project and committed to have it done in two weeks. He recognized the kind of people Neil and Marty were and figured out they had plenty of money to spend. He made several suggestions that were accepted without a haggle in the price at all. He recommended new lighting and resurfacing, sealing and painting the uneven concrete floors.

After two weeks, they would be able to start having the security system installed. Then came the fun part of buying equipment. They decided to hire a machine shop crew manager and let them hire everyone else and recommend machinery and tools to buy. They would initially be told this was a rich guy's play shop, which wasn't altogether untrue.

Neil had the men in Austria do a separate analysis on the pictures. When they were ready, they all met on Skype and discussed the outcomes of pictures one by one. They all worked from notes and had the pictures on large screens nearby to refer to. The pupils got a B+ on their first run, but they found one that Neil had not. Neil found four more possibles Blake and Joe missed, bringing the total of buildings with hits to eighty-five with ninety-two stashes.

They were all beginning to recognize canvas rolls of oil paintings and were excited to see five pictures that showed them. Neil knew Caroline would want to start there. Caroline and Patrice Morgan arrived later that evening and checked into the same hotel as the men. They met briefly, talked about the plan of action from a geographically efficient route, until Caroline got a good look at the list of addresses and saw the note about oil paintings -- that settled that. They made a couple of calls and set up the first meeting, then went to bed. They had already arranged for a local bank's security assistance and a contractor who would be repairing the holes made in walls or floors.

Neil and Marty spent the next day downtown in Washington D.C. on the "cheaper" side of town. This contract was with the FBI and they were out in force to watch the Echoes team perform the jobs. There were two contracts because they were from different divisions of the FBI. That's all they would say to Marty and Neil who were just fine with that answer. All in all, the contract called for nine pictures at one hundred thousand each. The Bureau had long since figured out that Neil would give them about twenty percent more than they would contract. Still, the Foundation would be paid almost a million dollars for one day's work.

Neil and Marty started into the work at nine a.m. when the traffic started to die down a bit. They decided to hit the side of town that no one likes to talk about first and were set up to go at nine fifteen. They had to hold getting started while the support teams deployed. Once ready, they started the work without much notice from anyone, except a few souls inside their homes looking out windows and wondering about the big van that pulled onto their street. Neil immediately saw stash places in the first two houses. They were pretty obvious in closets, but one of them had blocks of something on a coffee table with a set of scales next to it. When Neil saw this, he had Fletcher inform the officer in charge. While they decided what to do, Neil took two more pictures. The message came back for Neil to stop -- they were going to raid the coffee table house. Neil wrangled two more pictures and then headed for the downtown capital area where he had three more to take. These were more consulate and embassy buildings. Neil and Marty quickly took the pictures and made it back to Dulles to park the van with the plane before rush hour traffic hit.

When they were getting ready to leave the airport for the short drive home, Fletcher got a call and was told to immediately set up a teleconference with Marty and Neil. The Director of the FBI came on with a couple of Fletcher's bosses.

"Gentlemen, I wanted to be the one to give you an update on the follow up operations from your work. First of all, we took down a drug dealer with four kilos of pure heroin right here in the capital. Thank you very, very much." Neil and Marty acknowledged his kind words and he continued, "While that was going on, the DEA in Miami raided four houses today and seized four hundred pounds of marijuana. They send their thanks as well." Again, Neil and Marty both smiled and said how much they appreciated the opportunity to help. Then the Director wrapped it up and said, "And the New York office reports raiding bomb-making factories in the suburbs of the city and two significant drug stash houses in Harlem. The field office folks there say thank you also. I cannot tell you the debt of gratitude we owe to you for your groundbreaking work and partnering with us as your first choice. I look forward to a long, long relationship. Thank you again."

They ended the call pleasantly and Fletcher drove them back to their homes with a second car following along. On the way, he shared that he had gotten a promotion and said it was totally thanks to them and he appreciated all of it.

The next day, Neil and Marty stopped by their new shop to check on progress. Sitting out front were two old rusted out 1976 Chevelles. Marty had bought them on eBay for Neil.

## Under Attack

Caroline, Blake, Joe and Patrice met in the front of the hotel where Joe had their car waiting. He and Blake had now switched into protective mode with Caroline and Patrice being their protectees. They were well armed under their dress coats. It was a short distance to the first house and the owner was anxiously waiting for them. They reviewed the legal papers with the owner, with Blake interpreting for Caroline. They showed the owner where the stash was in the building and he told them the tenant worked all day and they could go in.

There was a cat to contend with and Patrice took it on as her work. The hidden compartment was in the floor of the master bedroom directly under a large bed. They took pictures of the room before they moved everything and cleared the bed out of the way. The contractors provided Blake and Joe with a few tools and they opened the floor cleanly without destroying any of the wood. As expected, they found two rolls of paintings. However, each of the two rolls had three painting rolled together. Caroline opened them one by one and set them around the room. They all looked at the first one in amazement. It was by Vincent Van Gogh and was a forgotten piece not cataloged in any books or online records. The other five were the same way and they were all magnificent. They rolled the paintings back up, secured them in a hard case tube and called the bank for transport. They had to spend an extra amount of time to calm the building owner down. He got so excited and wanted to look up the value right there on the spot.

Caroline pointed out that they were going to find the rightful owners before they even talked about the value. If none could be found and there were no notes of any kind in the floor or attached to the paintings, then they would start to talk about value and, of course, the building owner's cut.

The contractor's men went to work and the Echoes team left for the next house. All morning, they found something in every spot. They were able to complete four buildings before stopping to have lunch. Two of the spots had what was becoming a common pattern -- a cigar box with letters, notes and jewelry that was typically not too expensive. One of the houses had a large stash of very expensive jewelry with no notes or ID of any kind. Again, the problem was not so much with the discovery, but fighting off the building owner who turned greedy when the prize was sitting in front of them. He got the same warning as did the others who were all about their cut.

After a nice lunch, they went to another house with rolled up paintings. There were two, both by Camille Pissarro and beautiful. There were several documents that clearly had clues to family members.

One letter read:

*To my darling children,*

*Wilhelm and Anna, I am sorry for sending you away so quickly and not being with you. I will come to England as soon as I can. Your Aunt Heidi will take good care of you. I am leaving our precious paintings hidden for fear the Nazis will destroy them or worse. I pray they will make their way back to us soon after this madness is over. At least your mother doesn't have to suffer this place and these horrible people.*

*Love, Father*

The man's name was Hillel Abramovitz. He died in a camp a few months after leaving the letter and treasures in the secret family-hiding place. His two children were eleven and nine when he sent them to England in the winter of 1937. His deceased wife's sister, Heidi Baumgartner, happily took the children in. Heidi's husband was a very successful real estate developer in North London and he too received the children with open arms. They had no children of their own and had loved it when Heidi's sister's family visited in London or when they themselves went to Vienna. Thomas Baumgartner survived WWII as a Captain in the Royal Air Force, which was a rarity with the kill rate for the whole RAF having been sixty percent during the war.

Thomas and Heidi learned of the death of Hillel after the war ended, but they had suspected his death when he did not show up in England. The family made a trip back to Vienna after the war and walked the streets, looked at the old house, but kept going never dreaming that Hillel would be that sneaky. They just figured the art he loved was gone to the Nazis, never to be seen again.

Sonia Abramovitz, the oldest surviving heir by marriage to Hillel's son, would receive the paintings. She then would have to deal with all the children and grandchildren. She was doing well in her mid-seventies and lived by herself in Holloway, a suburb north of London proper. Her family lived close by and visited often. She was a retired school teacher and Wilhelm had provided well for her lifelong financial security before he died. The paintings were estimated to bring a total of eight million dollars and would probably change Sonia's life significantly.

The Vienna team continued working the next four days, scheduling all the searches, coordinating with the bank and contractors and then actually opening up the stashes of treasure. They found everything imaginable from rare books to gold coins, lots of personal effects, jewelry ranging from cheap junk to

beautiful diamond necklaces and lots of now worthless cash.

With just four houses remaining to visit, they took the afternoon off and relaxed from their hectic schedule. They shopped and ate and took naps. They had everything scheduled to finish up the next day. Fletcher had been transporting the treasures back to the United States, avoiding customs and the nasty questions they might ask. The next morning, the team continued with their schedule and went to the first house. The building owner's front door key would not work and they went in through a downstairs garage. They were all standing where a car obviously parked when Joe asked them wait a minute. He found the house's drawing and studied it a minute before saying, "This garage is supposed to have a work room behind this wall, but there is no door."

Blake figured out what he was saying and went over to the wall. It was cinder block with no openings at all. He looked at the picture with Joe and said, "Yeah and there is a bunch of things stored inside. It just looked like garage storage stuff to us, but someone has hidden the door that was probably here." He stood in front of the wall center and outlined a doorframe with his hands.

Patrice said, "Well, let's open it up." She walked out to the contractor's van, grabbed a sledge hammer from the back, summoned one of the workers and walked back into the garage. She handed the heavy tool to the contractor and stepped back.

Blake showed the man where to hit and the burly contractor had an opening big enough to walk through in less than a minute. They stepped inside with flashlights blazing and were amazed at what they discovered. The room held art galore from floor to ceiling. There were sculptures and fully framed paintings on shelves and in open-faced cabinets. It was all in perfect condition. This was obviously owned by more than one family and gathered to hide from the Germans by the one fellow with a large storage space he could hide easily. There were tags on everything and ledger books that carefully detailed the owners. This was a whole new ballgame. They got on the phone to the bank and sent for a lot more security transport. It took all day to pack and transfer everything. They wrapped up and went back to the hotel at four p.m.

It was ten in the morning and Marty and Neil were getting to check up on their new shop. Everything was actually ahead of schedule. Marty had picked up Neil in his Tushek super sports car. Neil liked everything about the car except the bright yellow color. He felt it was the difference between flashing class and just having it. But he could not begrudge his best friend a little fun -- they were earning it. They walked the floor and met with the project manager about hiring a shop foreman. The project manager knew just the guy. He retired as a large machine shop foreman after almost forty years and was getting bored. This

could be a great fit. They called him and he was on his way over within ten minutes. They went through magazines and made tentative guesses on equipment, but the final say so would be left with their new shop foreman.

Melinda had arrived at the Firm's office for the day at 6 a.m. She always had been an early bird and paid for it by going to bed at 10 p.m. every night. She left the office to get mid-morning coffees for everyone down the street. Melinda pulled her car out of the security lot and turned onto the main street. She made the first lights, but had to wait at the next signal to turn into the center where a Starbucks was located. She didn't notice the car that had been following her since she left the office.

Melinda pulled into the lot, parked and went inside the shop. She ordered and checked her phone while she waited. Her order came up, she paid, gathered up her bags and tray of drinks and walked to the door where a young lady helped her by opening the door. Melinda walked across the lot to her car and saw a young man get out of the one parked right beside hers. He smiled and turned to walk toward the stores. She put the drinks on the roof of her car and opened her doors with her key fob. She felt someone's presence behind her and turned to see the young girl from inside who helped her with the door. She had followed Melinda out to her car. Melinda felt a tingle and pressed the silent alarm on her keyring just as the girl pushed her past her car and shoved her into the backseat of the car next to hers. The girl piled in on top of her while the man who had returned to the car started it up and backed out. Melinda felt the poke of a needle and went unconscious.

Her emergency signal was received immediately and the phone in her purse went off. The girl heard it, dug it out and threw it out the window of the car. When Melinda did not answer her phone, the security service notified everyone as arranged. The man at Neil's house took off toward the last known signal. What the kidnappers did not know was that the key fob, like her phone, was also a GPS tracker. A car from sheriff's department was closest to the signal and followed the signal for a couple of blocks until it stopped. He pulled where the signal was stationary and found Melinda's purse thrown on a curb. Using the time the signal was activated gave them a direction the car was heading and where it last was located.

Neil and Marty were notified by text and they called the agent from Neil's house. They got him on cell in pursuit of the signal. The car was probably traveling on a main drag that was just one mile from the new shop. They bolted for their car and took off making full use of its extraordinary power.

Caroline, Patrice, Joe and Blake drove back to the hotel and pulled up in front to let the valet take the car. Blake was driving and got out at the same time as Joe did from the passenger front seat. They scanned the

street as Caroline and Patrice got out onto the sidewalk. A car was coming up the street behind them and Blake noticed the barrel of a gun sticking out the passenger side rear window. He yelled, "Gun!" and Joe looked and saw it coming. He pushed the women down and took a stance behind the car's rear fender. Blake was ready at the front of the car when the passing car opened fire from both the front and back windows with automatic rifles. Joe returned fire and got the rear seat shooter on his third shot. Blake fired a half-second later and hit the front seat man who slumped toward the driver. The driver hit the gas and took off. Blake dived into the car and sped away after him. He didn't have time to notice that Caroline had taken a bullet in her leg.

The two kidnapers pulled into a closed and deserted gas station behind the building where they had a second vehicle stored. They got out of the car they had stolen the night before. Together, they dragged Melinda out and pushed her into the waiting car. They threw an incendiary device into the old car and drove away. The smoke from the car took almost a minute to be noticeable.

Marty and Neil were the closest to the path the car was at its last known location. They didn't know it, but they were only a block behind the new car. They saw the smoke from the burning car and pulled into the gas station. They pulled behind the station, located the burning car and called it in. The responding agent gave them the address of the house in the country where the two young people lived only fifteen minutes away. They sped off in that direction unaware they were only a mile or two behind Melinda and her kidnapers.

By this time, a chopper was in the air headed toward the road where Marty was speeding along. It wasn't long before the traffic thinned out leaving the target car alone but hard for the chopper to follow due to the overgrown trees covering the road in many places.

Marty was doing eighty and quickly gaining on the target car. A sheriff was told address of the kidnapers and took up a position on a side road to intercept should he be needed.

Blake had the shooters' car in sight and was gaining on it. Too much traffic prevented him from taking shots at the driver, so Blake made do with staying on top of the car's bumper as close as he could. The driver took a couple of wild shots at Blake, but nothing even came close. As they rounded a corner, Blake took advantage of the lead car's drift and bumped its rear fender, sending the car sideways into a wall where the driver was pinned inside the car. Blake stopped and eased out of his seat using the open door for protection. His gun was out and ready and Blake moved closer. He got to the passenger door and stuck his gun inside the car. The man was barely conscious for the pain of a probable broken leg. Blake walked



all the way around the car checking on the two other men as he went. Both were dead. When he reached the driver, he could see both hands of the man and opened the door.

Blake shook him a bit, got his attention and said in German, "Listen, there are going to be people here any second." He stuck his gun into the leg of the man and continued. "Tell me who sent you. Now." The man smirked and Blake said, "Three, two, one." and shot him in his kneecap. "The next one goes into your artery and you'll bleed out in less than one minute. Three, two..."

And the man said, "No. No. I don't know who sent us. I really don't."

Blake said, "Then you are no use to me." He cocked the gun's trigger.

"Guzman! Guzman!"

"That's better. Manfred Guzman?" The driver shook his head yes. "Now, here's the way it is. I'm not going to tell anyone that I talked to you and what you told me. I suggest you do the same if only out of self-preservation. Stick to the story that one of your buddies did all the talking. You were just a driver." The man nodded again and Blake got out of the car. He walked back to his car and stood waiting for the cops to finally get there. In the meantime, he texted Fletcher. That message set off a firestorm across Europe.

Marty and Neil finally saw the car. The chopper had told them the make, model and color. They held way back and didn't know what to do at this point. They were only a mile from the kidnappers' house where the sheriff was waiting. Neil grabbed the phone and told the agent coordinating the effort to have the sheriff and all other law enforcement stand down. And to have the helicopter move a few miles over a hill. They were now one mile away and the car was just about to pull up to the house. Neil found a place for them to park and hide the car. They got out and took off running up the road as fast as they could.

The couple pulled into the driveway where the female kidnapper got out and opened a sliding wooden garage door opening up to a double car area. The male kidnapper pulled in and got out of the car. They were told that someone would come by tonight and pick up the abducted woman, so they just left Melinda asleep in the back seat of the car, giving her enough juice to keep her out for the night. They closed the garage just as Neil and Marty entered a yard two houses up the road. They saw the door go down and the couple go into the house without Melinda. They talked it over, made a plan and went to work.

Joe had hustled the women into the safety of the hotel lobby and gave Patrice the gun from his ankle holster. He got help from the hotel staff for Caroline and went back outside to keep watch. It was then he

got the message from Blake about the driver's words. Blake was sure he would be with the local police for the next few hours or more. Fletcher had already made his calls and an embassy representative was on the way along with a few dozen armed men. Fletcher didn't tell the Vienna team what was going on in Virginia knowing they had their own problems.

An ambulance showed up about the same time as the police, the embassy people and the news people. Joe was about to be cuffed when a diplomat showed up and started waving his credentials around. Finally, when a cop with some authority showed up and took charge, he calmly asked Joe to tell him what happened. He talked to Caroline and Patrice and got the same story. Then he had the ambulance take Caroline to the hospital with Patrice riding along. He asked Joe to come with him to the crash scene and he agreed. It was short drive, especially with the lights flashing.

Marty and Neil decided that both would go in the front door because of all the vines covering the porch made an approach easy without being noticed from inside. They opened a screen door and, to their surprise, it didn't squeak. They got set and Marty kicked the door open by standing with his back to it and kicking backward with his right foot. It flew open and Neil entered with Marty right behind him. The couple was sitting at a table talking and were totally surprised by the smashing door. The guy reached for a revolver on the table, but Neil moved in close and said, "That'll be the last thing you do." The kidnapers both put up their hands.

Marty threw them face down on the floor and instructed Neil, "Watch them and, if you want to kill them, it's okay with me." He ran out the back, into the garage and found Melinda in the car unconscious but doing well. He lifted her out of the car and laid her on a patch of lawn. Then he went back inside to find the scene just as he left it.

He asked Neil to go outside and call in the cavalry. Neil was out in a flash while Marty rolled the two prisoners over and said, "Tell me everything and I won't kill you." They smirked. "That woman is my wife and no one will be here to save you for three minutes. So, again, tell me everything and I won't kill you."

They tried to say they knew nothing, but Marty didn't have time to waste. He pointed his gun at the man's head and said, "I think you will die to keep your secret. But, will you watch her die?" Marty swung his gun at the woman's head. The young man started talking when the woman started crying. The sheriff was the first onsite; he cuffed the couple and secured the house. It was loaded with weapons and drugs. The FBI arrived next and used the local cops to keep the people away who were starting to gawk at all the cop cars as they drove by. When the ambulance showed up and took Melinda away, with Marty by her

side, Neil stayed behind to coordinate the next move. He told them about the people who were supposed to come for Melinda after dark sometime. They had no names or descriptions to help them out, so they decided to wait and see who showed up.

They cleared the cars as fast as they could, shut the garage and made the house look all safe and sound. Four agents were inside with two snipers hidden outside for good measure. Neil got a ride back to Marty's car and headed for the hospital. Then he got word of the attack in Vienna.

## Manfred Guzman

Manfred Guzman heard quickly of the failed attack in his city of Vienna. He did not know if the authorities knew of his involvement, but he knew safe was always better than sorry. He called his two security people and told them of the botched attack and that he needed to disappear. They all packed up and headed by car to Italy. He had a second residence in Udine that used to belong to one of the many sympathizers he had known over the years. Udine was a city just northeast of Venice and only a five-hour drive from Vienna. From there, he could communicate with his followers everywhere. He would wait to find out what had happened. It was a simple plan. At least he had confirmation from the United States that a hostage had been successfully taken.

He was out of the city for an hour when the police knocked on his door in Vienna. They put out the equivalent of an All-Points Bulletin, but they would find nothing with the head start he had. Guzman had been on the phone the whole trip so far and had pieced together the foul up in Vienna. He set up a lawyer for the lone survivor of the attack, more to make sure the bed-ridden man did not talk than to help him. Guzman was fairly sure the man did not know that he had ordered the hit. And even if he did know, it was his word against the assassin's.

Neil ordered the C-130 prepped to be ready to fly immediately. The support crew went to work adding a couple of extra weapons he had asked for and the pilots were on their way. Neil had to wait just fifteen minutes before they were rolling out of the hangar. Two of his Special Ops friends were waiting when he arrived at the hangar and the others were on their way to Vienna from wherever they happened to be. He wanted his own friends to help him sort all this out.

Neil was conferenced in with everyone as he made plans. There was little conjecture as to who was behind the attacks. Guzman needed to be found and stopped before he could do any more damage. Neil was not content to leave his apprehension to the European authorities. His people had other options at their disposal and were getting Interpol involved to help legitimize their plans.

The two men assigned to pick up Melinda never received a confirmation text message from the couple who did the kidnapping, so never showed up -- the stakeout was a bust. Homeland Security moved in and took over jurisdiction of the whole incident. The house provided a boatload of evidence that would dismantle the cell the kidnappers were a part of. Their computers and phones were all captured by the technical teams and two agents were assigned to monitor and infiltrate the network if possible.

Neil worked the problem like an engineer. The FBI and other operational leaders liked what he was doing. He seemed to actually be making sense of the problems that come up when multiple law enforcement agencies, especially foreign ones, are involved. But Neil had an ace up his sleeve with his personal team of Special Operation soldiers. That's what happens when you make friends with these people – You became part of their family and that meant more than anything to them.

Neil received a note from the President while flying offering any help he could and saying that he was sorry about Caroline being hurt and Melinda being kidnapped. Neil responded saying thank you, of course and that he may indeed take him up on the offer for help. Neil forwarded the note to Fletcher who showed it to anyone impeding his help to Echoes.

Back home in Virginia, Melinda was out of the hospital and home under close guard. The Firm closed and everyone given a work from home option. They all took it. Marty had taken a lead in the security of everyone including Neil and Caroline's parents. He turned the shop into an operational area that worked just fine for the varying law enforcement agencies involved in this case. The Homeland Security folks were even involved, inventorying their seizures from the White Supremacists'. Everyone got a tour of the weapons seized and agreed they were cheap knockoffs, but still there were a lot of them.

Neil finalized the plan and made arrangements for the special personnel he requested. One hour before they landed, the first step of the plan went into action. An anonymous tip to a newspaper in Vienna leaked the fact that the people who had been attacked were with an American Jewish Charitable Foundation. The paper jumped to the conclusion, as expected, that the attack was an anti-Semitic incident. Just as Neil landed, a different paper received another tip giving the names of the principal owners of the Foundation - Neil and Caroline Jacobs -- and that Caroline was injured in the attack with a bullet to her calf.

When Neil showed up at the hospital, he was barraged by reporters. All he told them was that he was letting the authorities sort it all out and was taking his wife away to recover in peace and quiet. About this time, the records regarding the purchase of the Amalfi house magically changed to reflect the new owner as Neil Jacobs. The NSA did a nice quiet hack job as a favor to the FBI.

Neil spent the rest of the day beside Caroline in her hospital room. Down the hall in an office, Caroline's double, a highly experienced CIA agent, prepared to assume Caroline's identity. At exactly five fifteen, as planned, Mr. and Mrs. Neil Jacobs left the hospital for the train station where they caught a late train to Rome. The train was out of the station an hour when the real Caroline was spirited away to

the C-130 that had already been loaded with all the treasures from the bank that Fletcher had not already sent ahead. Patrice was with Caroline the whole time, helping her get around and settled into the cargo plane. Patrice was expecting an old rickety aircraft and was amazed at the conversion. When Caroline was ready, the plane took off bound for the United States.

Neil and his secret entourage of plain clothes Special Operation soldiers quietly rode the train through the night. They reached Rome the next morning and Neil hired a simple rental car for the ride down the coast for him and “Caroline”. The escorts did the same and protected the car by boxing it in almost the entire drive. They finally got to the house and pulled into the garage as if they did it every day. The door shut and the waiting began.

Guzman was at his secret retreat in Northern Italy and watched with glee when the news story broke about the name of the Foundation’s principal officer, Neil Jacobs. Hearing Neil say he was taking his wife somewhere to rest, Guzman knew they caught the late train south bound. He searched the public record sales of all of Italy for a Neil Jacobs and found the address in Amalfi. He figured they would be there for at least two weeks before going home to Virginia. He could take his time and plan carefully. Neil and Caroline Jacobs had killed his men, one a good friend. For that and other crimes against the rightful rulers of all of Europe, they must die.

Manfred learned from his people in the United States that the kidnapping had somehow failed to materialize and the couple that were supposed to finish the assignment were missing and assumed to be in the hands of the police. They knew nothing anyway. But this lack of success all around with a couple of simple missions kept screaming inside his head, “If you want something done right, do it yourself.” He knew in his twisted mind that it was ordained for him to personally see the Jacobs’ lives end.

Neil and his “wife”, Jane was the name she gave Neil, pretended to be married when they could be seen through the window or out on the balcony. They had a wheelchair for Caroline and she played the hobbled young wife to perfection. Anyone watching would never know that under their bathrobes were full sets of body armor. And that there were two snipers looking through their scopes at whomever might be watching the couple.

Manfred Guzman was now going under a fake identification he had prepared a long time ago. His alias included a complete set of credit cards and the accounts to back them up. He waited a few days and started on his mission with his two bodyguards. They drove the six hours to Rome and checked into a

hotel. The trunk of their car held three automatic rifles, three handguns and lots of ammunition. Guzman fancied himself an expert with a handgun but, in reality, he was a poor shot at best.

The next day, they drove the three and a half hours to Amalfi and checked out the target house. Their third drive-by caught the attention of the men watching the road via cameras positioned around the house from the makeshift operational security room. They got the license plate of the car and drilled down to the owner. They could not connect Guzman to the car, but the video recording showed a silhouette of a male passenger that very well could be him. The people in the house went on high alert now that their fish had taken the bait.

After their final drive-by, Guzman and his men went down to the beach and had lunch. They had a perfect view of the house above. They discreetly used a pair of binoculars to check out the view. They saw Neil and Caroline outside on the back terrace reading and enjoying the sun. What they did not see were the two tourists that slipped in behind them at the restaurant who were now trailing them. A GPS tracker unit was attached to the rear wheel well of Guzman's car, which was parked a distance up the hillside giving the security team a perfect view of their target.

Neil had spent a lot of time deciding how they should take down Guzman and it was decided that they would wait for an attack just to have enough evidence to prosecute him. All the evidence they had now was circumstantial at best. Some of the men proposed just killing him out right, but Neil rejected that idea -- not because he didn't like it, but he wanted to destroy the whole network Guzman had built and not just take out Guzman himself.

They all finished lunch and Guzman and his men paid the check. They walked back up the hill to their car stopping several times to catch their breath. They were watched carefully and it was clearly noted that they did not retrieve any weapons from the trunk. They slowly drove by the house one more time as they started their trip back to Rome. They were tracked the whole drive. When they were back in Rome, they were shadowed by a pair of men who were told to watch and listen. When Guzman went out for dinner with his men, their rooms were broken into and video and audio bugs were installed. The men watching got an extra bonus when Guzman was joined for dinner by two local men. Those men were quickly identified and were now under watch themselves.

Back in Virginia, things were tense as the operation was in progress. But the Firm had reopened for work and Marty was focusing on getting the shop finished. Caroline had moved into the New York condo and her parents, her sisters and Neil's parents were taking turns staying with her to help her out. Of course, she had two FBI agents hanging around to lend assistance as well. Marty hired the shop foreman and

together they ordered the metal milling machines. The FBI and the rest of the agency people slowly moved out and closed the Virginia part of the operation. Besides the couple in Virginia, they had raided four other houses in the network and arrested sixteen people on weapon and drug charges. They believed they had made a major dent in the activities of the group. Marty watched while the shop was secured and finished out. The shop foreman was in heaven as he ordered stock metal, wood, hand tools, fasteners and anything else he could think of.

The Firm was still using Neil's house shop as storage for the treasures and spent a lot of time cataloging everything. They analyzed every piece of data they could get to locate the family members. They used the clues found with the treasure as a starting point, but they also went back through the building ownership records, archived utility bills and any other public data they could find. All in all, they had found about sixty percent of the rightful heirs. They would start contacting them after the situation in Italy was concluded.

When Guzman finished dinner, he met with his men in his hotel room and planned the attack. Every word was being listened to by Neil and the others at the house in Amalfi. One of the men with Neil translated the conversation. They were going to attack first thing in the morning, thinking that it was early enough not to be routine, but late enough where the targets would be sitting around in their night clothes relaxing with a nice breakfast. When the planning was over, the men went their separate ways and the Amalfi house rested in preparation of the rude awakening that was going to happen after the sun came up in this beautiful little town.

Before daybreak, Guzman and his hit squad began the three-hour drive down the coast. In Amalfi, everyone heard the news of Guzman being on the move. They made last minute adjustments to the interior of the house by moving some things into the bedroom. They had to anticipate gunfire and relocated neighbors that might be in the line of fire out of their homes for the next few hours. It turned out to be that only two pairs of older couples had to go out for breakfast. They set dummies of Neil and Caroline out on the deck with their backs to the glass windows. The front room looked a bit sparse, but lived in. They opened the front door lock and waited.

Guzman drove by the house once, turned around and went back. They pulled their Audi into the small driveway and quietly got out of the car. They all wore casual clothes with no body armor and only did they look like trouble when they pulled ski masks down over their faces. They all had rifles in hand as they approached the front door. Guzman tried the doorknob and much to his surprise it opened right up. He peeked his head inside and saw his targets out on the deck. He pushed the door wide open and the



three men burst into the room. Guzman was getting ready to shoot the dummies when the room flooded with soldiers in full battle-dress fatigues and body armor ready for anything. Three men came from one bedroom, two came out of the kitchen and two more followed them in the front door. Guzman and his men raised their hands as their rifles and handguns were taken from them. An Italian Interpol agent came in and took charge of the arrest. Guzman's two sidekicks were cuffed and taken outside first, leaving Manfred on his knees in the middle of the room. Neil came out of a bedroom and walked up to Guzman. Neil waved the men out of the room and Jane pushed them outside and into the garage. She walked over to Neil, who was staring at Guzman but had not said a word and handed him a gun she pulled out of a pocket. She said, "It's untraceable." And walked out onto the deck.

Neil opened the cylinder, checked that it was loaded and pushed it back into position. He pulled out a phone and dialed a number. Marty answered.

"Marty, I have Guzman cuffed and squatting in front of me this very minute. I am alone with him and have a Saturday night special with six thirty eights ready to use." Marty said something and Neil said, "Oh, he speaks English all right. Though he probably doesn't know who you are." He looked at Guzman and said, "The guy on the phone is the husband of the woman you tried to kidnap and you know me of course. I'm the husband of the woman with a bullet hole in her leg."

Guzman had yet to say anything, but was starting to sweat. Neil yelled to Jane, "Would you please call an ambulance. It seems Manfred here has shot himself."

Guzman started talking now. "You can't do that. I have rights."

Neil hung up the phone telling Marty that he had work to do and would call him back. Then he turned to Guzman and cold-cocked him with a right haymaker to the jaw. Then he took out his Sig and shot Guzman in the left kneecap. The men hanging outside flew back into the room where Neil said, "He was trying to escape." He holstered his weapon and walked outside.

The Interpol agent arrested Guzman and waited for the ambulance to arrive. It only took thirty minutes before all the Italians were gone. In the meantime, Neil called Caroline and told her it was over and that he was going to be on his way home shortly. Neil said goodbye to Jane and the others and drove his car with one of the soldiers up to the airport in Rome. He caught the next flight to Vienna, where he met with Blake and Joe and told them to continue to clear all the buildings that they had mapped. There were only five left and they would start on it the next day. They drove Neil to the airport where he caught the next flight to New York. He only waited three hours, spent in a bar with a drink in front of him. The flight was long with a stop in Lisbon. Neil slept most of the way only getting up for meals and the occasional trip to the bathroom.

Neil's parents picked him up at the airport and drove him to the Manhattan condo in the Waldorf Astoria Hotel where Caroline greeted him with a hug that lasted minutes. She was getting around pretty well, just using a walker and improving every day. Neil stayed there a week until she wanted to go home to Virginia.

The team had been sorting through the rest of the treasure brought back from Vienna by Joe and Blake. They too were home safe and sound and took over the security for the entire team. Marty, Joe and Blake set up an outdoor welcome home event at the shop for Neil and Caroline when they flew down from New York City. Caroline spent most of the time sitting and chatting with everyone, while Neil wanted to see what he could be doing on his Chevelle.

Neil got involved in the shop and started to order more things. He bought the parts for his Chevelle first, as anyone would have guessed. Then he started ordering turbines and the material to start his redesign and rebuild. He also wanted to start building many more units for the earthquake detection systems. Enough time had passed to accumulate data from the California monitoring equipment, so that they were able to actually start to predict events. They succeeded in showing predictive evidence of many smaller quakes and everything pointed toward the system showing larger quakes as well -- there just hadn't been a big enough event to cover the spectrum of the scale. The academics were putting together their white paper on the new exciting capability, but there were many security hurdles to jump over before public consumption would be approved. Neil was sure from his visits with Tara in San Diego that they would want more units; however, these would not be freebees considering the proof of concept was pretty much a success. He had the Firm working on the pricing of the units and then helping to find funding. They were looking at federal and state grants as possibilities before the Foundation would commit any more funds. That would involve changing the Foundation's charter or simply creating another foundation. Anyway, it turned out the whole prospect was exciting.

The Firm's team finished planning for the liquidation of the next batch of treasures, having identified at least a dozen families that would be blessed from the not too distant passed. But there was the problem of anonymity of the Foundation and the Firm to deal with. Certainly, the release of the names of the Foundation's principals and the location and ownership records of real estate holdings were something they all wished to avoid and they were working possible strategies with the FBI to do some damage control.

One thing that Melinda, Caroline, Marty and Neil all agreed upon was offering to their friends the use of the Amalfi house, the yacht and anything else that might help them out -- whether for personal vacation, use as a safe house, use as a planning retreat, use of the C-130 or just anything they wished. A

master schedule was posted on a secure website with clear invitations to take advantage of their genuine offer extended to the staff of their partnering government agencies and the military.

But before that message went out to the very exclusive list, Marty reserved three weeks for the four friends to take the yacht and travel up the Italian coast and ending with a visit to Barcelona, Spain. They left the foundation work in the capable hands of the staff and the manufacturing projects under the guidance of the shop foreman and left on a much needed vacation.

The End

I would like to give a very special thank you to a new friend who helped me with editing this work. She said she would like to help me for the “fun” of it. This wonderful act of kindness and support makes me hope we will remain friends for a long time. Thank you, Patricia.