



**H**ung or not, cowboys attract much attention.

The 2005 Ang Lee film *Brokeback Mountain* created buzz about the subject of gay cowboys in the United States.

Cowboys are both myth and reality. First Hollywood motion pictures, and then later the black and white westerns on television in the 1960s, defined forever how the entire world perceives of cowboys.



We learned from watching movies and black and white westerns how a cowboy dresses. The many styles of cowboy hats and cowboy boots have been indelibly etched into our minds because of what we saw in this movies and television shows. Distinct impressions were created by the movies and television westerns that we watched regarding the rules governing what cowboys should and should not do. We also learned by watching both the silver screen and the video screen how cowboys talk, how cowboys sing, how cowboys live, how cowboys fight, and even how cowboys die.

Cowboys are part of what makes the popular culture of the United States so appealing worldwide. Even in the 21st century, there are wild west shows that still attract tourists from around the world to states such as Arizona and Nevada. Some of these shows for tourists present staged shootouts in the street where wild animals roam freely. Some of these shows present staged hangings where tourists can watch a hung cowboy.

There has been a deep fascination with cowboys in the United States dating back to the days before motion pictures had any sound. The homoerotic value of those masculine men in their western attire has been known to gay men for many decades. But, prior to *Brokeback Mountain*, no Hollywood movies showed us directly how cowboys relate as males to one another in an emotional and sexual way. Some western movies only dared to hint metaphorically at how cowboys felt towards one another. In fact, many people in the United States would prefer to believe that cowboys have always only been oriented towards having sexual relations with females--even though this is a completely false belief.

The truth about cowboys has been masked by those who would preserve the falsehoods. Because you are here at this site, you can rip off that mask and see how the cowboy **really** can be. And, you will grow in your knowledge of cowboys because of seeing cowboys in a very different light.

This is an erotic gay fiction blog about cowboys with the title of "Danny Muncaster Gay

Cowboys Blog." It is based on people and events in the real world. Explore what happens when men discover a sexual passion in the American Southwest for one another despite the teachings of organized religion and the programming of polite and decent society.

Many of us guys have had similar experiences since boyhood. Whether we may ride horses or motorcycles, **we've all pretended to be cowboys.** And many of us share common experiences and the same shared expectations: When we became a man, we were expected to marry one woman. We would settle down and stay together with her and remain sexually faithfully to that one woman for our entire lives together. We would produce children. We would all live happily every after.

That's not how it actually happens to everyone because those expectations are mythical and unrealistic, despite the teachings of organized religion. This erotic gay fiction blog about cowboys is based on people and events in the real world. The names and places have been changed for confidentiality, but when you read this, you will see in vivid, honest detail what can really happen when a guy tries to fight biology and pretend that he is a heterosexual.



You are at the entrance to a unique and truthful journey where you will explore gay cowboys, gay bodybuilders and man-on-man sexual action in Arizona and Nevada based on people and events in real life. You will long remember what you experience here. You will no longer believe in false myths about cowboys who only had sex with women. You are being given rare access to truths that have long been hidden.



This is my blog and this is my life. I invite you to share in my life and my blog. I am trying to be as open and truthful as anyone can possibly be in a blog as I tell you about important experiences I've had.

This is all about a journey from lies toward truth and the high cost of getting from here to there.

The blog posts (each with an individual title) that are here cover events and people presented in such a way as to match the way life moves **forward**. The past is presented first, and then each blog post moves you forward in time from the past. You will enjoy this best by starting at the first blog post and then use the "next page" link to move forward through the story. You can always come here to select a particular part of the story that you want to enjoy again.

The images throughout my blog are for creating an impression and evoking feelings, and these images can be presumed to be figurative, but not literal.

Dedicated to S. Bear. Love you very much.



## Who is Danny Muncaster?

I'm Danny Muncaster. I'm just like you. We've always pretended to be cowboys.

Just like you, I grew up with the same shared expectation that many around me had for me: When I became a man, I would marry one woman. We would settle down and stay together sexually faithfully for our entire lives. We would have kids. We would all live happily ever after.

Well, that's not how it happened, however. I did marry one woman. It was not a wise decision.



Perhaps like you, I came to accept that many of those shared expectations of me related to my sexual identity and what I was "supposed to do" as a man were impossible expectations. Instead of battling the inevitable pressures of impossible expectations, not to mention biology, I chose instead to embrace the truth.

Statistically, at least one in ten people is gay. Some believe that percentage is actually higher. The reality is: Gay people are all around-- particularly gay men. It's likely that you already know a gay man even if you don't yet know that he's gay. Even if he doesn't yet know that he's gay.

You've heard that religion or psychotherapy can change you from gay to straight. You've heard there are no gay cowboys except in movies. You've heard of Santa Claus. You must choose what you believe. Let me help.

Here is my story. Here is how I succeeded in accepting difficult truths about myself and about my life as a gay man.

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## Hung

I am alive and kicking. However, I have had a very troubling, recurring nightmare: I am hung. Actually, I am hung by the neck.

Yes, it's the exact way that cowboys faced justice in the wild West era.



But, in my nightmare, each time I cheat the hangman when the rope breaks and I fall to freedom. And no, I've not been able to figure out why this recurring nightmare keeps happening.

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## Scrape the Shit Off



So, welcome, pardners. Glad you're here.

Where do you think a gay cowboy in the 20th century got his start? Would you believe that it all started in education within in the Roman Catholic Church?

Yes, that's correct. My parents sent me to a Roman Catholic owned and operated elementary school and later to a Roman Catholic owned and operated high school. I was taught that this was "the one true church"--presumably not to be confused with all the other churches out there that apparently were just pretending.

All this religion and schooling took place in the late 1960s. A weird era now long since gone. Those of us who survived that time were crafted like cookie-cutter kids--all stamped out the same as if from some great machine run by the Archdiocese. I still can say the Lord's Prayer in Latin.

I remember learning Lord's Prayer in Latin because I was told of how it promised to be a ticket to paradise. *Pater noster, qui es in caelis, sanctificetur nomen tuum. Adveniat regnum tuum. Fiat voluntas tua, sicut in caelo et in terra.* Oh, never mind. Maybe they meant Paradise, Nevada.

Was I such a bad boy if, compared to today when a person at age 16 or 17 probably has tried crack and marijuana, I was a saint in those days? I never even drank my first beer until I was a junior in high school. My first experience with marijuana was in college after I had turned 21. I thought I was so grown up. I thought that I had, at long last, became a man merely because of reaching the age of consent.

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## Pretending

I was glad to get out of high school and go to college. High school was boring. All that organized religion tends to freak a guy out.

In stunning contrast to the mundane world of a Roman Catholic owned and operated high school, the antiwar movement was really heating up as I started college, and as the poet sang, the times they were a-changin'. The Kent State shootings of 1970 changed everything about everyday life in college. I remember the burning of the Bank of America at Isla Vista and Governor Ronald Reagan responded by shutting down all the California state university campuses.

During the 1970s I was recruited to be a student undercover informant. I was told that since I was a Communications major, I could easily attend meetings. Everyone would assume I was from "the press." The way it was presented to me, my job was to pay attention to who said what and the kinds of topics that were brought up. The assumption was at the time that what Reagan called "outside agitators," no doubt some Communist infiltrators from the Evil Empire, were fucking with the drug-hazed minds of California's college students, inciting them to burn draft cards and eventually banks.

I never followed through with pretending to be a spy, though. I attended one meeting of student activists and then wrote up a report on speculation. The meeting was fairly tame. I could not identify one Russian spy in the entire bunch. But, maybe I had not been properly trained.

I quickly came to feel like I was being used, that law enforcement was taking advantage of me. I also didn't like the idea of spying on fellow students. Spying sounded like fun after watching all those James Bond movies. That was how I was

so easily recruited into this. I convinced myself that it would be so cool to be undercover. But, after that one meeting, I turned my back on espionage.

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## Big Boys Don't Cry

I left California after working for a couple of years doing marketing in Los Angeles following my graduation from college. I wanted to go to graduate school, and friends of mine convinced me that I would get the best education in the Midwest. There I was destined to meet the woman that I married in 1979.

I was in my 20s then, and I had no idea who I was. I thought that being a man was something automatic. I always was taller than most everybody else, about 6'4". So, I was "looked up to," literally. I found that my height made it easy for me to fall into a caretaking role, or a leadership mode, to put it in a less pejorative way.

Why wouldn't people turn to such an apparently solid, stable guy? I was the one who always took care of others' needs.



I was big Danny Muncaster. From outward appearances at least, I was big on self-confidence, big in stature, physically, and also big on emotional stability.

My façade was that of this easy-going, easy-to-love kind of guy who was big in all the right places. He took care of people. He took care of his woman, who had a lot of problems. Was the "big brother" type. He never cried about his problems. He took care of everyone's problems. He somehow did not learn, however, how to take care of himself and his own problems.

In those long-ago graduate school days in Indiana, I was young and therefore not terribly well emotionally or sexually adjusted. While I learned a lot of new things that would later help me professionally, I came to the realization that my what I might call my "emotional training" as a man was lacking.

To be specific, it wasn't until years later when I got divorced that I truly discovered what being a man was all about emotionally and sexually. Ironic, isn't it? You're probably supposed to learn this before getting married, right? Well, I certainly did not.



During my 20s, I was attracted to women. Or, so I thought. However, one slight problem: The women that I found myself attracted to were "losers" and "abusers." They chose to view themselves as "losers" because they chose to focus on their imperfections. To seek comfort, they became "abusers"--usually of alcohol or other drugs. These terms are the most honest and accurate to describe the essence of what my mother was to me. She was an alcoholic who lived most of her life responding to one crisis after another. She seemed to experience very little stability or calm throughout most of the 66 years that she lived.

Because of observing and responding to my mother, I grew up to view other women similarly to the way I viewed her: Women need men to take care of them. People closest to me--the woman I married and all our friends--shared this reality with me. In other words, nobody challenged this reality until I did so, myself. I put a lot of stock in something I read that Dag Hammarskjold had written: "It is more noble to give yourself completely to one individual than to labor diligently for the salvation of the masses."

But, who the fuck quotes Dag Hammarskjold today?



And, why didn't I realize that I really was attracted sexually to other males? Why did I find myself staring at men's bulges? Yet, I told myself I was attracted to women (albeit not very self-confident ones.)

And most importantly: Why did I marry a "loser" and "abuser" like my mother was?? It's certainly a crucial question that I have asked myself many times over many years in my life.

One of guys who lived on my floor in the graduate dorm was Nick Munro. He propped himself up next to me on an intensely muggy Indiana afternoon in 1976. Our thin plastic cups melted in the heat and humidity, overflowing with cheap beer. We were already buzzed from what Nick deemed the single worst pot he had ever smoked and we wanted to wash away the bitter aftertaste.

That was the moment when into my life walked this heavy-set blonde woman with seriously spooky blue eyes. She, too, obviously had been drinking that afternoon. Nick jumped backwards to avoid getting wet as I inadvertently tipped my beer sideways in response to her arrival. She completed a quick scan of me from face to crotch to feet to crotch to direct eye contact with me. Then the very first words out of your mouth were, "I approve of this man." I glanced in disbelief over at Nick for reassurance that he heard it, too. His laughter confirmed that he'd heard it, yes. I almost dropped my beer, knowing what she meant was: "You can fuck me if you want."

She and I started off so predictably. We were drunk. We saw, or thought we saw through the haze of Hoosier humidity and liquor, something in each other. I saw someone I thought was cute. Was it the beer? No. I'm young, single, oversexed and buzzed. An available, unpredictable woman with spooky blue eyes walks up to me at a college mixer in Indiana and practically grabs my cock. What I am expected to do? Sit around discussing basketball stats and Bobby Knight?

She gave me a blow job that night.

I was confused. But, I certainly liked how that felt. I guess I would have to say that I was repressed emotionally and sexually. I had so much to learn. Only after I've gotten my hormone fix from her and after the wedding a few years later does it hit me that I really should've thought through what to do with the rest of our lives together. It never occurs to a guy in his 20s that he's asking for trouble trusting his lust.

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## Hitchhiker

While I was still married in the late 1980s, a day or so after I had to hospitalize my wife in a psych ward following the first of her various suicide attempts, I was in the throes of some heavy-duty emotional strain. I was driving along one of those beautiful back roads of Rhode Island when I saw a hitchhiker--a young guy in his early 20s.

I experienced an immediate visceral reaction for a few seconds as I drove past him. I'm sure that he was clothed in the normal way. But, I didn't see him for what he really was. I saw him with no shirt and unzipped pants.



I saw his handsome, youthful face and his athletic body. I saw his cock. I wanted to stop my car, invite him in, and fuck him.

The intensity of the feelings really shocked the hell out of me. Made me take a hard look at what I was going through and how I was responding to it. I couldn't figure out if I was "turning gay" because of the stresses I was experiencing in a bad marriage, but I had to admit that I was, in fact, gay. The intensity of my feelings toward the hitchhiker scared me, too, as I considered that I had such an apparently innate and suppressed drive in me.

I couldn't help but think of that Eurythmics song from the early 1980s that explained everything so clearly to me:

**"Everybody's looking for something. Some of them want to use you. Some of them want to get used by you. Some of them want to abuse you. Some of them want to be abused."**

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## Out

The woman that I married changed her name to mine. They did that in those days. She became Frances Muncaster. It was not the catchiest handle for someone whose goal was to be a faith healer. You just don't bump into a woman everyday like Frances Muncaster, who wanted to "channel her power," as she used to call it.

Before her, I figured healers were witches or weirdos. She did not eat the heads off live chickens. She did not wear secret purple crystals. She was electric, captivating.

In those days, I honestly thought of her as the best fuck I ever had. Now, wait just a damn minute. Before you get all ticked off about how only some asshole would refer to another person that way, stop. And think. Referring to another person as (quote) the best fuck I ever had (unquote) is a compliment. It's shallow, yes. Anyone who thinks only about whether a person is a good fuck or a bad fuck is shallow. I do not classify the entirety of my relationship with Frances Muncaster in terms of whether or not she was a good fuck or a bad fuck. There was much more to our relationship than fucking. Much more. You will learn what I mean if you read on.

Her keen neurotic madness must have made sex so exciting. Yes, that must've been it!

Psychology would have been a better preparation for someone whose fate was to become a healer. Medical school was "too traditional, too male-dominated," she would explain to me many times over and over. Her choice to get a doctorate in History made no sense to me. Remember: Those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it. She did not know that important bit of wisdom.

I had only known her for about two weeks when she told me that she was seeing a psychiatrist at the university medical center. When I asked her why, she answered without hesitation, "Four days before I met you, Danny, I was going to step off the curb deliberately into the oncoming traffic."

The woman who became my wife, Frances Muncaster, told me this that memorable day in Bloomington, Indiana: "My shrink says I'm too dependent on men. After I was dumped by Richard Munder, I saw no reason to live. He went up to Chicago one night with his pals. They got into a fight with several rowdies. During the seventh inning stretch, I think. Rich got beaten up and kicked in the crotch repeatedly. He ended up with a ruptured right testicle, which had to be removed surgically. He lost interest in having sex with me. One night while we ate baked potatoes in his apartment, he announced he no longer wanted to see me. Rich Munder's testosterone poisoning had ruined his manhood and my sex life with him. I'll always hate him for that. In thirty seconds over baked potatoes, he was gone. Just gone. Then I met you."

That particular conversation I remember vividly for several reasons. The first and most important reason is that she told me this when we were new, fresh lovers. That's a state of mind most people never forget for as long as they live. Reason Number Two is that Frances always spoke in a style well out there past the edge of sensibility, employing humor and tragedy interchangeably. The other reason is that in the long run, I heard more about this ex-boyfriend Richard Munder than I ever wanted to. That was unforgettable, too.

Consistently, Frances spoke with the sincerest affection about this ex-boyfriend throughout the fourteen years she and I spent together before I left her and divorced her in 1990. Frances defined Richard Munder as approaching the status of a fair-haired adonis who chose her as his mortal companion. He took care of her unlike any man she had ever known.

I was but a pitiable poor substitute for that deity who ditched her during Fall Semester 1976. I became his replacement. Or, so I thought. She cried after sex with me. Always. I was too horny or too stupid to realize her tears were for him. Or, for the dissonance she must have felt fucking me while remembering him. I wonder how many men like me have prided themselves in bedpressing their woman to tears, self-assured in the false belief that their hard-driving lovin' moved her?

The memorable conversation about her suicidal ideation also happened in bed, which is Reason Number Four. It happened on a day when the wind chill shoved the outside temperature to fifty below zero. I chose her over William Randolph Hearst. I cut my journalism history class to get warm with her in that small off-campus apartment she rented. She were lying next to me under a soft, thick quilted multicolored comforter with her skillfully hands strategically positioned inside my thighs. "Oh," was my brilliant response as she carefully caressed my genitals while talking of killing herself by stepping in front of speeding cars.

"So, my shrink told me to avoid men for at least several weeks," Frances continued while gently stroking me under the comforter. "I told my shrink I had met you, Danny. 'Not a good idea,' was my shrink's response. That's why I dropped that shrink. Oh, fuck him! Just fuck him!! Fuck me!"

That was the exact moment that I inserted myself and shot off into her in a frenzied stupor like a prisoner who had been denied sexual intercourse for a decade until just this exquisite moment. I remember taking the big red bus back to my graduate dorm afterwards. The transition from hot, wet passion to dry, sub-zero Midwestern winds that freeze your balls off tends to make a deep impression on a guy. Even now, if ever I inhale the stunning scent of diesel fuel through frozen nostril hairs, I get easily aroused. But, somehow, my experiences from that afternoon did not include the tiniest clue as to her mental condition.

After I had Frances hospitalized in a psych ward in 1989, I effectively ended our marriage. But, the caretaker in me compelled me to stick around and watch over her, even though she never trusted me again.

I did not leave her until about a year she was released from the psych ward. After I left her and filed for divorce, she cut one of her wrists and had to be hospitalized again in the same psych ward.

Our relationship started because of my sexual lust. If that was a "good" thing, you know what they say about "good things never last." In the early part of our marriage, things didn't go well sexually for me like I imagined that they would. We had sex less frequently until we ultimately slept in separate bedrooms.

She grew more ill mentally and became one of the first patients in New England to take the then-new drug Prozac. Her impression of all this was that Prozac "cured" her of mental illness that she admitted she suffered from. I attributed her suicide threats and hospitalization directly to her taking Prozac. I never had any say in her taking Prozac. She just went to a psychiatrist and was prescribed Prozac and started taking it. I wanted her to go instead into talk therapy, but she consistently refused. Prozac was easier for her. And easier for her shrink.

I couldn't live with the reality of having a lifelong partner who required prescription drugs to function in everyday society. She became someone I did not even like, let alone love. It was intensely painful just being in the same house with her.

One day I just reached my limit after she hurt herself in a fall while intoxicated. No more fake nice guy. I had to leave immediately. I move out of the house that very night.

At least we both got out of this alive since there were the following distinct and real possibilities while we were together for those 14 years: She could have killed herself. She could have killed me. I could have killed her. Or, I could have killed myself.

The very next day, I was forced out of my job at the Rhode Island television station. I found myself having to make a hugely stressful transition from

employed married man to unemployed single man. And, you're probably wondering: What about the gay cowboy part?

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## High Ground

I had decided to go home to California in 1991, but after I started driving westward, I only got as far from Rhode Island as Colorado. Leaving my wife behind like that was certainly hugely difficult emotionally, especially after we had been together for 14 years. Yet, I grew to believe that doing so was the healthiest step I ever took on my own behalf in my entire life.

I uprooted myself from married life in New England and landed in the Rocky Mountains. I knew I had to restart my life. The drive from Rhode Island was euphoric. I was finally out from under the literally crushing emotional weight of a terrible marriage. Just like I had pretended to be a spy when I was in college, I had pretended to be a successfully married man after grad school.

I became attracted to the visual perspective that Colorado offers and what that visual perspective meant to me psychologically. And it was definitely the right time in my life to stop all pretending.

By the time I reached Denver on my journey, I was hurting. The realization of what I had done with my life thus far was overwhelming. Not having a job also added to my day-to-day stresses, although I had received about \$20,000 in severance from the Rhode Island television station. I don't remember ever crying more in my entire life as I realized how dishonest I had been with myself. I needed to be somewhere, to live somewhere that would allow me to blossom, to open up, to restart my life.

In the Denver metropolitan area, if you look toward the west, you can see literally for miles and miles straight ahead from the flat prairie to the mountains. At night, this amazing perspective is especially exciting because of all the city lights that seem to shine forever on their way to the foothills.

Add to that the backdrop the amazing Rocky Mountains, and the total visual perspective in Denver will take anyone's breath away. I would look westward from downtown Denver, watching a street head off into the distance. Then, the street would suddenly meet the Rocky Mountains shooting upwards into the sky. I could not help but feel that nature is good and that life is therefore good as well.

Being in Denver provided me with exactly the kind of visual stimulation I needed for my emotional development. Denver was literally "high ground" in my life, just

when I absolutely needed to pull myself up from the dark, low ground that I inhabited in New England.

I knew absolutely nobody in Denver. I realize now that one should never move to a new place where you know nobody, especially if you feel lonely. But, when I first landed in Denver, I was inexperienced about such things.

I watched the local television news programs because that's how I earned a living in Rhode Island. The severance given to me by the station helped me live, but I knew it would not last too long and I had to find work in Denver before too long.

One night, a local Denver channel covered the first Colorado casualty in the Desert Storm War. "His name was Michael Zuñiga. Age 19. From Aurora," the voiceover said while on the screen his father Juan Zuñiga showed a color photo. In that photo, Michael Zuñiga was age five, wearing a cowboy hat, cowboy boots and toy guns. The father smiled with pride as he said, "He was a playful little boy. Grew up to be a good man who stood for what was right. Everyone said so. Miguel was gentle and considerate." The reporter appeared on screen and observed, "Never even fired a shot in the war. He will nonetheless be buried with full military honors."

His mother, Martina Zuñiga, looked disoriented and subdued on screen. She showed a more recent photo of her son. "He loved his motorcycle," his mother explained, "rode it like a horse."



In that photograph, shown on Denver television, Michael Zuñiga sat on his motorcycle, holding onto the handlebars, wearing a cocky grin. He showed off his muscular arms. "He was very handsome. Popular with the women," his mother remembered. Joined the Army to see action. Didn't want to stay in Colorado. Wanted action. " She was given a close up, which seemed excessive, especially given the emotions she was experiencing. "He wanted to serve his country," she said. "To fight for freedom. We're proud of Michael, but. . . Just a boy." Her voice cracked and she looked away. The reporter's voice could be heard as the official Army photo of Michael Zuñiga filled the screen. "The Army has provided details about Private Zuñiga's death. He was crushed when the bunker he and others were building in the desert sand caved in on top of him."



After crying uncontrollably, I decided to visit a bookstore to see if I could find an author's perspective on surviving the emotional pain after divorce. I remember having those recurring nightmares about struggling to break free of being hanged was when I lived in Denver more frequently than at any other time in my life. Although I had experienced those hanging Danny Muncaster by the neck nightmares all the way back in my high school days, being in Denver increased their frequency.

Perhaps going to the self-help section of a bookstore is not the most sensible thing for one to do. But, I was afraid that I was going to lose what slight grip I had on sanity. The nightmares about being hung by the neck until the rope broke seemed to be some kind of warning. I knew that much.

So, I picked up a book about how to use your own mind to get what you want out of life. The notion that a person could essentially "program" his own mind to function better seemed kind of spooky to me. But, I read the whole book and started recording audiotapes of positive affirmations about myself and my life. I would listen to the audio recordings of my own voice using headphones. I cannot estimate how many times I replayed those audio recordings. But, it would not be an exaggeration that I repeatedly listened to my positive affirmations three times a day for several months.

One afternoon in Denver, I picked up the free weekly newspaper--the one with all the local person ads. I stopped first in the "Women Seeking Men" section. What the hell, why not?

*"White Knight," said the headline. "Be mine forever. Twice-divorced white female, 40, seeks new soulmate. Rescue me from loneliness, apathy and self-pity. Prove to me that good men are out there. Take me away to your castle where we can live happily ever after."*

Yeah, sure, baby. I'll call you tonight. This one's a definite suicide hotline prospect.

*"Hopeless Romantic," another headline read. "Men find me adorable because I am so real. You must love a Rubenesque figure. I am not gorgeous, but I have a heart as deep as you will ever find. You should see me in my hot pink pajamas!"*

Cannot wait to meet you, dear. I'll bring over a few pizzas.



I switched over to the "Men Seeking Men" section. I had never read any such section before I got to Denver.

*"Hey Stud," the headline cried. "I prefer cute guys with hairy chests and many muscles. Straight-acting only. Must enjoy swimming. No fatties, smokers, fairies or bozos."*

Obviously a deeply complex individual.

*"Sensitive Hunk," another headline said. "I'm the kind of man you want to take home to your mother. I've got looks and I am not afraid to express my emotions. You should be thin, blond and beautiful, love football, outdoor sports and rodeos."*

Oh, fuck you. Good luck, pal.

Then, I saw a personal ad with a simple headline that read, *"Young Male Bisexual Medical Doctor."* His ad was short and direct. It said he was *"recently divorced and curious,"* and I was intrigued by the wording. It kind of sounded like something I would have written had placed one of those personal ads. *"Call me today,"* the ad told me.

I was very confused at the time about where I wanted to go with my emotional and sexual life. Before I started the intensive "programming" of my brain using my positive affirmations, I had believed that it was entirely my own fault my marriage had not lasted "forever" like the Roman Catholic Church had taught me was supposed to happen. I even started believing that my being sexually attracted to males more than females had "caused" my ex-wife to become unstable mentally. Of course, I realized implicitly that she had the choice to marry anyone she wanted and yet somehow she chose me. Maybe she was a fag hag? She also chose to stay with me 14 years until I divorced her. So, from her perspective, mentally ill or not, the relationship must have been working well enough for her to stay in it with me.

I was seeking to establish truth in my life. The process of replaying my own voice in my head for months started changing how I thought about myself and about my life. I grew to believe that I had to leave a failed heterosexual marriage in New England or else I would have either killed myself or killed my wife. Now I was a free man in Denver, so I started feeling why not open myself up and see what I can discover about myself? I was going off emotionally into unexplored territory following my divorce. I felt very out of it, like I had no sense of direction. There was no gravity holding me to the planet.

So, I responded to that personals ad and called the young male bisexual medical doctor like his ad told me to do.

In advance of the time we were to meet, I bought an expensive pair of cowboy boots in Denver. Yee haw! I'm gonna be a cowboy. Yes, indeed. I think we're getting to the gay cowboy part at last!



I even fantasized how this young male bisexual medical doctor I was soon to meet would look so sexy in a white cowboy hat. I wore my new cowboy boots to continue the fantasy of meeting a stranger in his pricey high rise condo in downtown Denver.

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## Big

Those Denver cowboy boots that I bought for myself were size 13. They probably were a just little too snug. They made my feet feel uncomfortable, but damn, they sure looked good on me! I chose to wear obligatory faded blue jeans that any good cowboy must and I matched the jeans with a bright red long-sleeve western-style shirt.

I confidently knocked on the front door of the young male bisexual medical doctor's pricey high rise condo in downtown Denver. When he answered the door, I saw that he was younger than me. I was a little disappointed that he didn't look at all like my fantasy gay cowboy with the white cowboy hat. But, then I saw his eyes open very wide in expectation.

He studied me thoroughly from my eyes down to my uncomfortable, but great-looking size 13 Denver cowboy boots, and then back up to make eye contact again.



We sat on his thick chocolate brown leather sofa and drank expensive wine as we talked about nothing of consequence. When he learned that I was new in town--literally and figuratively--his pupils were gigantic, and he smiled at me like I've never seen a man smile before. He moved very close to me on that thick chocolate brown leather sofa and gently put his right hand gently on my crotch.

Of course, you know that I instantly flashed back to my first date in graduate school in the Midwest. All I could think of was that one simple, unforgettable blow job.

So, when the young male bisexual medical doctor put his large right hand on my crotch, smiled so amazingly at me, and asked me if I knew what I wanted, I knew exactly what to tell him.

He got on his knees on the extra plush golden carpet in front of me, and with the skill of a surgeon removed both my Denver cowboy boots faster humanly possible. Oh, what an exquisite relief to have those off! My Denver cowboy boots were killing my feet. I must have purchased one size too small and I know know it's not possible to adequately break them in on the first day that you own them. The young bisexual medical doctor showed additional skill as he whipped off both my socks.

He then started on my left foot first. He opened his mouth and gave my big toe a warm, wet reception. I had never before felt that sensation.

I was now grown up. This felt true.

I realized on that thick chocolate brown leather sofa that I had only experienced lies when I lived in Indiana and when I was a 20-something oversexed male who was inexperienced and gullible. I actually believed the woman I ultimately married when she told me back then, "You're so big, Danny Muncaster. The biggest cock I've ever seen."

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## Healed

In Denver, it wasn't long before an intense loneliness engulfed me to the point that I could no longer live by myself. The young medical doctor in the pricey condo turned out to be a one night stand. We really had a great time, but I felt I should not see him again. He called me and left a couple of messages, which I ignored.



I was amazed that I felt no guilt whatsoever even though I had tried sex with a man. All twelve years of my Roman Catholic Church education had

somehow failed to mess me up completely! Maybe the mental "programming" system had actually worked.

At first I was completely satisfied to just live alone. But, jumping immediately from New England and married life to the high altitude of Denver as a single man was probably too abrupt a transition. I finally chose to move into a roommate situation near the University of Denver with a Persian man named Farhad Munjari.

"A man who has healed himself will never be sick again. But, a man who has never been sick most certainly will be one day." That was a proverb from his culture that he shared with me.

In my marriage, I had been sick, but I was determined now that I had escaped, I was going to heal myself. Not only did I reprogram my mind, I had to become healthier physically. When I was married, I let myself become overweight, and I felt very miserable physically and emotionally. No surprise that I also drank too much. And, I was unfulfilled sexually. I started walking every day in Denver and eventually took up running.

No amount of religious moralizing about what is "right" and what is "wrong" could ease how messed up I felt. Had I stayed living the lie about my sexual orientation because the Roman Catholic Church had trained me to believe that homosexuality was a choice and a "sin," I never would have experimented with that young medical doctor in Denver.

After my self-reprogramming or whatever you want to call it, I saw my choice as simple: I could stay in a lie and be unfilled and miserable for it. I could stay unhealthy. Or, I could choose the alternative of living in honesty with myself and others about who I really am. I could choose to be healthy inside and outside.

But changing from living a lie to opening myself up to the truth was a choice I did not know how to make. Persian men helped me.

Farhad's friends from the computer software manufacturing firm in Denver were all also from Iran. We would all have dinner at Farhad's house at least 2 or 3 times a week. When I first met them, one of the first things I noticed was that they were very comfortable touching and hugging one another. They would speak rapidly in Farsi and smile at me. I felt really left out and, yes, very suspicious that they were talking about me.

After several weeks, one evening when we were all very drunk after dinner at Farhad's house, I learned that they were talking about me. The six of us got very naked very quickly. I won't say, "boy, was I drunk" as a way to explain away that night at Farhad's house with the Persian men.

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## Tuned out in Denver

One morning in 1991 in Denver, Farhad Munjari came running into the kitchen, very excited. He said that there was an antiwar demonstration on Capitol Hill. I assumed that he meant in Washington, DC. "No," Farhad insisted. "On our Capitol Hill. Here in Denver."

I had tuned out in Denver and did not read a newspaper or catch the news on radio and television. The war in Iraq was depressing and I was depressed enough with my own problems.

Farhad explained to me: Last week, it was hate, and Adolph Hitler's birthday. There were neo-Nazis, skinheads and talk about the Fourth Reich. Today, it's about war and peace. A large group of opposing demonstrators clashed on Capitol Hill. Here in Denver! This was the second violent demonstration in the span of only ten days.

I decided to watch the local news coverage that evening on television: Small, but vocal groups of demonstrators carry signs and plowed into each other. Uniformed police officers intervened. The reporter's voice said, "About fifty people clashed on Lincoln Street near the state capitol building. Antiwar protestors shouted 'No war for oil.'"

The protestors ranged from college age to middle age. Many of them looked to me like they just stepped out of a time machine from the late 1960s. The counter-demonstrators carried American flags and shouted "America, love it or leave it." Several men in cowboy hats and cowboy boots carried Old Glory and the state flag of Colorado. They shouted at the protestors. A woman in the street carried a sign that read, "I support my son fighting for your freedom."

The mood changed suddenly from chanting and shouting to shoving, pushing and then kicking. Bottles were thrown from both sides and that's when the police stepped in. Police confirmed that thirty people were arrested.

The reporter on the local television news said, "Last week forty people were arrested in almost exactly the same spot on Lincoln Street when white supremacists clashed with counter-protestors on Adolph Hitler's birthday. Denver Police say this sudden surge of violent demonstrations puzzles them. They point out that Denver is not known for these kinds of demonstrations."

The reporter explained: "This afternoon, I spoke with University of Denver sociology professor Jonathan Auerbach in search of a broader perspective on politically-motivated violence. 'No question about it,' the professor observed, 'we

are living in a time of ever-increasing violence.' "Are there any clues to why?' the reporter wanted to know."

I felt vindicated that I had tuned out all the news in Denver. The professor said, "Well, the Gulf War certainly has stimulated some of this violence of which I speak. Here in the Denver area, for instance, there have been several recent attacks on young American school children of Middle East origin by their own classmates. Clearly, the indications are that the local home environment is supercharged with emotions, particularly pro-American and anti-Iraqi. But, some of the children who were attacked in apparent outbursts of hate were Jewish as well as of Arab extraction."

The reporter asked the professor, "Do you see some connection to the recent activity by the so-called skinheads, the neo-Nazis in Colorado?"

"I would say I am concerned, yes," the professor responded. "The trend toward neo-Nazism is on the rise in the unified Germany. That we know. But, here in Colorado, we all would be well to take a close look at why young men, in particular, here in the Denver metro area are turning to hero-worship of Hitler. These young men clearly are attracted by the violent, white supremacist doctrines, which, in turn, promotes violence in the streets, the kind of which we saw last week in downtown Denver. The incidences of reported police brutality, now common even here in Denver, are another example. Violence which is motivated by political or racial or religious viewpoints can often be the most difficult for society to control."

The reporter asked, "So, you see that our society--and Denver in particular--is now undergoing some unexpected violent activity about which we should be concerned?"

"Yes, exactly," the professor agreed. "The prevailing wisdom has been that such violence is relatively common in bigger cities where crime and poverty are more prevalent than cities the size of Denver. Colorado is known for being a calm, comparatively peaceful state where the low population and picturesque natural settings contribute to a such a tranquil lifestyle. However, seventy years ago, the Ku Klux Klan was an 'invisible empire' in Colorado. Powerful men drew upon hate, violence and coercion as the lifeblood of their terrible triumphs, particularly in Denver. Perhaps, as some fear, we never really changed over the decades. The pendulum may just be swinging back to where it was in the 1920s and 1930s. All this recent activity may merely mean that we live in a rapidly-changing society, where violence previously not seen as common, in fact may be basic to who we are. Here in Denver we would be making a mistake to ignore that possibility."

The next morning, I was downtown on my way to get coffee on California Street having just visited an automatic teller machine half a block away. There is a small crowd of people walking in downtown since it's a work day. We all are distracted

from our own private thoughts as two cars speed down the street toward us, narrowly missing an RTD bus.

A white Honda station wagon screeched to a halt next to the sidewalk vendor whose coffee and doughnuts were fresh and waiting for me. A blue convertible sideswiped the station wagon, shoving the car across the pavement to within a couple of feet of the doughnut wagon. A young woman wearing a blue business suit scrambled out of the white station wagon and she was screaming at the blue convertible.

I thought they were filming a movie. But, where are the cameras!?

A stocky young man wearing a yellow western shirt, blue jeans and cowboy boots jumped out of the blue Ford. He shouted, "I told you I was going to kill you!" The morning sun caught him waving his 9mm semiautomatic machine pistol at her.

She ran behind her station wagon, yelling, "Leave me alone! I told you: Leave me alone!"

He chased after her, aiming at her as he ran. I was in a small crowd of people standing frozen in fear at that curb in downtown Denver.

A burst of seven or ten shots broke the crisp late morning silence. The young woman's business suit was shredded as she slumped, bloodied, onto California Street. The young man ran up to her, stood over her, pointing his machine pistol at her face.

He looked over at me and then saw the crowd. He screamed out like a young child, his anguished face clearly visible to me and to everyone else near him. He pointed his machine pistol to his chest. How could he do that!? Then, he squeezed the trigger.



His body jerked and collapses to the pavement. Blood flowed very quickly down California Street along his midsection and collected at the curb in a small pool around his well-worn, brown cowboy boots. I will never forget the expression on that young man's face in the street.

That night, I was included in the local Denver television news coverage. But, I refused to watch it. I had thrown up enough already for one day. I decided to stay tuned out in Denver and not watch the news at all. I made a vow to that effect. It was on May 15, 1991, the day the Desert Storm War ended.

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## Hozho

It's a very short, but very powerful word in the Navajo language. One little word, *hozho*, somehow can mean so many things: You have learned to align yourself harmoniously with your world; you have inner peace about your life and all that's happening to you; you're not pissed off at the world or yourself or anybody; and you're not anxious or depressed about life. That one little word comes as close as I can come to describing the proverbial "meaning of life."

I decided to leave Denver because it felt as if I needed to follow through on my original idea of going home to California. Plus, the economy in the Denver area was not that strong as a direct consequence of the Desert Storm War and none of the television stations wanted to hire me. I decided that I needed to get back to Los Angeles to look for work there and restart my life.

Driving across Southern Colorado was a breathtaking experience. You can lose yourself in its rugged, natural beauty. When I crossed the Rio Grande, oh man, that was unforgettable! The scent of the river was intoxicating. I saw big red block letters that had been painted years ago on the side of a battered old building near Alamosa. A saint's name. One I never heard of before. **Saint Rage**. His name was all in huge red capital letters. On that old Alamosa building, "**ST RAGE**." Must be one of those obscure Russian Orthodox saints. Or maybe from Eastern Europe.

I just kept driving. No longer could I see Colorado in my rear view mirror. Behind me nothing remained except that two-lane highway. Straight ahead in the distance the pointed needle of Shiprock pierced the skies where thin gray clouds float above the great Navajo Nation. My seat belt held me in as I drove my four-wheel-drive truck.



My mind wandered outside, floating along in the delicious Colorado air, faster than humanly possible, yelling down at that dork driving along as his shiny new 4×4 bouncing him in 4/4 time. Hey, you! Yeah, you, cowboy. You cannot hide, you worthless buzzard meat. You can run as far as you like. It will do you no good!

I arrived at Four Corners and stepped onto the golden disk marking the intersection of Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico and Utah just as the golden ball of light skimmed the western mountaintops. Late afternoon thunderclouds lined the mountainous horizon, relinquishing their treasured moisture. A southwest wind



blew hot across my back, pushing me forward. Low, rumbling thunder erupted way out there somewhere over the arid landscape as my nose picked up the sweet smell of desert rain. I closed my eyes, breathing in the deep musky scent.

This man-made monument to boundaries marks my journey into the frontier. I am confused, but I am determined. This boundary will become my focal point in the west.

Here, among the cowboys and Indians is where I decide that I truly belong.

This place felt like a personal frontier, both compelling and frightening, because it represented uncharted territory to me. I am someone who had lived in New England and chose to place too high a value on permanence. I had stayed too long in an unhealthy relationship. I had the sense to get out and get going with my life. I reprogrammed my own mind.

I did check the map first. I felt lost nonetheless. I knew I was entering the vast Navajo Indian Reservation which fills out Northern Arizona from Four Corners to the Grand Canyon. State Highway 160, with only two lanes, is one of the least populated stretches of road on which I have ever traveled.

Now, each passing mile marker separated me further from reason and reality. The familiar sensation of falling asleep while driving began to hit me again and again. I learned to keep myself awake by making pig noises. OOOOOOINNNNNK! OOOOOOINNNNNK! Actually, any barnyard animal sounds work just as well. You just feel kinda silly mooing and whinnying, so pig noises probably are the best. Luckily, nobody was driving by to witness a grown man, his face contorted, bellowing like a pig in distress.

I decide not to be road kill that night. I stopped at small motel so I could sleep. All night long a team of geologists in the next room got drunk and told loud stories. Could hear every word, every sound. A polite group of men who didn't swear much, even after finishing a case of bottled beer and flinging each and every bottlecap against the common wall between our rooms. But loud. Very loud. And horny. Bragging of sexual exploits. How men do. Shit stories. Not a moment of truth in any of them. Each man tried to outdo the previous one. Then, they suddenly get real quiet, except for an occasional muffled chuckle. Must have been the rock men circle jerking.

Very early in the morning, I returned to State Highway 160. At least where I was heading was known to me: According to my map, Kayenta, Arizona, listed in red, was ahead of me. The implicit promise of the color coding is that Kayenta is one of two larger communities on the Reservation interrupting the nearly 300 miles between Cortez and the Grand Canyon. In the western states the vast distances between cities and towns are unlike anywhere else in the country. The loneliness can sneak up on you easily, especially when you drive for ten hours straight. You

start longing for a brightly-colored, lively fast food restaurant to appear out of nowhere by the side of the road like in the TV commercials, but it never happens.

I tried the radio for company, but the auto-search struggled and found only one station across the entire dial: A female announcer spoke in a complex, unfamiliar language.

All I wanted now was to be gay and to be a cowboy out here in the western states. I wanted to sing country and western songs out loud all day with the radio at the top of my lungs. I pretended to be on horseback like a real man, riding the open trail without a care.

Faking it. As if some guy on the run from Rhode Island has any idea at all about what it means to be so true and so alive here in the Southwest.

Yesterday's sweat remained in the fibers of my T-shirt. I had no time for cleanliness. I just kept driving west without a shower--an earthy man's way to travel. Besides, a cowboy smells good and natural like this first thing in the morning. A cowboy refuses to live in lies like others around him will. He shuns what some call safety and security, especially whenever such things only sink his soul and handicap his heart. Cowboys seldom stay cowboys in captivity. We must ride out where nobody can fence us in.

At the edge of the highway ahead of me, a tattered billboard said, "Visit Monument Valley with a Navajo Guide." A local telephone number was positioned over a scene of the Navajo Reservation's famous, most photographed locale. The two-lane highway gently sloped and curved through desert land not suited for driving too much above sixty miles per hour--especially just before sunrise.

When I obligingly slowed down, I noticed faint lights dotting the horizon. I squinted to get a better look, but the skies were not bright enough yet to allow me to make out the source of the lights. I located a Farmington, New Mexico FM station that offered some rock and roll to keep me awake on that quiet Sunday morning.

Down around a bend in the shallow hills, the highway opened up and changed into a perfectly straight section without the usual curves. First light illuminated this stretch of the highway, allowing me to see clearly. On the left side of the highway I saw a light blue canvas-top Jeep.

Then he was there. A man hitchhiking on the opposite side of the road from the Jeep. He was wearing a white cowboy hat. An odd sight, this cowboy with a white cowboy hat standing by himself in the middle of the Navajo Nation!

His bright white long-sleeve shirt reflected the soft light of the morning sun as I passed this hitchhiker. I slowed down and he ran toward my truck. This is perfect! He was both a cowboy and an Indian.

His Jeep ran out of gas in the middle of nowhere. I had to stop and give him a lift. He climbed into the passenger seat. I noticed his powerfully-built body. I may be six-foot-four and this hitchhiker is certainly shorter than me, but he was thick and solid like a warrior. Why did I stop for him?

Then I saw shallow scars on his face in the early light. I knew that I had made a terrible mistake. Never pick up hitchhikers! No matter how attractive you may think they are. Never know what might happen. Can't just leave him out here alone at this hour on a Sunday. Got to help him. Nobody will be driving by this way for hours.

He got in and shut the door, then removed his white cowboy hats and ran his left hand through his thick black hair. I drove on. He was a Navajo man around 30 or so. He spoke in a very unusual accent that I had never before heard. He told me that his name was Vincent Muncote and that he was from a small town on the reservation named Kayenta. He had dusty brown cowboy boots that look like they have carried him hundreds of miles. His tight jeans are equally time-worn and authentically faded. The way he filled them out would make any man envious.

Vincent sat there in the passenger seat, just looking at me. Then he announced, "You white guys are so hung up on sex!"

I couldn't and wouldn't just leave him there at the side of the road since the nearest gas station was hours away across the huge expanses of Navajo land. But, I was freaked out that he apparently could read my mind. So, despite how spooky Vincent seemed to me, I was destined to spend some extended quality time with him.

He distracted me with details about *hozho*, and he suggested (I think sarcastically) that I should read some Tony Hillerman novels. "You lost? Got that look," he said, turning around and examining my cargo. The rear seats in my truck were folded down, allowing amply space for suitcases, duffle bags and cardboard boxes. He glanced at my odometer and added, "New truck. Never seen one like this."

I told him it was a new model. Just out. Technically it was a 1991 model, even though I had bought in the Spring of 1990. Not many on the road yet. Nobody called them sports utility vehicles yet. And gasoline was still affordable. It had lots of room to carry my stuff. "Kinda like I'm running away from home," I told Vincent.

Vincent talked about how he had been urged by his relatives to become a holy man, a "singer" as the Navajo people say. But, he rejected what his culture and

his upbringing wanted him to do and chose instead to embrace the ways of the White man. He worked in construction in someplace he called Bullhead. I knew that he was making this whole story up, but it helped pass the time.

He told me that in the Navajo culture, a "singer" is one chants or sings. He guides people by tuning in to the wisdom that comes from the spirit world. He performs ceremonies. He said he was on his way to join in with a cousin at one of these ceremonies when he ran out of gas. He said the Jeep belonged to his cousin, who would be pissed off when he learned it was out there on the highway.

Along the horizon I saw what looked like fires. He said that the fires I saw were for the ceremonies. "Magic?" I wanted to know. "The white man looks at ghosts and spirits and sees magic. Something that scares him. Something out of the ordinary. The People, the Navajo, are different. There is evil, yes. Ghosts can hurt. But, not all do. The ceremonies serve many purposes. They focus what you might call 'energy.' Toward something specific. Not what you call 'magic.'"

He sounded so convincing, yet the sum of my experience told me he was a psycho, probably from native-grown hallucinogens I never even heard of and couldn't pronounce anyway. He looked at me, apparently assessing my disbelief.

Vincent explained, "My hands once had severe pain that nobody could figure out. I work in construction. I went to Bullhead to work on the high rise hotel casinos on the Nevada side. The white doctors could not find anything wrong with my hands, but the pains in my hands would not go away. The oldest brother of my mother is a singer. I came back here to see what he could do."

"You're okay now?"

"Had the Navajo way of driving the ghosts out. Now my hands no longer feel the pain. I can work again. Now I am ready to go back to Bullhead."

I wanted to know why he didn't choose the way of life that his relatives wanted if he had benefitted from it. He explained that he converted to the Roman Catholic faith because of a girlfriend he met in Bullhead after he got her pregnant.

I didn't want to believe him. He seemed as though he was not telling me everything. I certainly liked looking at him wearing those jeans, but I didn't want to spend a lot of time with him because I couldn't trust him.

State Highway 160 winds down the hills into Kayenta, a Navajo community, which is the first outpost of any size you reach driving west out of Four Corners. Kayenta tempts motorists with a Holiday Inn, a few restaurants, a handful of gas stations and numerous Navajo jewelry vendors. At this hour of the morning, the town was quiet and looked very lonely.

Vincent watched my eyes as they scanned the area in front of us. "Tourists drive through the Reservation," he said, "They will stop and tell us how isolated and barren it looks here. How 'run down.' Most of them do not mean to be disrespectful. They buy lots of jewelry anyway. They stare at us like we are some kind of strange people, compared to them. Look down on us and our land. We are a nation. Sovereign. Yet our nation is within state lines. We belong here. Yet we are told we do not belong. Here," he pointed out the window. "You can turn right at the next street. On Highway 163. My aunt's place is just ahead up here over on the left side of the street."

I followed his directions and headed off the street onto another dirt road toward a cluster of brown stucco houses. Each dwelling looked livable but, as Vincent said, the phrase "run down" is one that I would've selected to describe what I saw. How such poverty is left unchecked within the vastness and abundance of a civilized country angered me.

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## **Bullhead**

Mario Cuomo, who once was governor of New York and one of the few true orators of our time, said the following during an early 1990s appearance on the Phil Donahue show: "You have to do what you have to do before you can do what you want to do."

Cuomo offered those simple, yet profound, words around the time that I arrived in a place in Arizona with a very strange name, Bullhead. It was because of picking up Vincent Muncote hitchhiking on the Navajo Reservation that I sought out this place called Bullhead. Since I was heading west anyway, he talked me into giving him a longer ride all the way across Northern Arizona from Kayenta to Bullhead.



That was how I found myself in the desert on the Colorado River near where the state of Arizona meets its neighboring states of California and Nevada. Across the river on the Nevada side, there are a dozen or so casinos. Los Angeles was about 5 hours drive away, but it would have to wait.

During the summer of 1991 after that short little war in the Persian Gulf was over, people here at home felt uncertain and the domestic economy was suffering. However, people nonetheless wanted to gamble, so those Colorado River casinos

on the Nevada side somehow managed to attract tourists from the Southern California and also from the Phoenix area.

My first impression: Bullhead was not so much a city by a river, but an attitude. Odd types came here. Renegades and misfits. Some longtime locals had teeth missing. Some had serious desert sunburn cases. Some had negative dispositions, too. Heat and sand may be bad for the human body.

Regardless, I dropped Vincent off in Bullhead and on the same day I quickly landed a job in casino marketing--helping to keep visitors coming to the casinos no matter what was going on in the real world. So, I figured that I would work and live here for awhile. My world felt greatly unbalanced and I was weary of being on the road.

I literally found myself suffering from short dizzy spells. I told myself that this place would be good for me. I chose to believe that the desert scours a man's soul, and I knew deep inside that's exactly what I needed at that point in my life following my divorce and exit from New England. So, I accepted the brutally high temperatures in the desert and kept reading Tony Hillerman novels like Vincent had suggested, thereby attempting to learning more about the importance of *hozho* in my life.

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## **These Boots Are Made For Walkin'**



My Denver cowboy boots looked great on me in Arizona. You can get away with wearing cowboy boots on any day in any part of Arizona or Nevada. Gay cowboy or straight cowboy. It does not matter. Only your cowboy boots matter.

I chose to view my cowboy boots as symbols of my passage. You know, pulling myself up by my bootstraps and all those boot-related truisms.

One problem with my Denver cowboy boots was how uncomfortable there were to wear. I guess I didn't break them in properly, but whenever I wore them, those Denver cowboy boots made walking very difficult. I wore them to work and as I hurried from one casino to another, I'm sure I called attention to myself for the sound that my Denver cowboy boots made on floor tiles.

But, I learned that Denver cowboy boots and slippery floor tiles in a Nevada casino just don't go together well. I fell forward one afternoon while rushing to a meeting on a downward-sloping hallway. When I tried to break my fall with my outstretched arms, I only succeeded in breaking both radial bones near my elbows.

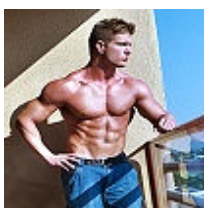
The doctor who treated me said that this was the kind of injury that inline skaters often experience when they fall forward. I didn't care how trendy this was. I only knew how much I hated having both my arms in casts and having to cope with extreme pain. Lucky for me that my insurance coverage from work paid for all my medical expenses because I had fallen on casino property.



I got a stern warning from the doctor concerning the need for me to work deliberately to recover my strength and mobility in both arms or else I might suffer from a lifelong injury. All because of wearing Denver cowboy boots. These boots also provided me with the motivation to seek a personal fitness trainer in Bullhead to show me the way to recovery. However, my fall and the resulting broken bones brought on several nights of nightmares. They were the now-familiar nightmaters of being hanged almost--but not quite--to the point of death.

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## Recovery



At the Bullhead gym, I made my selection of a personal trainer the very moment I saw Arturo Mundetti. He was the one that I chose to show me the way to recovery.

He was exceptionally handsome with a well-toned physical stature--the kind of man that the ancient Romans immortalized in their statues. I'm sure that this particular Italian American from the 20th century would have blended in perfectly had he lived in the time of the glories of Rome.

This Roman statue was very much alive and he was suddenly in front of me, extending his right hand to meet mine. I expected a bone-crushing experience

from a bodybuilder's handshake, but I was disappointed by his gentleness. He startled me when he started speaking to me in German and wouldn't let go of my hand. "Whoa," I said to him, "No comprende." I finally got to withdraw my hand. "You're German?"

"Jusk fucking with you. My father's Italian American. My mother was born in Germany."

That genetic combination certainly worked for him. I was sure that he easily could be a model if he wanted. He wasn't wearing any shoes and I noticed how big his feet were. He had very attractive feet, and I'm not coming from the viewpoint of a foot fetishist! His big feet told me that he was equally big below the belt.

"Former Marine," he said. "Had to wear boots all fucking day when I was in the Corps. I like not having anything on my feet." Then, he announced, "I just got some new pussy this morning, and I'm feeling fine, I tell you."

"Well, good for you," is all I could manage.

"Abso—fucking—lutely," he responded, raising his voice. "There are so many horny women around Bullhead. My cock doesn't get any rest whatsoever."

"Well, at least you've had your cardio workout already," I said, feeling proud of myself for such a snappy retort.

He laughed freely like a young boy who has just heard his first dirty joke. I quickly signed the one-year contract that he put in front of me.

Although the pain in both my arms was less and less of a bother, I needed help in doing exactly the right kind of arm and upper body resistance exercises if I ever hoped to fully recover from both broken radial bones. I felt at the time an odd mixture of loneliness after uprooting myself from 14 years of married life and an almost crazed sense of determination to not only survive, but get better than I was before. I kept playing the audiotape of my affirmations and I dedicated myself to working out at the Bullhead gym.

As my personal trainer, Arturo was very attentive and showed me that he knew how to instruct me in the proper ways of resistance training. The loneliness that I felt, however, drew me to Arturo because, despite acquaintances and coworkers that I had at work in the casinos, Arturo literally was the only person who truly gave a shit about me. I began to wonder whether there were any gay bodybuilders in Bullhead.

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## The Three Wise Men

When a man chooses to fly with buzzards, nobody will take seriously his complaints about the bitter taste of road kill. It's a very old Navajo proverb that I read somewhere.



Okay, they were gym rats, not buzzards. They just behaved like buzzards. They were guys that I hung out with at the Bullhead gym. Arturo Mundetti referred to them as the "three wise men" because they were so utterly brainless.

All I knew of them was that they were into working out at the Bullhead gym. I always saw them working out together every time I went there to work out with Arturo, but they were not also clients of his. To me, the three wise men seemed to radiate a strong hyper-masculinity. In their macho presence, I felt tremendously motivated to work out more diligently and play through the pain in both my arms.

I would pretend not to listen to them talk about their sexual exploits with women while they worked out. They would use politically-incorrect nicknames for important female body parts. When they were sweating and struggling with impossible weights during their bench presses, they were the most impressive to me. I imagined how they all would look naked in bed as they satisfied each other in a hot three-way. If there were any gay bodybuilders in Bullhead, I fantasized that these three could be the prototypes.

Arturo let me know that these three were using steroids. I already knew that they smoked pot. I could detect the faintest, sweet scent of marijuana on their gym shorts whenever they walked past my head as I was doing bench presses, trying to match the weights I had seen them use.

He also said that they were extreme right-wingers and that they hung out with other guys who were into guns. I wasn't sure if I believed Arturo about this. But, it was only natural that sooner or later, the three wise men would start hanging out with Arturo and me beyond the world of the Bullhead gym. We would venture across the Colorado River from Bullhead to the casinos on the Nevada side at night. It was there I learned that they overindulged in alcohol and then gambled to excess. I watched them encourage Arturo to show off at the Blackjack tables. They liked watching him. Arturo lost a lot of money. I realized that he was addicted to Blackjack. But, I also realized that the three wise men seemed addicted to using Arturo as a spectator sport. They pushed him to keep betting and they took delight in his losses.

The three wise men were the reason that Arturo and I became roommates in Bullhead. More accurately, Arturo had lost so much money gambling at the Blackjack tables that he stopped paying rent and got evicted by his landlord. I was right there, just in time to become a caretaker once again. Arturo had helped me with resistance training at the Bullhead gym to recover from my broken arms, so I felt it was only right that I help him in return.

He was the only one I knew at that time who genuinely cared about me and my well-being. Why should I not return the favor?

As for the supposed right-wing leanings of the three wise men? They talked about guns, yes. I also heard them mention driving over to Kingman to see some guys about guns. And, they also mentioned going to Las Vegas--again, about guns.



But, to me, guys who were talking about guns seemed normal in Northern Arizona. Why should I be surprised to encounter guys who were into guns, hunting, off-road exploring, and whatever else? Guns and Arizona go together. It's that basic.

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## Dirty Blond Desert

I ended up inviting Arturo Munzetti to move in with me at no cost to him after watching him lose so much money at the Blackjack tables. We shared a residence with no foundation. Literally.

Nobody in that neighborhood in Bullhead at the corner of Zircon and Quartz had any foundation. We all lived in aging trailers that were very cheap to rent.

The locals euphemistically called them "modular homes." Living inside these aluminum boxes in the desert was possible only because of swamp coolers. They sat on top of the trailers and kept the inside from turning into an oven. There in the desert near the Colorado River the nighttime lows in the summer hovered around 80 degrees, so the swamp coolers were kept running almost continuously.

In the essential paperback *Desert Survival Skills* by David Alloway (published by University of Texas Press in 2000), on page 23 we learn about "Antidiarrheal Tablets: Lomotil is often prescribed for travelers, but it can severely complicate

dehydration and electrolyte imbalances, both likely in desert environs." Remember this wisdom should you ever make the choice to live in an aluminum trailer in the desert.

On the first night that Arturo stayed with me in that trailer, I discovered that he liked to keep cool by walking around completely naked. The weight of his muscled body exerted a downward pressure on the trailer floor. The resulting sound of foreboding metal stress was quite like the special audio effects in those movies just before the doomed oceanliner is just about to sink.

Arturo's dirty blond hair was the same color as the desert sand. He shaved away most of his body hair, keeping a smooth appearance to call attention to his exceedingly low body fat. I had not occurred to me that Arturo might be an exhibitionist, but seeing him in this natural state was not what I would call unpleasant.



He was not shy to parade in front of me, open for complete inspection, as it were. He especially enjoyed reclining on his stomach on the sofa. When he walked around the trailer, in an inappropriately loud voice he would call out my name as he watched my eyes to see if I would look at his midsection.

Were my taped affirmations helping me? Or, was I growing up and getting more sensible? Each time I saw this handsome, nude alpha male, I would question the wisdom of my decision to invite him to live with me in that trailer.

For someone so physically strong and commanding, Arturo was so financially and emotionally needy. He would ask for money to buy food. And I would help him. He would ask for advice about how to market his personal training in the local media. I would help write his advertising copy and I even paid for his advertising. He would ask about what to wear if he was going out to look for women. He wanted to know what could he wear that would make him most sexually attractive to women. I would help him with that, too. I felt powerful by helping Arturo. And, I grew closer to him emotionally.

But, I grew to feel like my relationship with Arturo was a dirty little game. He walked around naked as if to tease me sexually, as if he just knew I was growing attracted and aroused by him. He behaved like a young boy who needed an older brother. Or, perhaps he needed a father figure. Either way, before too long, even though his personal training had benefitted me greatly, I felt like Arturo was using me emotionally and financially. And I let him.

And just how far would I go for Arturo? I have crossed the border from Arizona into Mexico for him. I know that sounds like a made-up story, but it's totally true. Not only did I help him by giving him money, I helped him scheme and wrangle to make money to pay his debtors. One such scheme involved picking up a package of unknown contents in Los Algodones, Mexico. The instructions Arturo explained were to bring that package back to Bullhead so Arturo could give it to some shady character that he spoke of in hushed tones using only the first name "Vinnie." And yes, that sounded so utterly cliché to me. But, the fear on Arturo's face seemed genuine to me, so I bought into this whole scenario. I also found out that what we were bringing into the United States was a very old, multicolored ceramic vase for "Vinnie," who collected exotic antiques.

It's a normal, everyday thing for American tourists to cross the border into Mexico from San Luis, Arizona just south of Yuma. But, to get to the Mexican border from Bullhead is a six-hour one-way drive through a lot of Arizona desert. If you make this particular journey in the summer months, you can endanger your very life because of the harsh weather conditions you will encounter. When Arturo and I drove through Lake Havasu City on our way to Mexico, the high temperatures hit one hundred twenty degrees.

Necessarily, Arturo and I spent a lot of time together on our Los Algodones adventure. I finally asked him why he needed *me* to cross the border while he waited on the Arizona side. Arturo shocked me with his answer. He came right out and told me that he was a convicted felon. He explained that if he were to leave the United States by crossing into Mexico, if he somehow got discovered, he would never be able to return home. I, however, was able to make it through customs at the international border without any problems. The old vase I carried across did not raise any suspicions whatsoever.

Although he had carefully concealed this from me and others in Bullhead, it turns out that in his native Los Angeles, Arturo had been busted for selling steroids to other bodybuilders. This drug conviction was the reason why Arturo moved to Bullhead. He wanted and needed to get far away from Los Angeles. My gaining this knowledge of Arturo's status as a convicted felon added to the overall thrill ride that it was when I was with him. When I walked out of the United States of America into that small border town of Los Algodones, Mexico, I felt with absolute certainty that I had reached a pathetic plateau. I became deeply aware of what I was doing: Because of my loneliness after breaking off ties with my ex-wife and everyone I knew in Rhode Island, I was now in Arizona knowingly choosing to be with a dangerous young man for the thrill and arousal.

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## Openings

I was only natural that I began to view my experiences with Arturo Mundetti and the three wise men in Bullhead in the context of *hozho*, which they all seemed to lack. Especially compared to Vincent Muncote, these men in Bullhead were living in chaos. How is it that Vincent could somehow survive in the same world as these guys, but not be as unbalanced as they were?

I remembered that morning in my truck just after I had picked him up hitchhiking. There was an attitude about him that served him well. He noticed that I was studying his face. "You see my scars." I, of course, quickly denied that I did. "I got beat up real bad. Six other Indians--Navajos like me--drunk. All of us. It was a test. They wanted to see if I could take it. We do not handle alcohol too well. They jumped me. All six of them. I could only take out three. But, hey, those three finished me quick. Woke up in the hospital in Farmington."

"And that's how you got those scars?"

Vincent looked at me, smiling at having caught me looking at his face. "Scars, yes. Openings on a man's face--openings to his soul."



I assured Vincent that I was happy to only know of such things from reading. He reminded me again about Tony Hillerman's novels. In turn, I urged Vincent to read about Theodore Roosevelt, the first cowboy president.

I explained how I escaped from a bad marriage in New England and that I chose to drive across the entire state of South Dakota just to get to Mount Rushmore. Just so I could see Teddy Roosevelt's face in person.

"His face is marred by dust and sweat and blood," I quoted the famous T.R. passage to Vincent, who wanted to know: "You saw blood on his big face at Mount Rushmore?"

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## Squirrel

Of course, the three wise men did have first and last names, I just never heard anyone use them. They were never seen as individuals. They seemed to exist only as a trio. Each was a variation of the same stocky, muscular young male with excessive testosterone. They acted like even though they might not consider themselves to be gay bodybuilders, they certainly preferred the company of men.

When I landed in Bullhead, I had just turned 40, but everyone told me how my appearance was that of a man ten or a dozen years younger. Arturo and the three wise men definitely were younger than me, and at times I felt that I merely was babysitting them all.

The tallest of the three wise men, Dutch, was white except for one very red neck. Next was a Filipino fellow who had the nickname of Squirrel because of a small tattoo of a cartoon flying squirrel on his back. I doubt that anyone knew his full name, Anthony Mungcal. A second white male, had blond hair and blue eyes completed this trio. He rarely used words with more than one syllable if he spoke at all. He was known as Blane, but privately, I thought of him as "Blank."



Squirrel was always the most edgy. Of the three wise men, he had the lowest attention span and the highest level of masculinity. I found him so attractive. It was difficult for me not to stare at Squirrel.

Since Arturo, the three wise men and I had at one time or another been in the locker room together at the Bullhead gym, it was natural that we all knew what each man looked like in the raw. We proved to be no more advanced than high school boys in the sense of keeping track of each other's equipment.

Squirrel definitely won as the best endowed of all of us. Arturo was a close second, followed by me, then Dutch and, in last place, Blane. I had to work with steady determination not to stare at Squirrel whenever he and I happened to be in the Bullhead gym shower together. I found him stunning for his muscularity and, of course, his manhood.

Because I saw the three wise men literally every time I went to the Bullhead gym to work out with Arturo Mundetti, the five of us started hanging out together as a group. Besides going to the casinos and the nightclubs on the Nevada side, we would also all go together to a riverside bar and grill south of Bullhead frequented by the locals. It was named Rincon Arizona.

It was situated on a corner of Arizona on the Colorado River within a small riverside settlement named Topoc. The local joke, according to Arturo, was to call it "Top Cock" instead.

My very first visit to Rincon Arizona with Arturo and the three wise men sticks in my memory. The restaurant had huge windows that faced south and west so that each overlooked the Colorado River. There were scores of booths and tables, all of which screamed a bright, but unpleasant red. Framed black and white pictures along the walls evidently depicted fishermen who have taken time from their

river adventures to eat and drink at Rincon Arizona. I even thought I recognized a couple of pictures that appeared to be of Hollywood celebrities from the 1950s.

Our booth was large—suitable for eight—in the center of the busy dining room. Dutch sat next to Arturo across from me in the booth. I was surrounded on either side by Blane and Squirrel. As always, Squirrel was the first to speak. "You buying?" he challenged.

Arturo frowned and quiet said, "Fuck you, Geisha girl."

"Told you before, I'm not Japanese, you goddamn Nazi" was Squirrel's response. Then, he turned his attention to me. "What did you do before you moved here?"

"Television," I answered.

His eyes got wide suddenly and he looked very innocent as he replied, "You're on TV? Have I ever seen you on anything?"

I managed to quickly glance at Arturo, who is having a difficult time trying to stifle a smile. I saw his lips slowly forming the words, "Three wise men."

"Not unless you were in New England," I told Squirrel.

"You don't sound like you're from England. Maybe from back east," he concluded.

"No, New England. I was on the local news in Rhode Island."

Dutch asked me, "You wanna be on TV here?"

"Sure, why not," I replied, knowing he was bullshitting me.

"Bartender's brother works for the cable news company," Dutch said as he motioned toward the bar. "I'll introduce you, come on."

I walked over to the bar with Dutch. The other two wise men followed close behind, leaving Arturo alone back at our table, shaking his head like he was expecting trouble. The bartender looked up from cleaning the sink as Dutch said, "Danny here was on TV in New York City." I didn't bother to correct him because it sounded too good to be totally false. "You think maybe your brother can get him to talk to someone at that cable new channel?" The other two wise men clapped me on the shoulders approvingly. "New York, City" Squirrel whispered in my ear like he was really jealous and impressed at the same time. "They will hire you," he said to me, barely audible. "Because you were on TV in New York City."

That was why I remembered the first visit with Arturo and the three wise men to Rincon Arizona. It was all about networking. It would prove to be an important connection for me in the desert.

The following afternoon I finished my workout with Arturo at the Bullhead gym. Arturo had an appointment with another client, so I went by myself to shower. In the locker room, I noticed that the three wise men were already showered and dressed. I saw Squirrel saying something to the other two and then they left the locker room without him. I went into the showers, which were completely empty at the time.

My eyes were stinging from that cheap shampoo provided by the Bullhead gym. When I finished rinsing clear my eyes and could finally open them again, I was astonished to find Squirrel standing there naked next to me in the shower. "What the fuck are you doing?" I said to Squirrel.

He did not reply. He just got down on his knees in front of me in that Bullhead gym shower room. He opened his mouth just a matter of millimeters from my cock. Of course, I was sexually attracted to Squirrel. He was the most masculine and most attractive of the three wise men. And for whatever reason, he was offering himself to me! He was impressed because he thought I worked on television in New York City. Was he secretly gay? Why was I asking myself all these questions when Squirrel was there, naked on his knees, in front of me!? I moved forward into Squirrel, quickly pushing myself, semi-erect, into his mouth.

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## Manhood



To my absolute amazement, nobody caught Squirrel and me having sex in a corner of the shower room at the Bullhead gym. However, because I held the expectation that someone--probably Arturo--would walk in and discover me fucking Squirrel, the entire time with him in that shower was supercharged and electric.

Squirrel walked with me through the blistering heat of the asphalt parking lot in front of the Bullhead gym. I learned that climbing into a locked vehicle that has been cooked in the direct desert sunlight can be a painful experience. I will never do that a second time. Now I understand why so many people who parked in the lot have cardboard sunscreens inside their windshields. As I drove my truck out of the parking lot, my air conditioning does its best to make life inside the cabin tolerable for Squirrel and me.

I drove us to the bar at Rincon Arizona. For the first time since I had met him, Squirrel did not talk a mile a minute. He actually seemed peaceful and calm--very



unusual for him. We sat next to each other at bar. Whenever I made eye contact with Squirrel, he looked into my eyes with intense interest in me. I never thought it was possible for a man to show himself in this way to another man. I guess this pretty much proved that Squirrel was gay. I wondered whether any of the other wise men were also.

Although it was not yet a year since my divorce, I felt that I had morphed into someone who was new and improved. Of course, I had deliberately worked on exactly that. But, I realized that I had become someone very different in Arizona compared to when I was that heterosexual married guy in Rhode Island. Now I was no longer that guy. Now felt I could honestly express my sexual identity, and I had found in Squirrel a most satisfying emotional and physical connection. I felt manhood as if for the first time. I felt happy.

The bartender interrupted my buzz from the endorphins when he handed me a small piece of paper with a telephone number written on it. He said, "My brother wants you to call him. That's a Las Vegas number. Ask for Walter."

I had forgotten how on a previous visit to Rincon Arizona, one of the three wise men had told the bartender that I was on television in New York City. At least it got me a connection to possible employment in Las Vegas. I thanked the bartender. Before he walked away, I told him I would call his brother tomorrow.

When I returned my attention to Squirrel next to me at the bar, his eyes still had the same look of intense interest in me. He said to me, "I told you. Because you were on TV in New York City, they will hire you." Then he added, "And you will dump me like I'm nobody." I was stunned, but I did my best to conceal it. I quickly scanned the bar to see if we were being watched, and then I reached down and grabbed Squirrel's nuts through his gym shorts.

I had never known it was possible for a man to get so aroused so quickly! Squirrel's face showed deep embarrassment, especially since he knew he could not get down from his bar stool without revealing his erection through his blue jeans to all of the Rincon Arizona patrons. We waited until he was completely relaxed once again. By the time we left the bar, it was dark outside. Under cover of the night, on the bank of the Colorado River I gave Squirrel the sexual pleasures he wanted and deserved.

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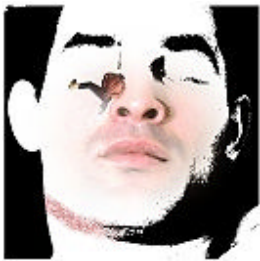
## **Hanging a Cowboy**

I brought Squirrel back to the trailer with me. Even though it was past midnight, Arturo Mundetti was not at home. He probably was out looking for women and

wearing the clothing that I had picked out so he would look sexy for them. So, I took Squirrel with me to bed.

Despite my Roman Catholic upbringing, how my body and mind felt at that moment left no room whatsoever for guilt, shame, or regret. Instead, I was overtaken with the clear sense that I deserve to be happy—a completely unfamiliar concept for me. All those celibate men in the Roman Catholic Church who give advice about what they call "the pleasures of the flesh" should never be taken seriously. They only have book learning. You wouldn't trust a vegetarian to advise you about how to barbecue beef.

I made a pot of coffee the next morning and waited to enjoy the marvelous sensations of its first scent. That was when Squirrel startled me as his hands reached around my torso and he gently pinched my nipples. He only had on his blue jeans and my hands cannot resist reaching inside to see what he's got in there. I was not sure I actually believed this was happening to me. I was in Nevada with both hands inside the blue jeans of a barefoot, shirtless guy with whom I had such great sex yesterday. It was too much for me to process. How was it possible to feel so happy?



Later that same morning, I took Squirrel on a mystery ride to Oatman, a small town near Bullhead on the fabled Route 66 highway. Oatman was unlike anywhere else in Arizona. It became a wild West town that was popular with tourists. You could find cute, burros roaming the narrow streets freely.

You could also find men in cowboy costumes who put on street melodramas for the tourists, including a fake hanging. Squirrel and I watched the cowboy stuntman do his best to sell the fake hanging.

Then, I suddenly grew very disoriented.

Of course, I realized how odd it was during my waking hours to be watching a cowboy being hanged because of my recurring nightmares that I was being hung by the neck. Oh, shit. I'm having a difficult time breathing! I never imagined that in Oatman, Arizona, I would lose consciousness and collapse into the street in front of all those tourists. They probably thought that the temperature of 108 had finished me off.

While I was lying there on the pavement unconscious on that street, I could feel how terribly hot it was, but it felt like I really was somewhere else. I decided that I was hallucinating.

I saw myself hanged by the neck from the branch of a strong tree.

This was no nightmare. This was not even happening at night! I was standing there on the ground underneath another version of myself, who was in cowboy boots, blue jeans, and shirtless. My hands were bound behind my back and I was hanging by the neck.

I was lynched deliberately and very carefully in an exacting fashion--not dropped so my neck would snap. My bloody wrists are tied behind my back with a piece of rope. I was hoisted up slowly off the desert floor so that my suffering would be extended. The rope was then wrapped the rope several times around tree trunk before being tied. My entire body weight then drew earthward tightening the noose steadily around my neck.

What a horrible sight! I looked up in the eyes of that hung cowboy. He and I connected like I never connected with anyone before. I am him. He is me. Either I am being tormented by evil spirits, or what I'm experiencing has some meaning and value to my life.

I was overcome with a sudden realization that I was alone. Even though I left my wife for good reason, I was alone now. I felt instinctively that I should find someone to get involved with. Somebody to share life with. Sure. What a track record I have with relationships. At least now, in this connection with that hanging man, I felt something give. Like rocks falling off the ceiling of a darkened cave, letting in the brilliant white sunlight from the outside world for the very first time. It seems to have been all about intimacy. Something I chose to avoid in my relationships with women.

My mother taught me how to avoid intimacy by the way she lived. I witnessed the fear and the awe she had toward men. Why wouldn't she feel this way? Her father had been an abusive, violent man. Women like my mother see men as the stronger ones, the ones to be feared and revered. The strength and power men exhibit are seductive to her, although men are capable of such brutality. No equality here. You never have equality with someone you choose to fear. Such woman who fear and disdain men are not capable of equality with men. They doom themselves. Intimacy, which requires equality first, is not possible between such women and men.

Men who want no intimacy with women have it so easy. All you need to do is find the women who fear you, who disdain you. Then you've got it made. You never have to work toward nor concern yourself about intimacy with such women because intimacy will never be possible. A similar trick you can use to keep away from intimacy is to select a woman who hates her own body. If you pick women

who see themselves as overweight or ugly, you won't have equality with them either, unless somehow you share their same level of low self-esteem. Whatever else you get with such women, you won't get intimacy. Such women will end up faulting you for being emotionally distant from them. But that distancing is not solely your creation. It is the direct outcome of selecting a woman with whom you cannot have equality.

My father was a living example of this crucial relationship between equality and intimacy. Because he enlightened me about this elusive truth, I will always admire him. Though I may not have the most comfortable connection with him, I feel this esteem for my dad as part of the unique kind of respectful love that a man can only feel toward his father. He lived the reality of inequality with my mom. Then he moved on to another woman and started the whole process over again.

My father gave me his view of how to live with women: Some women can make you happy and miserable--often at the same time. You learn to just live with it until you've had enough. How else will you get sexually satisfied? Men need to give in to such women so as to win first their favor and then sex. We males are all taught the distinct, orderly process--the rules--to achieve sexual pleasure, captured in almost poetic fashion by the phrases we all have come to know: Find them. Fool them. Feel them. Fuck Them. Forget Them. The process never takes intimacy into consideration at all. You need to learn that yourself somehow. If you care to. If you can.

My father also showed me that men should take care of women and children first, before taking care of themselves. Because men are made to be the stronger ones. Men should keep their feelings to themselves, but especially never admit their feelings to women or the women will laugh at you for being so foolish. Unless, of course, you find the one, true love, who waits for you out there somewhere, ready to share total intimacy with you. Yeah, right. Happens every day. And what happens if you discover that your capacity to share intimacy happens only with other men? Then what?

I came to inside my 4×4, which Squirrel was driving. The air conditioning felt absolutely wonderful on my face as I sat in the passenger seat.

Squirrel looked greatly upset, as if he had been crying. "Don't worry," I assured him. "I'm not going to die and leave you all alone."

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## **After Sunset**

The brother of the Rincon Arizona bartender turned out to be on the management team at the cable news company. After going through a series of interviews there and a couple of on-camera tests, I accepted a field news producer position that included both Las Vegas and the Laughlin/Bullhead area.

I saw this as possibly a major turning point in my life. I got the chance to return to the television business once again and that made me feel so excited!

Now, I felt like I would actually succeed in restarting my life. After all the pain I had experienced with my unsuccessful marriage, my breaking away from a 14-year relationship with a woman, and my westward journey of exploration, I had managed to find a career position that paid quite well.

When I turned in my resignation at the casino marketing office, I felt guilty leaving them. They had hired me so quickly. I was overqualified for that position, but I really needed money, so I just accepted their offer. I agreed to complete one future assignment for them. I assured them that I would return to Laughlin in about a month or so on any date they requested. My final assignment would be to photograph a construction crane completing what was to be the final day of work on the new 27-story casino and hotel on the Colorado River.

I was ready to begin the process of moving to Las Vegas from Bullhead to begin the next phase of my life. But, my relocation plans immediately affected other people's lives.

Arturo Mundetti was angry because he was losing me as personal training client. More importantly, he was angry that he would have to find somewhere else to live since he could not afford to rent the trailer that I allowed him to live in with me.

"How can you do this to me, after all I've done for you?" he actually asked.

"I'm not doing this *to* you," I explained. "I've got to move to Las Vegas because I got a better job there."

"Where will I live after you move?" Arturo wanted to know.

"I can't take care of you any more, Arturo," I told him. "This is not about you. I've just gotten a new job and I've got to move."

"I can come live with you in Las Vegas," he suggested. "I can start a personal training business there. I'm sure I'll make more money there compared to here."

I was dumfounded. I could barely shake my head to indicate that my answer was "no." I was even more shocked when my response caused Arturo to get tears in his eyes. I never expected him to show me any emotion, even though I knew he was felt crushed that he would no longer get any money from me.

And then there was Squirrel, who became depressed when I told him I was leaving Bullhead. He reminded me how he had whispered in my ear at the bar in Rincon Arizona that I would one day dump him to move to Las Vegas. I pretended that I did not remember.

"Part of my job is to cover the Bullhead area and Laughlin, too," I assured Squirrel. "The cable news channel wants me here at least once a week. I'll be driving here very often, don't you see?"

"It still feels like you're dumping me," Squirrel said, very dejected. "You'll be here once a week, maybe. You'll stop by for a quickie with me. Then, you'll be back to Las Vegas and I'll still be here."

"It's a great opportunity for me," I assured him. "I can't stay here. I've got to move to Las Vegas. I'm coming back in a few weeks to photograph that construction crane over in Laughlin. Their putting the finishing touches on the 27-story building."

"Okay, I'm sure I'll see you then," Squirrel said. He then asked, "But, what if I come to live in Vegas with you? Then we could be together all the time."



Two different men. Both Arturo and Squirrel wanted me to take care of them. I did not like how that felt, even though having sex with Squirrel was very rewarding on many levels for me. I suddenly realized that even though I had gotten divorced and changed my life in a major way, I was still by nature a caretaker. Even though I was beginning at long last to admit that I'm gay instead of straight, that did not change me from being a caretaker. I really did not like how that felt! "Sorry. Not going to happen," was all I said to Squirrel.

You can drive from Bullhead to Las Vegas in about two hours. The actual physical distance of the journey is just under 100 miles. I packed my 4×4 as tightly as I could and made this trek in August 1991. Since this was the very hottest time of the year to drive across the desert, I waited until after sunset. Plus, nobody would be able to my tears in the darkness.

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## Desert Harmonies

To fulfill my obligation to the casino marketing people, well before sunrise I drove down on September 5, 1991 from Las Vegas to Laughlin so I could

photograph the final day that the construction crane was working on the new 27-story casino building. I had phoned Squirrel ahead of time to let him know that I was heading into town on this day for this shoot. I could tell how happy he was that we could get together. I wondered whether he wanted me more for sex or companionship.



It was impossible to miss the almost-finished highrise building at the edge of the river. In this town, it was the only building that reached skyward so high. All the other casinos were no more than 10 stories. Plus, the huge construction crane working above the unfinished tower was visible for miles.

I parked my 4x4 on Casino Drive, which had very little traffic just after sunrise. The construction crane was just completing yet another rotation above the highrise tower. I had made the choice to set up my 35mm camera on a tripod so that in the frame I would get that entire gigantic construction crane. It was painted bright white that made it easily the most eye-catching thing on Casino Drive. It towered above the unfinished building with its distinctive triangle-shaped roof.

As I focused my camera on the building, I was attracted to the colors of the morning sunlight that cut through the upper stories where the finishing touches of steel and glass were being readied. The contrast between the white crane against the bright blue desert skies was compelling to me.

I could tell that there was a new roll of color film inside as I glanced at the back of the camera. Looking through the lens, I could see the entire highrise in the frame, all the way from the bus on the street way up to that construction crane. I activated the automatic shutter that would take shot after shot after shot as long as I kept pressing that little button.

A bus from Phoenix bearing the name "Desert Harmonies" had arrived under at the excessively pink and blue neon rainbow entrance to the casino. This was not your ordinary, everyday Arizona tour bus. After completing a leisurely four-hour trip from the Valley of the Sun carrying 50 hopeful daytrippers looking forward to a happy day gambling, this bus was headed into the history books.

Two small explosions-just seconds apart-torn apart the midsection of the construction crane above the unfinished building. This caused the top of the crane to break in half. The heavier rear section fell downward and most of it slid down the steel that shaped the triangular roof. The counterweighted end, however, fell through the roof and crashed downward through the top stories. The lighter front section of the crane fell straight downward. It had been sticking out past the edge of the unfinished tower directly over Casino Drive. So, that

unweighted nose section of the crane had absolutely nothing in its way as it fell straight down to the street like a gigantic white arrow. It crushed the Desert Harmonies bus and passengers from Phoenix parked under the rainbow at the main casino entrance.

I was stunned by the speed of that bright white steel projectile hitting that bus. The crushing metal sound was unimaginably horrific and loud. I knew what had happened to the people inside. It was awful to watch. Then, the bus exploded. I was not expecting that. Nor did I expect that a couple of tires from the bus would fly in my direction through the smoke and the flames.



I woke up and knew immediately that I was in a hospital. There were plastic tubes running into my nose, I had an I.V. in my left arm, and I was wired to a lot of electronic equipment next to the bed I found myself lying in. After I successfully wiggled my toes and moved my legs, arms and fingers, I felt less terrified. I also felt relieved that I was not in any pain, but I certainly felt as if I was in a thick fog.

All that electronic equipment must have signalled to a monitoring station when I woke up because it wasn't long before a nurse entered my hospital room. "How do you feel?" she wanted to know.

"I'm just great. A bus exploded. I feel like one of its' tires hit me in the head. Why wouldn't I feel just great?"

She replied: "I'm sure doctor will want to see you." Then, she left quickly.

I waited for what seemed like an hour before anyone else entered my room. He was a young blond man with blue eyes and a name tag that read, "Jared Munich, MD."

"How are you doing?" he asked me with a strong German accent. Then there was a whole laundry list of questions that he asked me, apparently to determine if I had amnesia: Did I know who was the President of the United States? How long had I been living in Nevada? Where did I live? Stupid questions. I sensed that I had some memory loss, but not about important things.

"The x-rays show that you recovered recently from breaks in both arms just below your elbows," Dr. Munich said.

"Yeah, long story," I answered. "Why is my head bandaged? Am I okay?"



Dr. Munich said, "You've been unconscious. But, you probably figured that out on your own. Your head is bandaged so we could stop the bleeding from some cuts. You were flown here to Las Vegas. That was five days ago."

What he told me made me feel really dizzy from the shock value.

"Something grazed your head in that explosion," Dr. Munich said to me. "I think that's what knocked you out. You lost a lot of blood. Other than being unconscious for a short while, I'd say you were extraordinarily lucky."

"I know my name. I remember shooting pictures. All that."

"That's all very good," he said, smiling.

"What about my camera?"

He replied with one word: "Evidence."

"What about my truck?"

"Go slow. I want to run some tests. You've been through quite a lot. Remember anything about shooting pictures that day?"

"There was a couple of explosions. The crane split apart. Crushed that bus. Lots of smoke. Stuff blown in my direction. Tires. Next thing I know, I'm here in this hospital bed."

"Tires?"

"From the bus, maybe. Don't know. I guess I ducked."

"Yeah. I guess you did. You'd be dead otherwise," Dr. Munich assured me.

"Other people died?"

He nodded as his face turned solemn.

"How many?"

"The authorities want to talk with you about all that. I'm really not supposed to get into any of that with you," he explained. "If you feel up to it, I will make the phone call."

"Did this get covered nationally on the news?" I asked Dr. Munich.

He shrugged and said, "Not really. Most of the news coverage has been about what's happening in Russia."

"Are we at war now or what? I feel so out of touch."

"No, they're dissolving the Soviet Union right now. Communism is finished. You just get some rest, okay?"

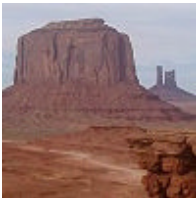
I nodded and watched Dr. Munich leave my hospital room.

Appropriately, my head felt sore. A head injury was not a sensation that I had experienced before, so I was frightened.

I felt more than a little dizzy and, strangely, I was thinking of what seemed like a memory: I saw myself on television--something I was accustomed to from when I was on the local news in Rhode Island. But, this was not a memory of my work in local news in Providence. This looked and felt like a prime time network television series.

I saw myself driving in my new 1991 Ford Explorer through the Navajo Reservation in Monument Valley. The only problem was: I had never visited Monument Valley in my entire life! I was driving the 4×4 and Vincent Muncote was riding next to me in the passenger seat.

I heard a haunting Navajo song performed by a chorus of male voices. I could not understand the words of that unfamiliar language, but the singing was quite captivating. Then, Vincent and I were seated on the roof of the 4×4 as the vehicle somehow continued to drive as if by itself on the two lane highway through the Navajo Tribal Park.



Early morning sunlight in Monument Valley is delicious like egg yolk floating on perfect bright white. Nowhere else on this planet will you ever find more natural shades of pink and red competing for your attention. Unlike sitting in a dark movie theater watching John Ford cowboy movies that were filmed here, when you are here in Monument Valley in real life, you feel the boundless energy that crackles from the red soil up to the bluest sky.

There were several motion picture cameras that I could see around me. Of course, a camera in a helicopter was obligatory to get the sweeping vistas of Monument Valley. But, there were also cameras on a vehicle ahead of my 4×4 on that two lane road. Vincent and I were wearing full cowboy attire including cowboy hats and cowboy boots, and we were seated on the roof of the vehicle in white plastic chairs at a white plastic round table.

The majestic land in this scene belongs once again to the Navajo, who for generations lived here, carving out a life in the forbidding territory of sun, sand, scarce rainfall and spectacular geology. In Vincent's eyes I discerned a strong respect for this place. Although I can see the obvious physical majesty here, his relationship with this valley seems unknowable to me--an outsider, a Caucasian. He can tune into the harmonies of this desert, but I am incapable of doing so.

The scent of Monument Valley is like nowhere else on the planet. Deep, rich, musky and alluring, like an ancient spice, long forgotten by humanity. Mixed with clean, fresh air. But, how can I discern any scents!?! This is a television show!! I have never actually been to Monument Valley. I am remembering this as though I had been filming in Monument Valley!

The wind swept through the valley in whirling, wispy tones. Nowhere else will you ever see such contrast in the colors of nature! The red earth beside brown sand dotted with green scrub brush gives way to fibrous gray roots of tenacious trees in a symphony of color.

I discovered that in this televised playback of what was not a genuine memory of mine, it was possible for edits to happen without warning. One minute I was on top of that 4×4 with Vincent, then the next I knew, he and I were standing in the bright red dust of the unpaved road on the valley floor. The helicopter camera buzzed over our heads while on the ground next to me and Vincent I could see a sound man with his boom microphone and a cameraman with a shoulder camera pointed at me.

When I looked down at my black cowboy boots, the red dust had all but overtaken me. And that was when I saw the deep red blood covering both of my hands. I know that I must have had an anguished look on my face when I examined those bloody hands of mine because I saw that Vincent suddenly looked very concerned. The Navajo chanting stopped abruptly after I rubbed my face, getting blood all over my mouth and chin. I can taste my own blood! Vincent reached out as if he were going to try to stop me from touching my hands to my face again. "Oh shit," was all I could manage to say as I started to pass out. I fell face first into that soft red soil in Monument Valley. Then, Vincent helped me to stand up again. "Cut!" yelled the director from somewhere nearby.

I walked away by myself from the set leaving Vincent, the director, the crew--everyone--behind. I was drawn to one very odd-looking and extra large tree sticking out of the landscape under the crystal clear silvery blue sky. That tree seemed completely out of place in this desert setting. It surely did not belong here in the middle of the Navajo Tribal Park. Something definitely was very wrong.

Hung from a thick brown rope in that tree was a shirtless man wearing large cowboy boots that were kicking desperately. The entire inside of my mouth was suddenly drier, and I was having great difficulty breathing.



The cowboy's arms were bound behind him at his wrists with rope. He kicked and kicked and kicked desperately as I drew nearer to him hanging by the neck from that large tree. I saw several buzzards circling, waiting.

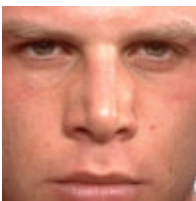
Whoever lynched him deliberately and very carefully hoisted him in exacting fashion upward by that rope around his neck. His bloody wrists tied behind his back with a piece of the same rope were the only obvious sign of a struggle. They pulled him off the desert floor at least 4 feet into the air, intentionally preserving this cowboy's spine intact, and then wrapped the rope several times around tree trunk before tying it. His entire body weight then drew earthward tightening the noose steadily around his large neck—a slow brutality that no doubt provided his executioners an extended time to watch and enjoy his desperate kicking, leaving him to suffocate to an inevitably slow, painful death.

A hot, dry wind was blowing across the entire valley, spinning the hanging cowboy on that rope. I suddenly saw his face. **I saw that the hanging cowboy was me.**

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## Questions

Two agents from the Las Vegas FBI office came to my hospital room. They both were dressed in dark suits. They were young guys with very short hair who looked like they had just left the National Football League.



The Causasian agent with green eyes did all the talking while his partner, an African American guy, just kept his intense dark brown eyes on me at all times. As if I could somehow jump up from the hospital bed with my head bandaged and run away.

Agent Green Eyes started with the obligatory, "Tell me why you were there in Laughlin shooting pictures that morning."

"The casino marketing people wanted 35mm pictures of that crane on the final day of the high-rise construction. For historical purposes. And marketing."

"You drove down there from here in Las Vegas that morning?"

"Yes. Real early. Before sunrise."

"How did the casino marketing people let you know the exact day?"

"We'd been in touch by phone all that week. There was a big sense of anticipation. I got a call on Thursday night. They said the next morning they wanted me there to shoot the pictures."

"Who else knew you were shooting pictures that morning?"

"I still have friends in the area that I see when I'm working down there. So, I called a guy I used to work out with at the Bullhead gym. We were going to have breakfast that morning when I finished shooting. He must've wondered what happened to me."

The two agents glance at each other for a moment. Then, the one with green eyes asked me, "What's his name?"

"Anthony Mungcal. But, he's known to everyone as Squirrel."

"You have other friends from that gym in Bullhead, right? What are their names?"

"I had a personal trainer there. Arturo Mundetti. He would know everyone's name from the Bullhead gym. The other guys Arturo and I hung out with--. We used to refer to them as 'the three wise men' because--. Well, it was a put-down. You know what I mean?"

"You know where they are today? These 'three wise men'?"

"I spoke on the phone with Squirrel the night before I went there to shoot pictures of that crane. The others, I don't know."

"And what about your former personal trainer?"

"I don't understand. What's going on? You think they had something to do with this? Those guys would never do anything like that."

The agent with the green eyes looked over at his partner, who continued to stare at me silently. Then, the agent with green eyes resumed his eye contact with me and his questioning. "So, you think they're fine, upstanding local citizens? Is that what you think? They've all run up debts in the casinos."

"Well, Arturo, yeah. He's got a real gambling problem. Blackjack. The others I don't know. If they had gambling debts, I never knew it was serious. They didn't talk about it."

"What can you tell us about 'the three wise men'?"

"Bodybuilders. Macho cowboy types. Couple of them had been in the Army. Sometimes, I'd hear one or two of them talking about, you know, the kind of stuff you hear all the time in Northern Arizona. Right to bear arms. Government infringement of individual rights. That kind of thing."

"Explosives?"



"I don't know. I only heard them talking about guns. They were into weapons. They would go out into the desert and shoot. Like I said: Macho cowboy types. They took pictures of each other. Posing with guns."

"Were you aware of any of them having any grudges against the casinos? Or against anyone in particular who worked in the casinos?"

"No. We all would hang out at the casino nightclubs. Lot of other locals do, too. If those guys had a grudges, they would have avoided a particular casino and its nightclubs. And that never happened."

"Thank you, Mr. Muncaster," the agent with green eyes said to me, with only the slightest smile. "We appreciate your talking to us. Doctor said we could only spend a few minutes with you today."

I was feeling lightheaded, but needed to know more. "Tell me what happened in Laughlin, will you? What about the pictures I shot there?"

"Your pictures will help us figure out what happened," said the agent with green eyes. "You did good, Mr. Muncaster. Very good."

"People were hurt, right?" I asked. "When that crane crashed down to the bus parked on the street level?"

The agent with the intense brown eyes finally spoke: "There were 23 people in that bus from Phoenix. All of them were killed."

"Shit," is all I could manage to say.

The agent with the green eyes added, "A couple of people inside that high rise near the top were also killed. The investigation has been going on for a few days now. Thank you again, Mr. Muncaster." Before I could say another word, both FBI agents had left my hospital room.

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## **Flying With Buzzards**

An old Navajo proverb teaches: "When a man choses to fly with buzzards, nobody will take seriously his complaints about the bitter taste of road kill." As I laid there in that Las Vegas hospital bed, I had plenty of time to consider the wisdom of that proverb.

I was stuck in that Las Vegas hospital because an explosion blew a bus tire that grazed my head and knocked me out. I could have been killed, but somehow, I survived. But, I now felt that I was losing my sanity.

Why was I there at the moment of that explosion? I had chosen to come to Nevada. I had chosen to work for the casinos. I had chosen to photograph the casino construction for the casinos.

I felt that I might have to stop and evaluate the choices I was making. My head was starting to hurt more than before. Maybe I was adding things up the wrong way?

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## **Letting Go**

With so much time to spend in that Las Vegas hospital bed, I had time to think back to Frances Muncaster, my ex-wife. I recall her waiting for me to meet her for dinner at an intimate Italian bistro in downtown Providence, Rhode Island.

Few restaurants existed in either Rhode Island or Massachusetts where she and I had not fought. When I arrived ten minutes late that evening, she finished quickly a glass of champagne. As usual, she was dressed in her simple, functional dark blue college professor suit with a white blouse. I presumed that she has just come from her last class for the day at the state university.

Her outfit was her disguise. She admitted to nobody but me how she preferred that outfit since in it she could hide her weight. Yet, anyone who looked at her saw a college professor, not an overweight person trying to conceal herself in dark blue cotton tweed.

When I glanced at myself in one of the restaurant's many mirrors, I felt that at least I was alive, even though I felt like someone who was barely-alive. I enjoyed working on the local news in Providence, but my wise-ass, on-screen persona was wearing thin. I was tired of performing on camera when inside I felt like I had long ago died. I felt like a piece of meat. Ten years on the air in news and public affairs in Providence, yet my journalistic credibility seemed to count for little. My abilities as an interviewer and a writer went unsung. What mattered to station management was the news consultants' take. They liked my self-created, well-honed witty persona. But, those parasites proclaimed my presence on the news program as "skewed to the higher demos," to use their exact words. My days on television in Providence clearly were numbered and I knew it.

As I sit down, Frances made no mention of my dark brown European-style suit accented by an excessively loud red power tie. My outfit was not a disguise, it was a trade arrangement. Whatever I wore on TV was provided by a local men's clothiers in exchange for a promotional announcement during the local news show. I had just finished the six o'clock newscast and tonight I did not have to return to the newsroom to prepare for the eleven o'clock.

What Frances Muncaster chose to say to me when I arrived at our table was a simple declarative sentence: "**I thought you loved me.**" The air temperature in the restaurant fell fifteen degrees and my lungs collapsed. There was a faint familiarity in the manner in which this simple declarative sentence was spoken by this woman that I married.

What she was saying, what she wanted to know was: Did I still love her? Or, did I love her enough? Here was the crux of the problem between me and this woman. After a dozen years married to her, I expected the unexpected. A loaded question. A sudden accusation. Amid moments of tenderness and humor.

She was a history professor with the oratorical skills of a veteran United States Senator. Though my own profession required me to use words as my stock and trade, I knew better than to mess verbally with this woman. I kept my distance from her for fear of being hurt by her words as I had been so many times. I was admittedly uncooperative, therefore, and did not express myself with her. She was left with no choice but to determine my feelings toward her by other means. Such as provocation. Did I still love her assumed I had, at a previous point in time, loved her. As I took my seat next to her, I felt smothered, a familiar sensation.

She gulped deeply from another glass of champagne placed in front of her by our waiter. Since I had just arrived, I had to suffer in sobriety the question I did not



want to hear, let alone answer. And so it was I told her: "I love being ambushed like this. You pissed about something tonight?"

"Just never hear you say it."

"Well, Professor, never start out with a test. Tends to scare people off."

"Do I scare you?"

"Sometimes."

"Like how?"

"Just jump right in? No pleasantries. No small talk?"

"Okay. Tough day at the office, dear?"

"Really not in the mood, you know?"

"You love your work more than me."

"I was only ten minutes late."

"Not what I meant. You've changed." Before I could answer, she added quickly, "and don't make a joke about this."

"All right, no wise cracks, huh?"

"No, that's the TV persona. Your cocky humor bit. I want the real man, not your performance. You did see what the critic in the morning paper said about you?"

"What is this? 'Pick on Danny Muncaster day'?"

"A 'video caricature.' Not fair to call you that," she says without faking her disagreement with my detractors. "What do critics know anyway?"

Cooled me down slightly. "Newspapers love bashing television news," I told her, realizing how defensive and upset I really felt. "Just because I'm not your garden variety local TV news reporter, who's all image, no brains and even less substance. I'm effective on TV. And I make people laugh and think. Fuck the newspaper. I am real."

"Say something to me that's real."

"Jesus, I hate this," I responded.

"I'd say that's pretty real," she replied.

"This guy you're having dinner with may be a wise-guy on TV, a comfortable performance. But isn't he your classic nice guy when he comes home to you, or when he meets you for dinner?"

"That's what I mean. You realize all we really do together anymore is eat dinner out?"

"We fight at restaurants, too. You forget to mention that. This one is among the few where we hadn't fought."

"What about love?"

"The word, the word. Ever notice how we joke around about that hot word, love. We play around with it, toying with it. I say to you, 'I luuvvvv you.' And you say to me, 'I loffff you, Danny.'"

She said, "We don't use the word without humor, yeah. That part of your personality you call the wise guy. Maybe so effective in the local ratings, sometimes it gets stuck? Cannot be switched off when you come home?"

I said, "You're probably right."

"I don't think you love me anymore, Danny. You spend all your energies on your excitement fix--the local news show. And you're right about going out as our only time together. God knows, we haven't slept together for how long?"

"The entire Reagan Presidency," I replied.

"See what I mean?," she said laughing--even though what I had said was absolutely true. "And you see yourself as such a nice guy with me."

I said, "Always make you laugh, though, don't I?"

She said, "That you do, Danny. You do."

"No man has ever made me laugh like you, Danny,' is what you always say to me."

"It's true. What holds us together, right? Even though you don't love me anymore." A sudden change of feeling came over her. She looked like a lost child as she said, "I want you to love me. I really don't want anything bad to happen to us."

"Bad?"

"Not staying together."

I did not respond.

"You don't love me anymore," she concluded. "I don't think you even like me very much now."

Verbally skilled and very perceptive was this woman, the college professor. Do I cave in now? Of course not. I drank my coffee in silence. Why won't I level with her?

"If you really loved me," she finally said, "you wouldn't be so tight with your emotions toward me."

"Another test," I responded. "If I loved you, I would do this. If I loved you, I would do that. This is bullshit. You attach strings. Conditional love isn't actually love. It's bullshit. Have you ever considered that?"

She looked hurt by my honesty. "You wanted the real man, not the fake nice guy I am with you. You can't stand real. You and I both know that."

"Danny, I'm just afraid we aren't gonna make it."

"This is a rerun. Can't we fight about something new for a change?"

"You want me to stop the medication?" she asked.

"Too late now. Another condition you lay on me. Stop your medication? Sure. As long as I enjoy rushing you to the hospital after your suicide threats."

"This isn't easy," she admitted. "The Prozac is working now. Not like before. That was a one-shot deal."

"I don't--. Was gonna say, I don't care. I do care. This is just outta control. Nothing I say or do makes any difference. You got Prozac. I got what's left of you."

"What else am I supposed to do for my depression?" she wanted to know.

"Another rerun, Jesus."

"This is what I'm saying. If you really loved me, you would be more supportive."

"That's so attractive," I told her. "An insult woven inside a condition."

"We should just call this whole thing off," she concluded. And then, she got real drunk in that intimate Italian bistro in downtown Providence, Rhode Island. I finally got her home. She was barely able to walk when she went upstairs to the master bathroom.

I was in the kitchen, just below the master bathroom. The next sound I heard was easy to identify. A dull, thudding. I recognized it as that of a human form collapsing against the floor upstairs above my head. The floor of the master bathroom. I stared up at the ceiling like an idiot, then realized I better run up and help her.

As I arrived at the top of the stairs outside the nearly-shut door of the master bathroom, I heard her groan in that uniquely vomatose way. Just before I pushed open the door, the sounds of her throwing up into the pink toilet bowl were vivid and immediate. I held my breath and edged the door inward.

Her puffy left cheek swam in the shallow red pool floating on hot pink floor tile. Those dazed deep blue eyes of hers were partially obscured by the locks of curly blonde hair draping down her forehead. Brutal black and scarlet color the savaged right side of her ashen white face. I am stuck, frozen just inside the open bathroom door towering helplessly over her sprawled out below me. Wearing only her bright white robe, now stained deep, dark red, she rested at the base of the low-slung pink toilet, her mouth gaped in trauma.

I heard myself screaming: "Your faaaaaaaaaace! Jeee--zuss!"

She spit out blood and puke and coughs. "Hit it. . .on the tub when. . .I fell," she gurgled.

*GURGLED!*

My brains were sloshing around inside my skull as I turned to leave the master bathroom.

"Danny. . .I'm sorry. . .please."

I jumped down several steps at a time until I reached the ground floor. My face was glowings. My inner voice shifted to a shrill, maddened choir screaming way off key. At the moment I reached the kitchen, I watched the digital display on the microwave oven change from "11:59 PM" to "12:00 AM" and then, the new date, "09/09/90," flashed in front of my eyes.

I crashed through the screen door to our redwood deck and dropped down on the back steps, digging my trembling fingers tightly into my hair as if there was any comfort to be found in there. Like magma rising, my guts climbed northward inside my windpipe. My entire face pounded as though my heart had reshaped itself by squeezing up into my nasal passages.

Then, comes the eruption! My head tilted back slightly, my mouth contorted. From this man, this human being, there came a most unmanlike, nonhuman cry. It was closer to that of a howling wolf. In the darkness. I abruptly released my restrained agony into those humid first seconds of the new morning.

I quickly got into my car and drove to a hotel by the Interstate. At a more reasonable hour that same morning, I contacted a lawyer friend and began the process of filing for a divorce. He asked me if I was absolutely certain that I wanted to divorce her.

I told him what Frances had repeated to me many times: She believed a polar shift was coming. Something she read about. Psychics predicted it. Big fear she had. Magnetic pole is supposed to shift someday soon. Within our lifetime. She worried about how the oceans would rush onto land. We lived in Providence. She was afraid we would be rinsed away by the tidal waves coming up from Narragansett Bay. When the pole shifted. Believed the whole planet would spin the wrong way one day. "Rinse and spin" is what she called it. A repeating cycle, supposedly. Rinse and spin. She said that it happens ever few tens of millions of years on Earth. And Danny and Frances couldn't have kids because their kids would never grow up. They'd be born into the planetary cycle. Drowned by rinse and spin.

A stronger, more tolerant husband might not have divorced her. Perhaps some other man more obsessed than me with being her caretaker, her white knight, would have been a better husband for her. Had Frances married a psychiatrist, she probably could have been treated better. Although I never felt consciously unsympathetic toward her as an emotionally troubled individual, I discovered that I just could not live with anyone who needed psychopharmaceutical drugs. I had been worn down to gristle by the dozen or so years that I had spent with her. I should have left her years ago.

The experiences of one evening that started at an intimate Italian bistro in downtown Providence, Rhode Island taught me it was time to let go. It was time to get going somewhere else very fast.

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## News



When a news correspondent becomes a news story, the game changes. It was only a matter of time before the cable news channel ran the inevitable story. I had initially attracted local attention by appearing on Desert News Network wearing cowboy boots and a cowboy hat and earning the dubious nickname of "the cowboy correspondent." But, I became the object of attention as a new story--something I did not want to happen.

Desert News Network reported: "This network's own, Danny Muncaster, was in Laughlin shooting 35mm photographs at the very moment when that casino crane exploded and crashed to the street, killing several Arizona tourists in their bus. His photographs have been released after careful examination by federal law enforcement authorities. Muncaster remains in good condition in a Las Vegas hospital."

Although my head bandages were removed, I was ordered to stay in that hospital bed awhile longer for observation. The day after the cable news channel's reports about me, I started receiving telephone calls from the Bullhead/Laughlin area. My privacy was gone now.

I heard from former co-workers in casino marketing. But, I was surprised that nobody from the Bullhead gym called. The two men that I most expected to hear from--Squirrel and Arturo--never called.

When I phoned the Bullhead gym, I spoke to a new employee who had not worked there when I was a customer. He responded to my questions with apparent respect. He, of course, knew of me as the locally-famous Danny Muncaster, "the cowboy correspondent."

The new gym employee told me that Arturo Mundetti had not come to work at the Bullhead gym for over a week. He said that the gym owners grew very angry and concluded that Arturo had to leave town suddenly. When I asked the new gym employee about Squirrel, it was obvious that nickname was unfamiliar to him. After I used Squirrel's real name--Anthony Mungcal--the new gym employee told me that Squirrel and the other two guys he worked out with at the gym had not been seen working out there for the same amount of time that Arturo had been gone. My last resort was to phone the Rincon Arizona bartender that had provided the contact for my Las Vegas job. I was stunned when the bartender confirmed he was surprised he had not seen Arturo or the three wise men for more than a week.

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## **Shrink**

Dr. Jared Munich was a shrink. I found this out when I had to visit him in his office at the Las Vegas hospital on the day I was to be released, September 27, 1991.

"You didn't tell me you were a psychiatrist," I said to him, skipping the pleasantries.

"True," he responded in that pronounced German accent I had come to know well.

"What do you need me to tell you, Dr. Munich? I just want to get out of this hospital today."

"You've mended well," he said to me. "Physically, that is. We had to shave your head. Your hair should grow back, I'm sure. Your cowboy hat should still fit you. Eventually. But, you seem troubled. Want to tell me about that?"

I answered sarcastically, "I'm definitely worried about hair loss, Dr. Munich."

"I would recommend Rogaine for you," he said, matching my sarcasm.

"Okay," I responded. "Fair enough. Yeah, I'm having these nightmares. Weird nightmares."

"What do you remember about these nightmares you're having?"

"Well, to be honest, I've had a recurring dream since--. A long time. Actually, it's a nightmare. About being hung. As in: Hung by the neck until dead."

"Recurring?"

"Well, variations of it, yeah. Not the same, exact nightmare repeatedly. Variations."

"What do think it has to do with witnessing that crane explosion?"

"I don't know. The nightmares seem more vivid now. Following my being hit in the head."

"How are they more vivid?"



"Like I said: I've had variations of the nightmare. I'm being hung by the neck. I always get away. The rope breaks. Or some shoots the rope. Or cuts it. That kind of thing. I never actually dreamt about dying. Once I found myself here in this hospital, the nightmare seemed more real. I could smell the scents of the desert. I could taste blood in my mouth."

"You ever tell anyone else before about this?" Dr. Munich wanted to know.

"You're the first."

"Ever read about what dreams symbolize?"

"Well, sure, of course. Everyone has. I've read about what it means to dream of escaping from something bad. I guess that dreaming I was being hanged and then the rope is cut or breaks and I escape could mean: I've broken free from something choking me, killing me."

"What do you think it is that you're breaking free from?"

"Many possibilities in my case. I broke free from a bad marriage. Very recently. I just arrived here to Nevada not long ago. Left my ex-wife back in Rhode Island."

"So, your nightmares started after you got married?"

"No, of course not. It's not that simple. The first time I can remember having the nightmare was when I was about 18. Around the time I got out of high school. And, no, I haven't had the nightmare steadily for the past 20 or so years. There have been many years when I didn't have the nightmare at all."

"If you don't think you're having nightmares as a result of your marriage, or your divorce, what are some other possibilities that you can think of?"

"Well, you're a shrink. I guess I should tell you. Never told anyone else. I pretty much lied to myself for a long, long time. About who I really am. Sexually, I mean. Since I first became aware of what sexual identity was, I convinced myself that I was straight."

"Around the time you were getting out of high school?"

"I guess so, yeah. You think I've had this nightmare because I didn't want to admit that I'm gay?"

He smiled reassuringly and said, "It's a possibility. I don't know. You may never know."

"I just would be happier if I could get the nightmare to stop. That's my bottom line."

"You might benefit from having regular visits."

"With you?"

"If you want, yes. After you're discharged today, you could make appointments to talk with me. It's up to you."



"So, I'm okay to be discharged today?"

"Sure. Nothing else is bothering you?"

"Well, I'm worried about not hearing from guys I used to work out with. At the Bullhead gym."

"None of your friends phoned you?"

"Well, I did get calls from some people I used to work with. In casino marketing. But, no. None of the guys I hung out with from the gym. That bothers me, yeah."

"I'm going to clear you to return to work. Your job involves covering the Bullhead/Laughlin area, right?"

"Yeah, I thought of that already. I can go back there easily. I'll find out why they didn't call me here in the hospital."

"I think going back there and looking for your friends will give you a sense of closure on this whole thing. That's good. But, you probably thought of this, too: You should probably expect to have dreams about that crane. The explosions. The bus being crushed."

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## **Cowboy Spy**

The FBI agent with the green eyes stopped by my hospital room after I was dressed and ready to leave. "I'll bet you're looking forward to getting out of here," Green said to me, smiling. I was surprised at first to see him, but I knew right away what he wanted.

"Why do I get the feeling that this is not a social visit?" I asked him directly.

"You're a smart guy, Danny. We just want you to apply some of that to help us," Green told me.

"Help you with what?"

"To help us find those responsible for that crane explosion that killed those people down in Laughlin."

"And because I work in the media, I've got the perfect cover, right? You want me to help spy for you guys?" I asked him, knowing the question would make him uncomfortable, which it did.

"Yeah, but I wouldn't call it that," he said. Then, he quickly added, "This is very important. You're in an excellent position to really help us."



"I do understand," I assured Agent Green. "And, I do agree to help you guys. Because I want this over with," I told him. And that's how the cowboy correspondent became the cowboy spy.

Agent Green explained that he would provide me with connections to law enforcement in Northern Arizona and in Laughlin. I was welcomed inside the cop community and rode with them as needed to track down leads. My cover was that I was preparing to do segments on the Desert News Channel about the work of local law enforcement, but the cops knew the real reason I was there among them. I was required to submit text summaries to the Las Vegas FBI office. My first summary involved my reconnection with a certain Navajo hitchhiker.

Report to Las Vegas FBI — October 4, 1991: Spoke with casino construction worker Vincent Muncote, Navajo male, 33, from Kayenta, AZ. Have had a friendship with Muncote for several months. Muncote was working in the tower beneath the construction crane on September 5, the day of the explosion. Told me he saw three males in the tower who did not belong there just before the explosion. Muncote could not provide any specifics about who they were or give descriptions of them. All he knew was that they were not construction workers and should not have been in the tower. He speculated that they might be tourists who had wandered up into the tower from the casino. Local law enforcement got the same information from four other construction workers who also were present in the tower on September 5, so this information from Muncote will serve to corroborate.

I left something of my report to the Las Vegas FBI office: I had the distinct feeling that somehow the three wise men were involved in the crane explosion on September 5. This was completely irrational, of course. Why should the FBI believe a guy with recurring nightmares about being hanged who happened to have a "distinct feeling" about Bullhead bodybuilders being involved with that September 5 crane explosion? I worried that Squirrel had been there. But, I couldn't imagine what Squirrel would have to do with exploding a construction crane?

I asked Vincent if he thought any of the three guys that he saw in the tower that morning was Asian. Vincent told me that he was too far away from them and couldn't be certain of their races except that he didn't see any dark skin. None of

the other eyewitness reports to local law enforcement gave any descriptions of the three guys seen in that tower that morning.

I also left out of my report something that Vincent had said to me. He told me that it was clear to him that I had been through quite a lot recently. He said to me that I had been so helpful to him and that he was grateful I had given him a ride to Bullhead so he could return to work. He then assured me that if I ever there was anything wrong with me and nobody could figure out how to help, I could ask him. His exact words, which intrigued me, were: "Some of my family members are healers. Not me. Maybe I could take you to one of my uncles. Yeah. Look under your hood. Find out if any of your spark plugs are misfiring."

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## Cross

Report to Las Vegas FBI, October 18, 1991: Accompanied county sheriff deputies to location about four miles east of Lake Havasu City, AZ. Response to 911 call earlier this date from two teenage hikers who saw a body. Positive ID of victim: Arturo Mundetti, Caucasian male, 28, from Bullhead City, AZ. Shot four times, execution style, in the chest.

I was completely unprepared to be riding with the Mojave County sheriff deputies when we found Arturo's body in the desert. As soon as we got out of the car, I recognized Arturo immediately.

I lost control. I dropped to my knees and started vomitting by the side of the unpaved road.



Arturo was such a good-looking man, so full of health and life when I last saw him! When I first met him, I remember thinking that Arturo looked like those Roman statues that celebrated the majesties of masculinity. Now, this once-strong and statuesque man was lying on his back in the desert. His eyes were closed and his head titled downward in a decline.

I couldn't take my eyes off of him!

Arturo had obviously been shot in the chest four times. I saw the entry wounds were precise—no more than a few millimeters apart—and they seemed to form a near-perfect cross above his heart. Executed! Who would have done this to Arturo? And why?

Arturo's handsome face was already sunburned. The 911 call from the teenage hikers was only a couple of hours before the sheriff deputies and I arrived. One estimated that Arturo probably had been shot just a few hours earlier.

Arturo's bright yellow T-shirt was stained deep red from considerable bleeding. He was wearing the same dark blue workout pants that he usually wore when he was my personal trainer at the Bullhead gym. His large feet were shoeless, as usual. He hated wearing anything on his feet because he had been a Marine and had to wear boots.

I couldn't stop crying at seeing Arturo like this. If only I had agreed to let him move in with me in Las Vegas, perhaps Arturo would still be alive.

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## Statue Worship

I can only imagine how desperate I sounded when I telephoned Dr. Jared Munich. He agreed to see me that same evening at 9:00. I knew that was impossible. He must have heard how fucked up I was. Dr. Munich was waiting inside his office near McCarran International Airport when I arrived at 8:56 p.m. that night. He opened the office door for me quickly when he saw through the windows that I had arrived.

"Just tell me what happened," he said gently and I felt immediate comfort when I heard his German accent.

I started sobbing. That seemed the only thing I could do. Dr. Munich walked over to where I was seated and put his right hand on my left shoulder, but said nothing. He just let me keep crying and crying there in that padded leather chair in his office. Eventually, I discovered that I could stop. Or, more accurately, I could no longer cry anymore that night.

"You feel like talking?" Dr. Munich asked me quietly.

"This feels like something more than grief," I heard a weakened version of my voice answer.

"Completely understandable, Danny. What you've experienced was very traumatic."

"Arturo executed. Out there. In the Arizona desert. Just can't believe it!"

Dr. Munich just sat there, listening to me.

"When Arturo lived with me—. It won't make sense now. It seems so fucked up. Even to me. Arturo would walk around naked. The trailer that we lived in was small. Two bedrooms, but small. When we were there together—. He would always be naked, Dr. Munich. He wanted me to see him like that. He enjoyed it that I watched him. He would grab his cock when he was standing in front of me. He would start rubbing his cock and balls right there. In front of me! He would enjoy it that I watched him get hard. He would taunt me. He'd say to me, "Yeah, you love it!" He would say, "You know you want my big cock, Danny! You know you want me, Danny."

Dr. Munich nodded as I spoke, but said nothing in response.



"Arturo was like one of those Roman statues. Perfect body. Excellent proportions. Yeah, and he did have a really big cock. He did. He really did. I never thought he was gay. He was always talking about having sex with different women. His favorite word was 'pussy.' He would say to me, 'I'm going to get some pussy.' Never said, 'I'm going to make love to a woman. It was always just 'pussy.' As if it was just a body part he needed. He had no use for women. He couldn't relate to women. Had nothing to say to them. He actually told me: 'Danny, I wish I didn't need women for sex.' He really said that. He really said that to me. Women just wanted Arturo for his Roman statue body. They just wanted him to fuck them. That's all they wanted. He was useless at conversation. Women didn't want him to talk to them. No way. They only wanted him to fuck them. What they wanted was his big Roman statue cock pumping them hard."

Dr. Munich broke his silence when he asked me, "Who wanted Arturo for sex, Danny?"

"Yeah, okay. I admit it. Arturo would walk around naked in front of me. Yeah, okay. He would practically shove that big cock into my mouth. He liked it. No, he loved it. When I opened my mouth. Yeah, okay. He would say to me, 'Yeah, Danny. You know you want to.' And then he would pull away quickly. Did that make him a gay bodybuilder?"

"How often did this happen between you and Arturo, Danny?"

"Whenever he wasn't out for 'pussy.' Whenever he and I were there together at night in that trailer in Bullhead. He needed me. I paid the rent. I bought the food. He would work himself up to a full erection. I paid the bills. I helped negotiate a payment schedule for some of his gambling debts. Because of my connections inside the casinos. Arturo would put that big cock near my mouth. He would wait for me to open my mouth. I helped him get better. I was helping him get over his gambling addiction. He would shake his erection back and forth in front of my lips."

Dr. Munich interrupted me. "Danny, did you and Arturo ever actually have sex together?"

"No, of course not," I told Dr. Munich. "It's the truth. No bullshit. His parents drove one time to Bullhead. To visit Arturo. They lived in L.A. His mother didn't like me. Right away. She's from Germany. Had an accent like yours, Dr. Munich. Born near Dresden, I think she said. Anyway, I heard her telling Arturo, 'You and your friend are faggots!' The way she said 'faggots' with that German accent—. She certainly tuned in to Arturo and me. Truth was her Roman statue son wanted sex like he never had. Arturo certainly chased 'pussy.' But what that big cock really wanted—. He couldn't say it in words. Arturo said it with his nudity. He was—. Arturo was sexually attracted to this 'faggot' named Danny Muncaster, who worshipped his Roman statue body."

Dr. Munich wanted to know: "Danny, since you and Arturo never had sex, did you have sexual fantasies about him?"

"Funny thing is: I can remember one time, yeah. One time. I remember waking up from a sexed-up dream I was having. I remember I was admiring his back and his shoulders. And then I fucked Arturo like I really wanted. And he loved it!"

Dr. Munich actually opened his mouth in surprise at my answer.

"That was only a sexual fantasy, Dr. Munich. A dream. One time. Just that one time. Then, I got involved with Squirrel. He's a gay bodybuilder. I met him at the Bullhead gym. I spent a lot of time with Squirrel. A lot of time. A lot of sex with Squirrel. The first time we did it right there in the shower at the Bullhead gym. Arturo was nearby training some guy. I felt such power. I was fucking Squirrel in that shower. But, I was thinking about Arturo. I was hoping Arturo would walk in. I was hoping Arturo would see me fucking Squirrel."

"Have you continued your sexual relationship with Squirrel?" Dr. Munich asked.

"Well, no. I moved up here to Las Vegas. Squirrel stayed in Bullhead. He told me that I was going to dump him. Squirrel said that. He was afraid I was going to dump him. Squirrel couldn't tell me, either. He couldn't say the words, 'I love you, Danny Muncaster.' But, for all his shortcomings in the interpersonal sense—. Well, Squirrel more than makes up for that physically and sexually with me."

"Danny, is Squirrel one of the people that you wanted to find in Bullhead after that crane tragedy?" Dr. Munich asked slowly and deliberately.

"Yeah, that's exactly it, Doc. Exactly it. Squirrel's nowhere to be found. No matter where I've looked. I'm supposed to be a spy for the Las Vegas FBI. Some spy, hunh? Squirrel's vanished. All my connections in Bullhead amount to zilch. I can't find Squirrel. I'm so pissed off. And so fucking horny. And then this happens. Arturo's executed in the fucking desert near Lake Havasu City."

"Danny, what do you intend to tell the Las Vegas FBI?" Dr. Munich wanted to know.

"I'll tell them everything. I mean, nothing about Arturo wagging his big cock in my direction. None of that matters to them. But, I realize I need to tell them about my relationship with Squirrel. I'm not objective. I don't even know whether that green-eyed agent thinks I'm objective."

"I can tell you something: That green-eyed agent doesn't care about your sexual orientation, Danny."

"The FBI is accepting of gays? That's what you're trying to tell me, Dr. Munich?"

"Danny, why should you be surprised to find out that there are gay men in the FBI?"

"That green-eyed guy?"

Dr. Munich did not answer me.

"Gorgeous eyes," I said to Dr. Munich. "That green-eye agent. But, I'm going to have to level with him about my being involved with Squirrel."

"The agent put that together already, Danny. You should know that. I'm sure that he wouldn't have asked you to 'be a spy,' as you call it—. The agent trusts you, Danny. I encourage you to just be patient. Your connections in Bullhead may lead you somewhere. And you can help the FBI."

"So, Dr. Munich, they think Squirrel is somehow involved in that crane tragedy?"

Again, Dr. Munich did not answer me.

"Okay. I'm sure I'll do my best to help. I will. I figured Squirrel was caught up in this, too. His not the brightest. Probably got persuaded by others. Who knows? I've just got to find Squirrel. I know that much."

"Danny, can you begin to think that Squirrel might have had something to do with Arturo's murder?" Dr. Munich asked me.

I remember that I felt very dizzy when I heard Dr. Munich ask me that question. I remember that I passed out right there in Dr. Munich's office that night.

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## Cowboy Swing

After unloading my emotions in a late-night visit to Dr. Munich, I returned to work at Desert News Network the next day. An intern who was looking to impress me had given me a joint just after I had started working there. The very last time I had smoked pot was nearly 15 years in the past, back in the days when I was still in graduate school. After work when I was back in my apartment, I found that intern's joint.

A glass of red wine and half a joint later, I felt very, very happy.

Sprawled out on my sofa, I dreamed that I was in a large television studio and watched the production of a music video.

I watched six men-Arturo, Squirrel, his other two wise men buddies, Agent Green, and Vincent-all costumed like cowboys standing in a straight line in front of multiple television cameras. The instrumental music track started playing. It was an uptempo country swing song I had never before heard.

The six cowboys really sold that song. Their faces showed overt expression and emotion, unlike what I had ever seen in real life during my interactions with them. I was amazed at how they all looked extremely sexy in their cowboy costumes, especially their tight blue jeans.



This was a gay cowboy's ultimate dream: Six sexy men with bulges in blue jeans.

I heard them sing the song's simple, silly lyrics in a boy band type of harmony: "I'm a gay cowboy. Yeah, yeah. Gay cowboy. Don't let anyone say I'm not. A gay cowboy. Yeah, yeah. Watch my buckle. Aren't I hot?"



The six singing cowboys danced like the Rockettes-standing in a straight line with their arms on each others' shoulders and alternately kicking each leg and their cowboy boots high in the air.

Some of the six singing cowboys had an individualized portion of the silly, yet meaningful, lyrics to sing in a close up while the others sang backup. Arturo: "Aren't I drop dead sexy?" Singing Cowboys: "Gay cowboy, yeah, yeah." Squirrel: "You just wanna use me." Singing Cowboys: "Gay cowboy, yeah, yeah." Agent Green: "I'm the one who needs you!" Singing Cowboys: "Gay cowboy, yeah, yeah." Vincent: "Take me while you've got me!" Singing Cowboys: "Gay cowboy, yeah, yeah."

Then, the six singing cowboys paired off and danced man-to-man in a homoerotic cowboy swing-bumping and grinding, rubbing hands on crotches, pinching nipples, and French kissing. As the song reached a cold ending, all of the six singing cowboys were in a straight line again and each in succession grabbed his cowboy hat and holds it high in the air.

I watched as the six singing cowboys carried an uncovered pine coffin as the instrumental track continued in the background. One of the cameras lifted off the ground quickly on a crane, and then swooped down to reveal the contents of that open coffin.



It was me in that pine box, naked. My hands were bound in front of me by rope. There was a noose tightly wrapped around my neck. But, that rope had obviously been cut just above the 13th coil.

My eyes were closed. Was I dead because I was hanged? Or was I merely asleep and dreaming this? I had a peaceful look on my face, but showed no signs that I was alive. Had these cowboys cut the rope in time to rescue me? If they had rescued me, why were they carrying me in that pine box?

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## Lost in Peaceful Dreaming

After seeing him dressed as a cowboy in my music video dream, I was not able to look at the green-eyed FBI agent the same way again. He had become someone I found very attractive. When he phoned me to stop by his Las Vegas office, I jumped at the opportunity.

He sat down next to me in the Las Vegas FBI office conference room and opened up a large folder containing many photographs. "What I wanted to show you, Danny, are some photos we got through our surveillance." I looked into his deep green eyes to see if my gaydar was working regarding him. The implication from Dr. Munich was that this handsome, muscular agent was gay. He smiled at me, but pointed to the black and white photographic prints on the conference room table.

"Where were these taken?" I asked him.

"Downtown. Fremont Street," he answered.

"What do you want me to look for in these?" I wanted to know.

"See if you recognize anybody you know in them."

I wondered what he was up to, so I looked carefully at several photographs. I kept looking back into his eyes and then at the photographs.

"You don't see anybody that you recognize, Danny?"

What I was intent on was trying to figure out what this green-eyed agent would look like without any clothes on. He looked like he had a great chest under that crisp white shirt and that too-dark suit jacket. I imagined that his biceps were big as well. He looked especially sexy when he frowned at me.

He repeated, "You don't see anybody that you recognize, Danny?"

I switched back to looking at the photographs on the conference room table because it was obvious that was what he wanted me to do.

I heard him sigh in frustration. Then he said, "These are prints from video cameras on Fremont Street. Six successive days, Danny. You don't see the same people in front of that cowboy bar in several of these prints?"

I looked into his eyes again. I figured he would be a great fuck. I imagined that he probably would be very vocal. He probably would shout out when he ejaculated.

"Are you even here with me, Danny" he finally asked me.

I looked back at the photographs and shook my head to indicate no.

"You're not here?" he wanted to know. "What's wrong with you?"

"I'm here, yeah," I answered. "Nothing's wrong. I just meant I don't see anybody in these photos that I recognize."

I looked closely at his face, especially his lips. I wondered if he was a good kisser. I imagined what it would feel like to have my cock in his mouth.

He frowned at me and started gathering up the photographic prints. "Okay, Danny," he said. "You should go back to work. I'll give you a call if we find anything else I need you to look at, okay?"

I kept studying his mouth and just nodded.

On my way out of the Las Vegas FBI office, I felt that I had been successful. I had completely diffused the situation with him. I did feel a strong sexual attraction to him, but my gaydar was insufficient to tell if he would be someone who would want me in the same way that I wanted him. But, more importantly, I had used my sexual attraction to him as a screen to hide what was really going on in that conference room.



Numerous photographs that the green-eyed FBI agent had shown me included clear shots of Squirrel and the other two wise men in front of the same cowboy bar on Fremont Street. I did not want the green-eyed FBI agent to know what I had discovered. I wanted him sexually, yes. But, more importantly, I had succeeded in concealing from the green-eye FBI agent that I clearly recognized the three wise men in those Fremont Street photographs.

I began to hang out on Fremont Street across from that cowboy bar. I would go there on successive evenings after 9:00 p.m. I accepted that I would start showing up in the surveillance videos taken on Fremont Street. But, when I failed to identify anyone I recognized in the Fremont Street surveillance, I felt that I had successfully deflected the attention of the green-eyed FBI agent.

On the sixth night, Friday, December 6, 1991, my patience paid off. I saw Squirrel entering that Fremont Street cowboy bar at 10:30 p.m. I had to be more patient and wait for him to leave the bar, which he finally did at around Midnight. I watched him walk in the direction of East Charleston Boulevard, where there were parking garages. I followed Squirrel at a discreet distance and saw him walking into one parking garage. I hurried to catch up with him and ran up the three flights of stairs that I knew Squirrel had taken. I saw him get into his car. It was a blue VW bug from the late 1970s with Nevada tags. I watched him drive away as I remained hidden beside a stationwagon.

The next night, Saturday, December 7, 1991, I returned to that Fremont Street cowboy bar after 9:00 p.m. once again. When I saw Squirrel enter the cowboy bar at around 11:00 p.m., I returned to the parking garage on East Charleston, where

I had parked my car. I drove through that entire parking garage until I finally located Squirrel's VW bug. I found an empty parking space nearby, parked my car, and just waited. Shortly after Midnight, I watched Squirrel return to his VW bug. I dropped down in the seat so that Squirrel wouldn't see me waiting. As soon as he started his VW bug, I started my car, and poked me head up to watch him. As Squirrel drove toward the exit, I followed him in my car. There was one other car in front of mine, so I figured Squirrel would not see me two cars back.

I tailed Squirrel as he drove on West Charleston heading away from downtown Las Vegas in a westbound direction. There was sufficient traffic so that I could hang back and not look obviously like I was following his VW bug. I saw him turning left on South Decatur in a southbound direction. I made sure that I kept close enough to him, but yet far enough away so that he wouldn't get the chance to see me.

He pulled into an apartment complex that was next door to a 24-hour gym named Las Vegas Fitness Center. I knew right away what to do. The next morning, I returned to Las Vegas Fitness Center and signed up for a gym membership. I started using that gym after work each night even though it meant driving across town from where my apartment was located near UNLV.

On Thursday, December 12, 1991, I was using the large heated Jacuzzi at Las Vegas Fitness Center after working out. There were two or three other people in the pool at the time. I saw Squirrel walk in wearing a tight pair of red swim trunks. He saw me immediately and looked stunned first, then happy. Of course, he came and sat next to me in the pool.

I whispered to him quietly, "Hey, cowboy, when did you move from Bullhead?"

He looked very happy that I had been the first one to say anything. "Been here a little while," he answered. "Never saw you at this gym before."

"No, just joined," I told him. "There's an advertising trade arrangement with this gym, so I thought I would sign up here. You're looking really good, Squirrel."

He then told me that he wondered what had happened to me and reminded me that I was supposed to call him whenever I was in Bullhead. I told him that I had been injured in that September crane explosion because I was there shooting photographs on Casino Drive. His eyes revealed that he had not known. I began to wonder what possible connection Squirrel could have to that crane explosion.

"I was unconscious for awhile after the crane fell onto that bus. Something hit me. From the bus. I woke up here in Las Vegas in the hospital. My memory of that is still very fuzzy," I lied to him.

"You have amnesia?" Squirrel wanted to know.

"Well, yeah," I answered, making it seem more mysterious. "I remember you. I remember me. Other things I don't remember."

"You remember us, right?" Squirrel asked. I could see the horniness on his face that I had grown to know and love.

"Well," I said, "I don't know. Do you think maybe you and I can get out of here? Find a bed somewhere nearby? Maybe you can help refresh my memory?"

Squirrel reached under the water and grabbed me through my swim trunks, not caring whether anyone else saw him. "I think you know my answer," Squirrel said.

We were inside Squirrel's apartment next door real quickly. And then we were naked in his bed, and I was inside Squirrel real quickly.

Sex with Squirrel that night was unlike any I had experienced before. Missing him and longing for him made me feel so especially attracted to him. He behaved as if there had been an intense unmet physical need that he had for me. When we finally were in his bed together, naked and uninhibited, we were the only two people on the entire planet. He finally fell asleep in my arms and just watched him there, knowing that the hours I had just spent with him would have a special place in my memory forever.

I left Squirrel's apartment just after sunrise. It was Friday, December 13, 1991 and I felt nonetheless very lucky. When I got back to my apartment, I phoned into work that I was sick and couldn't come in that day. I showered and then got back into my car to go back to Squirrel's apartment on South Decatur.

Squirrel did not respond to my pressing the button at the front gate to ring his apartment. I figured that he was either in the shower or still sleeping. So, I waited until someone else arrived 10 or 15 minutes later and followed them through the front gate. When I got to Squirrel's apartment, I knocked on his door. He didn't answer, so I waited a couple of minutes and knocked again.

His courtyard apartment was on the end of the fifth floor, but it was around a corner, so no other apartment door or window faced his. I figured I could stand there knocking for awhile because I knew that the location of his door prevented anyone from having a direct line of sight to see me there.

I grew concerned after several minutes had passed and yet he did not answer my knocking. The window in his living room had curtains, but there was enough of an opening in those curtains that I could peer into his apartment while standing outside by his front door. So, I carefully leaned into the window and cupped my hands near my eyes to reduce the glare from the sunlight and looked through the opening in his living room curtains.

I saw him. Squirrel was resting naked on his leather sofa. I looked at his crotch and wondered how he could not have heard me there knocking on his door. Although it was dark in his living room, I noticed that Squirrel's eyes were closed. His arms were at his side. He looked like he was asleep. I went back to the door and knocked a little louder than before. Then I returned to look inside his apartment through the opening in his living room curtains. Only then did I notice Squirrel's chest. I had seen this before!



Squirrel obviously had what looked like four bullet wounds in his chest!! There was no blood. Just four wounds. But, those four wounds on Squirrel's chest formed the exact same pattern-a cross-that I had seen on Arturo Mundetti's body when he was executed near Lake Havasu City.

I felt like I would soon pass out, but everything in me said to keep alert. I looked at Squirrel's door and I could see no signs of a forced entry. It just looked like an apartment door would look if it were locked. I went back to look again into Squirrel's apartment, just to convince myself that I had not imagined it all. Squirrel was still there reclining on that leather sofa, looking like he was lost in peaceful dreaming. So, I did not disturb him.

I discreetly left the apartment complex, convincing myself that I got away without being seen. Only when I was driving down South Decatur did I begin to realize the full implications of what I had just seen. I do not know what kept me from losing consciousness. Maybe I had grown stronger because of all the shit I had experienced. Maybe it was the high adrenaline level in me.

I drove directly and without distraction to the Las Vegas FBI office. When I arrived at the front desk, the receptionist buzzed me in because I had been there so many times before.

The green-eyed agent was on the telephone when I arrived at his desk. He acknowledged me with a nod and then quickly ended his phone call.

"What's up, Danny?" he asked me.

"Let's talk somewhere quiet," I replied.



The young FBI agent stood up and I realized again what an excellent, athletic body this man had. Wow. And those amazing eyes of his! I felt certain it was the high stress I was under at the moment, but I knew it was very possible that I could give this gorgeous man a blow job before the afternoon was over. He pointed to a nearby door and I walked ahead of him.

I arrived at the door and waited for him to open it. I looked back at him and realized he was just standing there looking at me from two feet away. "What?" I asked him. He walked up to the door and opened it, gesturing for me to go inside. His after shave lotion was making me hornier. It was a small room with only a couple of chairs and a floor lamp. I went inside and he followed me, then closed the door.

"What's going on, Danny. You're acting kind of weird," he said to me.

I sat down in the nearest chair. At that point, I realized that I had to hold onto my head or I might fall down. I leaned forward in the chair, rested my elbows on my knees, and held my head in my hands. When I exhaled, it was so intense that I was sure that my breath could have cut through five or six floors beneath us.

He sat down in the other chair, which was only a few inches away from me. "Talk to me," was all he said. I could inhale his scent all day. It was awesomely masculine and suited him perfectly. It was a little bit of his sweat blended with a subtle hint of after shave lotion.

I just blurted it out: "The guy who is nicknamed Squirrel. Anthony Mungcal. He's dead."

"Okay. How do you know this?" he asked me.

"Truth is: I spent last night in his bed. With him. We, you know--."

He interrupted me, and he said, "I know that you and he are gay. So what?"

I looked into those tantalizingly green eyes of his. I just wanted him sexually right then and there in that small room. I knew I could give him the most unforgettable orgasm he had ever had. I wanted to satisfy him just to show him what he could be experiencing if only he were with me.

"I spent last night in his bed," I repeated. "I left this morning early. Around sunrise. Squirrel was asleep. I drove to my apartment near UNLV and showered.

I called into work and told them I was sick. Then, I drove back to his apartment. He was--."

I couldn't finish the sentence. My throat constricted. I didn't want to start crying in front of this hyper-masculine FBI agent. I was having trouble breathing.

"Don't hold back. Don't worry," he said in an unusually reassuring way.

I forced myself to sit up straight. I forced myself to breathe deeply.

"He was shot four times in the chest," I blurted out. "Execution style. I'm no forensics expert, but--. Looked exactly like the bullet wounds I saw on Arturo's chest down in Havasu. Exactly the same. I saw Squirrel there. Inside his apartment. Door was locked. I couldn't get in. He was face up, naked, on his leather sofa. Four bullet wounds. Exactly like Arturo."

"When was this, Danny? And where?"

"I just drove here from there. It happened this morning. Apartment complex on South Decatur. Next door to that 24-hour gym. Fifth floor. Apartment E-55."

The green-eyed agent got up and started to leave the small room. "Wait for me here, Danny," he said in that same usually reassuring way. I watched him leave the small room with a swagger of utter confidence and certainty, like a quarterback who had just won another Super Bowl. I wondered what this man would look like without that damn dark suit. I wondered if the first time seeing him naked would be more thrilling for me to see him from behind, or, would it be better to see his cock and balls. He left the door open. He trusted me. That made me feel real good.

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## **Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas**

Living in Las Vegas during the holidays at the end of the year proved to be a little strange for me. Some of the casinos apparently refused to change their marketing or décor to allow for wrapped presents, Santa Claus, wreaths and what not. Others went big with lots of Christmas trees and snowmen—a very odd sight in the Mojave Desert when the temperature is 60 degrees. I kept my afternoon appointment with Dr. Munich on December 20, 1991. He tried to help me realize it was okay for me to grieve for Squirrel, who had been killed just a week ago now. My goal was to keep busy at work and try to think about the promise of better things coming in the new year, 1992.



Desert News Network produced the obligatory "good news" pieces for the holiday season. I was guilty of adding to the festive mood by focusing my producing on hot issues like community leaders and their charitable efforts while leaving freeway accidents and arrests of hookers for the local Las Vegas news programs.

On Monday, December 23, I felt especially lonely as I sat in my apartment listening to some old school jazz before going to work in the morning. It was 13 years ago that I got married. December 23, 1978, a date that will live in infamy. My divorce from Frances had become final on April 1, 1991, April Fool's Day. Appropriate. I kept the jazz playing in the background and picked up the telephone dialed eleven digits connecting me to my old telephone number in Rhode Island.

Frances answered on the second ring. I could tell immediately she has not been sleeping. She must have stayed up all night. Some things never change.

"Hi, it's me. Calling long distance."

"Danny! Where are you?"

"Nevada."

"What happened to California?"

"Well, people say it's gonna fall into the Pacific very soon. The 'Big One' hasn't happened yet. I just never made it home to see any of my family. I'm here in the Mojave Desert instead."

"I hoped you would call just to let me know where you were, Danny."

"Well, you were the one who said you wanted us to remain friends."

"I did say that, didn't I? Just never thought you would leave me, that's all."

"Uh. . .I just had this feeling to call you. Don't know what else to say here."

"You left some things behind here. You left a white work shirt down in the basement. You were doing laundry and must have forgotten it."

I chuckled at how trivial this sounded to me.

"It was not washed."

I waited for Frances to deliver the punchline.

"I refused to wash it, Danny."

"Uh, am I supposed to guess as to why?"

"Don't be mean to me. That shirt. . .carried your scent. I mean, it reminded me of you. Your deodorant. Your sweat. You. That's why I refused to wash it, Danny."

I could only sigh like I always did when she got to me over something so simple.

"I wanted to retain it as is."

"Retain?"

"So it would continue to smell like you. I wore it to bed. Instead of my nightgown."

"Oh. Look, I. . ."

"Until it lost your scent. I had to throw it away finally. That was it. No more shirt. Gone."

"What can I say?" was the best I could think of as a reply to her madness.

"Okay. Don't worry about it, Danny. Forget it. You know, I'm not sure how to tell you this, so let me just do it, all right?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Fluffy is dead," she said quickly. "She died at the veterinarian's office."

My breath was gone. I coughed and tried to sit up straight and breathe deeper. "No. She was a perfectly healthy cat! How did she die?"

"Well, after you left, I switched to a cheaper cat food because I'm afraid I won't be able to support myself on just my salary alone. Anyway, Fluffy started losing weight really fast, so my father helped me take her to the vet to see what was wrong with her."

"And then what happened?"

"The vet said he couldn't figure out what caused it. Fluffy had developed some serious liver damage and was suffering a great deal."

"Goddamn it, what were you doing at the time?"

"Fluffy wouldn't eat any of the new cat food I had bought for both her and for my cat, Bow."

"Your cat? Has it come to this now?"

"I'm sorry Danny. Fluffy was your cat. She belonged to you. She reminded me of you. Bow is mine. She always was since you wrapped her up in the bright red bow for me when we got both kittens."

I was unable to respond. Deep in my stomach, I felt a muted pain.

She continued to speak, "Bow ate the cheaper cat food without any problems. Fluffy would throw up whenever she ate it, so. . . Anyway, the vet had to put Fluffy to sleep. That's all. I can't help but think that maybe if you hadn't left me, maybe Fluffy would not have died. Maybe you should have taken her with you."

I started to cry into the telephone. "No, that's not possible," I said as my throat felt like it was closing tightly. "Fluffy was so healthy before I left!"

I put my head down on the telephone desk in my kitchen, while holding the receiver. Silly little memories. Those can sneak up on you the easiest. They can hurt you quicker, more unexpectedly than the important stuff. Two small black kittens. Fluffy and Bow. Furry little creatures I loved like I had loved no other pets. Into the receiver, I told Frances, "You didn't let this happen! This is awful."

"I know how you must feel, Danny."

I swallowed hard and cleared my throat. "You know, I truly assumed you could keep running the household properly. I signed the house over to you. It's a nice house. It's all yours. You're all set. You're thirty-six years old with a Ph.D. You let this happen? I can understand how you would feel toward me. But, how could you allow a defenseless little cat just get sick and die like that? Were you trying to get back at me?"

"No. I said I was sorry. I told you that already. There was nothing I could do."

"Not good enough," I told her. "You know how I feel about animals." I tried not to lose my composure completely--as if that would matter to her. "No," I said while crying and talking, "You couldn't let things slip like this! We are responsible, you know? Animals are not. Cannot defend themselves. From suffering. We can. It's our job. No matter what we're going through. No matter what."

"I've been in no condition for that, Danny."

"Always passing the buck."

"I tried to kill myself," she announced without emphasis.

I did not respond. I wanted to hear her side of the story that I already know enough about.

She said, "I was trying to see what would happen if I stopped taking Prozac."

"What a sense of humor you have, Frances."

She continued, "Nobody jokes about killing themselves, Danny. They should always be taken seriously. I was having new floor tile put in the pink bathroom. Because of the stain I made on the floor that night I threw up. A permanent stain that wouldn't wash out. No matter how hard I tried. I cut my left wrist with a knife that some worker left behind."

I remained silent.

"I stopped taking Prozac temporarily. Wanted to make it on my own. That's what I think happened. Must've been when I stopped taking it. Made me suicidal. Danny, are you there?"

"Yes," is all I said.

"Anyway, I cut into my left wrist. Being right handed and all. I didn't know exactly how to do this," she chatted on without stopping. "Remember I had originally talked about drowning myself in Narragansett Bay? Well, cutting my wrists seemed quicker. Actually doing it was really scary. The blood was so red. Dripped all over the new floor tiles. They were so shiny and white. The guy installing them had left behind a knife. I used it. What a mess I made. Just like before. Now those goddamn floor tiles must be replaced all over."

Tears filled my eyes again as I heard her voice. The voice with which I am the most familiar of anyone else's in the world. Saying such things. Terrible things. Although I had already gone through the initial shock of learning about her suicide attempt, the details were too painful. Especially hearing them from her directly. Especially hearing this after she told me that she killed my cat. She must be exaggerating. Like she always does. Just to shake me up. To punish me. Like she always did. To hurt me. Because I dumped her.

"So I called this guy, Jordan. A graduate student of mine. He worked as an emergency medical tech for an ambulance company. It was after midnight, but he came over anyway. Helped bandage up my wrist. I was okay. Just a few stitches did the trick. Now Jordan is renting a room here in this house so I can have some extra income."

"I should never have called you, Frances. I realize that now quite clearly."

"Danny, listen to me. After this wrist thing, I got a new psychiatrist, Dr. Brown."

"What do I care?"

She kept talking: "This psychiatrist emphasizes talk therapy. You got what you wanted. Talk therapy for me. Isn't that what you wanted for me?" Frances

sounded giddy now as she talked faster. "So you won. You finally won. How do you feel about that?"

"How long were you hospitalized?" I asked her.

There is a long pause on her end.

"You still there? Frances?"

She says nothing, but I can hear how fast she was breathing.

"You were hospitalized, weren't you? They don't just let suicide attempts walk in and then leave with just a few bandages and a word of warning about self-respect, right?"

She said nothing.

"Okay, well. I gotta go back to my home planet," I announced with fake ceremony.

"Jason said that I should stay on Prozac," she finally said. She sounded like a young girl trying to explain her way out of a tough situation. "But he requires me to be in talk therapy. Or else he won't sign my prescriptions."

"Don't wanna answer me, huh? Okay, have it your way. As always. I suppose you expect me to ask a follow-up question. Okay, fine. Who is Jason?"

"Jason Brown, my new psychiatrist. And, there's good news," she said, picking up her mood too quickly. "Now I can get pregnant! Jordan and I have talked about having his baby."

"What? Your new psychiatrist?"

"No, I said Jordan, not Jason."

She was abusing me good here. Real good. Like always. I wanted her to know I saw what she is doing. Like always. "Who is Jordan? Oh, yeah, that's right. Isn't he in that teen group, you know, from Boston? The New Kids on the Block? You're sleeping with some teenage girl's idea of a man? Real nice, Frances."

She ignored my rebuttals. Like always. "Jordan Tirrell, my graduate student. He moved in. I want to have a baby. Jordan said he would consider it. Now that I will be coming off Prozac. What do you think? This shouldn't make you jealous."

By now I was convinced that I was going to explode. My rage was the only thing that kept me breathing. It consumed me and urged me to stay focused on

Frances. I would not let her emerge victorious in this telephone conversation with me.

"Are you there, Danny? I don't know why you didn't want to have a baby with me. I just don't know why. I would have taken care of our baby. Really I would. I want to be a mother. I want a baby now. Now that you're gone. Now that I'm coming off Prozac. I'm all alone and I need somebody! I need somebody to take care of."

I watched this all unfold, looking at this odd, out-of-control situation as if from a distance. I heard the man in that kitchen talking into that telephone with my voice. He was talking to the woman who had once been his wife. I heard him get really ticked off her. His voice sounded totally stressed. I heard him say, "Friends at the TV station told me. About you. Hospitalized again. Whitney Medical. Don't bullshit me. I know. I fuckin' know everything! You can't hide this."

Frances did not respond.

"Here's the deal, okay?" this man in his kitchen said in a failing voice. "Have a baby if you want. Have a pterodactyl if that's what you want," I heard him talking faster into the telephone. "Have sex with any man foolish enough to let you can get your claws into him!" I heard him crying and watched him wipe his nose with the sleeve of his shirt that he had chosen to wear to work this morning. "Just keep lying to each new man," he cried into the telephone, utterly lost now, "about how *his* cock is the biggest you've ever seen in your damn whole life! Each new guy will believe your lies, I promise. His cock is the center of his life. He will not be able to resist your lies about his cock."

I saw how hard it was for for this man to keep talking there in his kitchen, yet he continued with certain bravery. "But, no more phone calls. No more! Ever. We must file our taxes jointly this April. But, afterwards, there's no reason to talk. Ever. You can even kill yourself if you want. Step out in the downtown traffic. Or drown yourself in the Atlantic. I don't give a bloody fuck anymore what you do."

I watched the man in that kitchen from my vantage point somewhere in some other, nearby dimension. He slammed down the telephone receiver and sat at that telephone desk with his mouth open, trying to breathe. He stood up and walked around his kitchen, laboriously drawing air in and letting it out too quickly. I heard him say to himself finally, "And have yourself a merry little Christmas *now*."

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## Of Cowboys and Bodybuilders

For me, the new year 1992 began with my grieving. If you lose someone close at the end of a year in the midst of the holiday season festivities, you feel like you have landed here from some other planet. None of the good cheer makes any sense to you. The songs that are intended to spark happiness and fond memories of holidays past only ignite your disgust. But, you get over it. You must. Eventually.

If not, you will become miserable like some darkly loathsome character created by Charles Dickens. And if that happens to you, nobody ever will want to spend time with you. In turn, you will be lonelier than you ever thought possible. So, get over it. You must. Life continues. So must you.

These things I told myself over and over. And eventually I believed what I told myself. That's how it's supposed to work. I knew that I had to move on and learn to live my life even though Squirrel and Arturo had both been brutally taken from this life. I came to understand that I would never be able to replace them in my life.



I also grew to believe that having lost both of them like that was something that only happens in fiction. Yet, my loss was a clearly real experience that had changed my life forever. I ventured into the world--real or imaginary--of gay cowboys and gay bodybuilders. And, I lived to tell.

The FBI could not find any evidence linking the Arizona murder of Arturo with the Nevada murder of Squirrel. I knew with utter certainty that both men were killed by the same person or persons. The fatal wounds were made with different weapons, but to me, that was irrelevant. I was sure that the green-eyed FBI agent in Las Vegas shared my perceptions about these two murders, although he never told me so. He debriefed me in Las Vegas on the case findings in 1992 and that was it. I wanted to stay in contact with this man, although not for professional reasons. But, instead, I convinced myself that he was straight and just walked away from him.

I had only two or three subsequent sessions in 1992 with Dr. Jared Munich as I gradually stopped needing to have my head shrunk. He told me to keep going to the gym regularly as I did and that the rest would take care of itself. If psychiatrists would prescribe gym memberships more than Prozac or whatever other new drug is trendy, they could change the world.



Although I love Las Vegas, and always will, I could not live and work there indefinitely because of certain memories I had of cowboys and bodybuilders. I'm sure that I will always feel especially attracted to those particular kind of men because of all I have experienced. But, I ended up trading life in the Mojave Desert for life in the Sonoran Desert. Phoenix, Arizona became home for the new and improved Danny Muncaster.

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## Changes



Immediately after I relocated in 1992 from Las Vegas to Phoenix, I grew a beard to change my look. The guy who had been "the cowboy correspondent" was no more.

I did not even appear on television at all in Phoenix. My new life in the Valley of the Sun was quieter and afforded me the opportunity to settle down and grow up. I was free of the hanging cowboy nightmares that once had haunted me. And, I felt that I was attaining *hozho* slowly, but surely.

I left the television news business and Desert News Network behind in Las Vegas, so I had to start over and find other work to support myself. For about a year or so, I worked in gyms in Phoenix selling memberships. That gave me the chance to work out, keep myself in shape, feel good inside, and put food on the table.





The guys who frequented the gyms started looking younger and younger to me. So, as much as I would find myself attracted to some of them, and yes, sometimes I would jerk off late at night at my apartment fantasizing about sex with the young studs, I avoided any and all entanglements with gym rats in Phoenix. I remained solo for awhile, steering clear of any relationship with anybody--gay cowboy, gay bodybuilder, whatever.

By 1995, the year I turned 45, because I knew how to live inexpensively in Phoenix, I was able to make a modest living as a freelance writer as long as I kept working at a gym or two selling memberships.

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## After Oklahoma City

When the Oklahoma City bombing took 168 lives in April 1995, the explosion tore through the heartland of America. Life was never the same for many people after Oklahoma City 1995, including me. I was a thousand miles away from Oklahoma City when that bombing took place, yet in early 1996 I was called to Washington, DC to testify before a Senate subcommittee that wanted answers only I could provide.

The submittee was exploring a broad subject defined by two words that were seldom used together before the 1990s in the United States: **domestic terrorism**.

Some people want to live in a world where such a phrase does not belong in the American vocabulary. I understand that kind of wishful thinking. I had my own variety of wishful thinking based upon geography. I looked upon my life in the desert the way Marty Robbins sang of it--an innocent, fantasy view of life in the Southwest that I feel certainly deserves to be real:



*I want a ten-gallon Stetson, and a horse that bears  
my brand,  
A thousand head of cattle on a great big piece of land.*

*I want a ranch in Arizona, where they never sleep inside.  
I wanna gaze at the moon and stars above.  
I wanna learn to rope and ride.*

The Senator from Arizona interrupted my unsuccessful attempt to escape into cowboy music. "I think we deserve answers, Mr. Muncaster--if only for all those people from Pheonix who were killed in that bus in 1991."

Ah, that bus in 1991. I understood clearly that I would never be able to shake my involvement in that terrible day in Laughlin when a construction crane crushed a bus filled with Phoenix tourists. Now, it had become a federal case, literally.

Federal law enforcement officials started connecting the dots about what they called "underground activity" in small towns in Arizona and Nevada in the early 1990s leading up to the April 1995 bombing of the Murrah Building in Oklahoma City. Their leads pointed them to men in Mojave County, Arizona and Clark County, Nevada who were into guns. Federal law enforcement agents uncovered details about men in Bullhead, Kingman and Las Vegas who were a little whacked-out. Some were genuinely extreme right-wingers bent on overthrowing the United States government with an armed militia. Others were hapless and underemployed young men who followed aggressive alpha males on various violent quests of the day.

I was called to Washington, DC to testify because the Las Vegas FBI had files that included my name. I photographed that 1991 casino bus tragedy and later did my best to help FBI agents identify possible local suspects. However, despite best efforts, no suspects were ever charged in the casino bus tragedy. The execution-style murders of two particular men I had known--a man I called Squirrel, and, my former personal trainer, Arturo Mundetti--remained unsolved. I was compelled to go to Washington, DC and relive many memories and emotions that I had hoped I could keep buried.

The Senator from Arizona told me that he connected the dots, too. We met on the first Friday after the New Year's Day holiday. It was January 5, 1996. He said, "This subcommittee has called this special meeting to find out what happened back in 1991. You, apparently, are one who knows for sure because you were there. You saw things. You spent time within that subculture of bodybuilders in Bullhead. And, I want answers, Mr. Muncaster."

Answers. I honestly did not believe I had any answers. I had many unanswered questions, too.

"Senator, I mean no disrespect whatsoever," I assured him as the television cameras framed me in the center of the shot they are capturing live. How strange I felt to once again be on television. "The men I knew where not in any way involved in domestic terrorism," I said loud and clear.

"You were there in Bullhead City, Arizona and Laughlin, Nevada starting in late 1990. Is that correct, Mr. Muncaster?"

"Yes, Senator. That is true."

"You spent time with these domestic terrorists in and around Bullhead and Laughlin, Mr. Muncaster. You saw how they lived, and what their actions led to: The death of those 23 people from Phoenix on the bus that morning."

"No, Senator that's not entirely accurate."

He was extraordinarily angry with me and practically shouted at me: "You took photographs of what happened, Mr. Muncaster. The bus! That construction crane crashing down on the casino bus!"

"Yes, Senator. I was there in 1991. I did shoot that roll of film."

"What, then, is your problem, Mr. Muncaster?"

"Senator, all I am saying is: The guys I met in the Bullhead in 1991 were not domestic terrorists. That's elevating them to a status--."

The Senator from Arizona pounded his gavel angrily now. I couldn't believe I was pissing off a United States Senator on live television.

"Elevating them? What would you call them, Mr. Muncaster?" the Senator from Arizona wanted to know.

"Sir, I don't really know. Bad guys. Drugged-out losers, I guess. But, not domestic terrorists," was my answer. How lame I thought that sounded!

"They used drugs, Mr. Muncaster?"

"Yes. Steroids," was my answer.

"Can you see why I am saying this, Mr. Muncaster? These guys used drugs! You are testifying that they used drugs. And their drug use was followed by violence. We already know that they blew up a construction crane and it crashed down on a casino bus, killing 23 people. And this is not domestic terrorism?"

"Drugs, yes, senator. I just wouldn't use the phrase domestic terrorism, no."

"I find you to be very trying, Mr. Muncaster. Very trying."

"Senator, all I'm trying to say is this: The guys whom I hung out with used sports performance enhancing drugs. Some also used a little marijuana. But, nobody

knows for sure if these same guys were actually involved in blowing up that crane in 1991."

"And you're an expert on this?"

"No, senator, of course not. I was there. I want to help you. That's why I'm here. Unfortunately, the people who blew up that crane and killed all the people on the casino bus from Phoenix were never caught."

The Senator from Arizona leaned forward and said, "And you, Mr. Muncaster, think that your drug-using bodybuilder pals were completely innocent?"

"Honestly, Senator. I don't know for sure. I was in the hospital and unconscious for several days because I was injured when that bus from Phoenix exploded."

"This isn't about you. Mr. Muncaster. I know you've suffered. Don't think for one minute that I, or anyone else here for that matter, wants to minimize your suffering. We know you had some memory loss. We know that two close friends of yours were brutally murdered shortly thereafter. We know all these things. But, there's a larger issue now. And this subcommittee is going to find out what happened back then. I want to know what you know, Mr. Muncaster. Could I be any clearer than that?"

I decided to just remain silent to respectfully let the Senator from Arizona have the last word. No other witnesses were called before he adjourned the subcommittee meeting until the following week.

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## White Out

For my command performance before a subcommittee of the United States Senate, I stayed in a downtown Washington, DC hotel near the FBI headquarters. The stress of having to appear before well-known Senators was so high in me that I did not feel like doing any tourist things while I was in the District of Columbia. I just wanted a hotel near one of the Metrorail stations so that I could get to the subcommittee hearings easily. I found a gym just down the street from my hotel, and I told myself to be satisfied to split my time between that gym, the hotel, and the subcommittee hearings on Capitol Hill.

But, after my first appearance was over, I was unprepared when Saturday night arrived. I had already worked out that day at the gym. I had a light lunch at the hotel. Now what?

I went to one of the hotel bars, but I did not find the atmosphere very inviting. There were other out-of-towners like me, all of whom were looking for diversion and escape. So obvious. So pathetic. So, I asked one of the younger bartenders about recommending a place where gay men go on a Saturday night in Washington, DC. Without hesitation, the young bartender said two words: "Navy Yard."

I hailed a cab and once I was inside, repeated the two words to the driver, who was a Middle Eastern man. He asked, "Which bar?" I was stumped! The young bartender made it sound like that was the actual name of the gay bar. I realized what I had to tell the driver: "The bar where you drop most guys off." He answered me, but because of his accent, I didn't understand one word he said.

As we drove off, I was soon distracted by the snow that was falling. I lived in the desert, but it looked to me like there was an awful lot of snow coming down to the street level.

The ride from downtown near the FBI headquarters to the Washington, DC Navy Yard was a short one, but all the windows on that taxi were covered in snow when we arrived at our destination. If the windshield wipers had not worked well, I'm sure the taxi driver would not have been able to navigate the streets of the city.

When the driver stopped the taxi and I got out after paying him, the snow was falling steadily. It was so thick, and the street lights reflected back nothing but white. I could not read the name of the bar directly in front of me, so I just walked towards the blinking lights, opened the door, and walked inside where I could hear loud music.

Unlike other cities I was familiar with--including Las Vegas--the laws in Washington, DC regarding gay bars apparently were more relaxed. This particular bar, whose name I never learned, had several completely naked men dancing on a horseshoe shaped bar. There clearly also was plenty of alcohol on sale. I had never been to a gay bar that allowed both total male nudity and alcohol sales. The inside of the bar was dark and not much to look at, but I realized that nobody went there to admire the interior design.

I had not been with a completely naked man for quite awhile. That could explain why I felt the very beginnings of an erection in the first few minutes that I sat there sipping on a bottle of beer while watching each nude dancer pass in front of me on the bar. The each wore only white socks so customers could stuff money into them to show their appreciation. So, I did.



Every 20 minutes, there was a shift change and a new group of dancers emerged onto that bar. On the third shift, I saw a gorgeous Asian dancer who reminded me of Squirrel from Arizona.

I'd had only two beers by then and I felt a very quick attraction to this guy that I knew was not caused by alcohol. I found him totally captivating. He watched me stuff a twenty dollar bill into the white sock on his right foot. He smiled at me and winked. I repeated this ritual of stuffing twenty dollar bills into the dancer's right white sock at least three more times before the evening ended. I was proud of myself for only having had four beers the entire night instead of drinking to excess. But now, all I wanted was to fuck that one particular dancer.

When I walked outside the bar at closing time, I lost my bearings immediately because I stepped into the heaviest snowfall I had ever experienced. It was suddenly just me and white all around me.

The sound of other guys talking outside the bar was almost completely muted by the snow on the ground and still in the air, falling, falling. I had no idea how I was going to get out of there. "Now what?" I asked aloud to nobody.

I felt somebody grab my right hand gently from somewhere inside the whiteness all around. "Are you lost?" I heard my favorite dancer's voice ask me. "Can't see you," I answered, so I pulled on his hand to draw him nearer to me. He was standing there in front of me, but we were under a powerful street light so there was only white out.

I wrapped both my arms around him and kissed him because I really needed to. "I so much want take you with me," I said to him. "Where?" he asked. I told him the name of the hotel where I was staying. I heard him say, "Okay, I can drive us there."

Finding where he had parked his car proved to be an adventure in its own rite. The snow was falling so heavily. I was certain we would need to search for hours because the dancer did not know how to locate where he had parked. Eventually, he found his car—a black VW bug. It was not particularly the safest vehicle I was looking forward to riding around in DC in a heavy snow storm, but I had other priorities on my mind.

The trip from the Navy Yard to my hotel had seemed so short when I rode in the cab a few hours earlier. But, the dancer was slow and deliberate as he piloted that VW bug through the streets that were getting more impassible each minute. It seemed like an hour before we arrived at my hotel. I suggested to the dancer that

he drive us into the underground parking. I gave him money to cover the parking fee. We were up in the elevator and inside my room only a few minutes later.

He had told me that his "dancer name" was Jake, and I didn't even want to ask him for his real name. I couldn't believe that he and I were finally alone in my hotel room. I whispered to him I wanted him like I hadn't wanted any other man for a long while. It sounded like a horribly stale opening line to me, but I realized this was not the first thing he had heard me say. He had already agreed to accompany me back to my hotel room. I knew that he knew why we were there together and what would come next.

He noticed my white cowboy hat sitting on the small table by the bed. "You're a gay cowboy?" I heard him ask me. "From Arizona, no less," I answered him, half jokingly. "Wow," he answered, "that's really hot. Would you wear your cowboy hat when you're fucking me?"

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## Cabin Fever

I asked Jake to leave around 4:00 a.m. While we had fun with each other sexually, I was disappointed in this one night stand. So, I wanted him out of my hotel room as quickly as possible once we were done. Part of the problem was that I had the too-familiar nightmare about being hanged by the neck. I just hung there. The young hangman smiled, obviously enjoying watching me hang.

I wasn't sure if I subconsciously compared him to Squirrel. Was I trying to recreate what I had with Squirrel. Was that why I felt as I did? I wasn't sure about anything. I just knew that bringing a guy up to my hotel room for sex was not as enjoyable as I thought it would be. I was angry at myself. Yet, I felt that I was becoming a more mature man than ever before. Maybe this was progress.

After showering, I went downstairs at around 5:00 a.m. to see if I could get breakfast. Once I reached the lobby of the hotel, I noticed that the coffee shop was open, but what caught my attention was outside the windows of the hotel. I had not looked out any windows in the hotel until I reached the lobby. Outside it was like nothing I had seen before. There was so much snow piled up on the sidewalks and the street.

Officially, it became known as the blizzard of 1996. There had never before been this great of a sudden snowfall covering such a large part of the Eastern Time Zone. Not only was Washington, DC crippled by over a foot and a half of snow that fell overnight, but all the major cities along the eastern corridor of Interstate 95 up to Boston.

Being stuck in a hotel unexpectedly like that definitely was not my idea of a good time. But, there was no place to go. And this was a collective experience that a large portion of the population was simultaneously enjoying. All transportation was extremely difficult. The deep snow made it necessary to shut down many businesses, schools, and even the federal government in the DC area. This meant that the Senate subcommittee hearing on domestic terrorism was brought to a sudden halt.

It was difficult, but possible for me to walk through the snow down the street to the gym from my hotel. So, I found myself spending time working out and enjoying the sauna after feeling cabin fever in my hotel room. On one of my visits to the gym, I was just walking into the shower when I came face to face with a memory.



Standing there in that shower in front of me was the green-eyed FBI agent from Las Vegas. When I first met him in Nevada, I had been impressed with his looks.



Seeing him naked in a gym shower was pure delight for me. That one moment made the entire Washington, DC trip worthwhile! I quickly memorized every inch of him.

I offered to buy coffee and he accepted, so we made the journey up the street to the coffee shop at my hotel. He told me that he was called to attend the same Senate subcommittee hearing, but not to testify. He had been in the same room on the day that I was questioned by the Senator from Arizona. He explained that since that gym was near the FBI headquarters, he decided to use it instead of the fitness center inside the J. Edgar Hoover building. "I thought you handled yourself well," the green-eyed agent said to me sitting across from me in our booth at the coffee shop.

"How much can you talk about this stuff?" I asked him.





"You can ask what you'd like. If I can't answer, I'll let you know," he said, teasingly.

So, I jumped right in with the one question I needed answered: "Any leads on who killed my friends?"

"Figured you'd want to know that," he replied as he smiled. "And, I can tell you that, no, we never found out anything more."

"Can you speculate about what happened?" I asked him.

"I personally think that the same shooter or shooters killed both of your friends. I know that you've believed that also."

"Yeah, I figured there had to be some connection. I've even thought Arturo maybe got into trouble with someone he may have sold steroids to," I explained to the green-eye agent.

"We never found evidence that he was selling steroids in Bullhead."

"But, come on," I said as my frustration level was increasing, "Arturo had been convicted in L.A. for selling steroids. He was a personal trainer in Bullhead. There were guys at that gym Arturo told me were using steroids. To me, it all adds up."

"Well, I can see how you would add it all up that way," he replied.

"What are you saying?" I ask him quickly.

"Some in the FBI think there were guys involved in guns and violence in Arizona and Nevada," he explained.

"I know that already. But, do you honestly think these two friends of mine-. How in the hell could they have been connected with the guys responsible for the Oklahoma City bombing?"

"I cannot say anything about that, Danny. Let's just-. There are some in the FBI who think there might have been a possible connection," he said to me. I could tell that he felt my frustration over not knowing the whole truth.

"That just boggles my mind," I admitted to him. "I hung out with guys-now they're both dead. They got involved with domestic terrorists? I just makes no sense at all."

"I said possible connection," he warned. "Let's just leave it at that, okay?"

"So, when are you going back to Las Vegas?" I asked him to change the subject.

"My superiors told me. They heard the inside word was the subcommittee will cancel the hearings due to the blizzard. Soon as I can catch a flight out, I'm going home," he explained. "And you?"

"Well, if the hearings are going to be cancelled, I wish they'd tell me. I just want to get back to Phoenix as soon as possible."

As we were about to leave that hotel coffee shop, instead of shaking my hand-which I had expected-the green-eyed FBI agent hugged me goodbye. It was the kind of unexpected and pleasurable moment that I would save in my memory to replay over and over and over. Maybe that was why I had numerous sexual fantasies involving this muscular, green-eyed agent at the hotel pool.

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## What Green Means

On the flight back to Phoenix from DC, I had plenty of time to think.

Would I be called back to that Sentate subcommittee to provide more testimony? Or, could I just phone it in?

Why didn't I seize the moment in that gym shower with the green-eyed FBI agent? He looked so available. He agreed to have coffee with me. He hugged me goodbye. Should I have invited him up to my room? Then I realized how I had been disappointed after inviting a dancer up to my room for sex. Perhaps it was far better for me if I could learn to be happy with remembering that green-eyed FBI agent as one that could have been.

What was I going to do with my life? I was now a gay man 40 plus. I also can call myself a gay cowboy. Living in Arizona and wearing cowboy boots and a cowboy hat should count for something, right? Was I going to continue my life alone? Was I better off picking up younger guys--like dancers in gay bars? What kind of a life would that be for me?

Why do I long to recapture the thrills and arousals of my days with Arturo and with Squirrel? Certainly I would be better off not crossing life paths with guys who are dangerous and self-destructive like Arturo and Squirrel were. I should learn from my past experiences, right? Were there exciting men out there who

were not dangerous and self-destructive? If so, could I somehow find one in Arizona?

I wanted answers to all of these questions on the flight back to Phoenix. I wanted to feel a sense of awareness about what I should do with my life as a gay man.

When the plane landed in Chicago to pick up new passengers before continuing on to Phoenix, I just wanted to shut my eyes. I just wanted to close myself off from everything around me. I just wanted to be free of all the pains of the past. I just wanted to learn more quickly from my experiences. Oh, if only I could pull that off. So, I closed my eyes and fell asleep quickly.

I was awakened by turbulence. I looked next to me at the aisle seat that had been empty on the flight from DC to Chicago. Now there was a young, muscular African American man sitting there. I felt groggy and disoriented. I did not remember him sitting down next to me. He must have gotten on this flight in Chicago. Then, he turned and looked at me. I looked into his eyes.



Green eyes! Staring deeply into me. Wow! I felt stunned as we maintained our eye contact longer than we should have. I knew it. He knew it.

I had many questions for myself. Were there exciting men that I could find in Arizona? How about exciting men on their way to Arizona? Would he want me as much as I wanted him? Wow! He was still maintaining eye contact with me. Green eyes! I had to take a chance. I hoped beyond hope that green means **go**.

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## Why The Hangman Smiles

My nightmares about being hung by the neck continue. I can be on a jet. I can be in a hotel bed. I can be in my own bed, or some other guy's bed. No matter what, the nightmares persist.

I keep dreaming that I am a cowboy in the old west. I always see myself as a hung cowboy on the wooden gallows. The young hangman always is there with me in my nightmares.

In my younger years, my nightmare ended as I fell free of the gallows, cheating death. Those days are behind me now.

In my recurring nightmares, I keep seeing myself suffocating as that rope crushes my neck because my body weight is pulling me ever downward.



The young hangman obviously is enjoying gazing down at my midsection while he holds onto that rope tightly standing at my side.

That's all the young hangman ever does. Over and over I dream this. The young hangman keeps staring at my crotch. And he keeps smiling.

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