

## Chapter 6

# The Golden Eagle

Drink in hand, he stood before the gas-fed flames playing across the artificial logs. The label under the blown-up, black-and-white photographic print mounted to one side of the stone-veneered hearth read *Villa Monteflores and the Monteflores Vineyard in the 1880s*; on the other side hung an enlarged print showing a hatted man walking behind a horse-drawn cultivator: *Dante Monteflores working vine rows the old-fashioned way during World War I*. He turned around: without foot traffic into or out of the barroom, the rich red carpet flowed uninterrupted across the wooden floor and out into the mall beyond the double glass doors, where islands furnished with vacant tables, dim lamps, and upholstered chairs reminded him of indeterminate days and nights at international airports, after the last flights have arrived, before the first flights depart. The Golden Eagle's exposed ceiling beams passed through the wall above a seamless plate glass window, likely framing a vista of nothing but sky and sea beyond the eave jutting out over the patio where no one sat. The drizzle and early-hour darkness obscured any panoramic Pacific Ocean view beyond the hilltop's horizon, and the time of day and of year combined to leave the Golden Eagle and the rest of the William & Marcia Cummings Complex all but to Pieter T.

After lunch, having owned up to his dread of repacking his overnight bag in order to relocate back at Nico's for another rainy

night alone, he had telephoned his closest neighbors on Soquel Gulch Road to ensure that the boy caring for Viggo could do so for another twenty-four hours and, to the tune of \$225 plus, registered for a second night at Monteflores Lodge West, immediately benefiting from a long afternoon nap. Pieter sipped his Garnet cocktail and wondered if extending his stay at the lodge had been a mistake. Buttonholing that employee strolling down the hall or chatting up the shopkeeper looking at her wristwatch while idling beyond the confines of her deserted store—what more could he learn here about the overt workings or covert intentions of Monteflores Inc.? But the mix of London gin, pomegranate liqueur, sweet vermouth, and Meyer lemon juice warmed his inners, bringing to mind the winter fruits maturing in the Lowrie yard five miles down the hill.

In the under-occupied barroom, Pieter could savor the quiet end of its so called Happy Hour, a welcome respite after twenty-four hours facing off—under false premises—against the solicitous army of Monteflores’ formidable sales army. When the twentysomething barkeeper, wearing the requisite forest green vest over a white shirt with broad, unbuttoned lapels, had obligingly muted the volume on the TV set mounted behind the bar, the anodyne music piped in throughout the complex became audible, but the artificial logs did not crackle. Yet the cocktail was delicious. If he kept his eye on the time, he could catch the last shuttle downhill and indulge in another sumptuous supper with whomever was left of the subdued, genteel crowd in the lodge’s stage-set dining room, then enjoy another good night’s sleep in the comfortable bed after plowing through to the end of the skinny novel over which, the previous evening, he had fallen asleep reading—or rereading, he could not say—more of Commissioner Maigret’s trials and tribulations.

An older man entered the room through an interior door connecting with Ye Olde Pro Shoppe next door and took what seemed his usual place at the end of the bar. Without a word between them, as the bartender poured an unmeasured amount of Jack Daniels over ice cubes jammed into an engraved glass tumbler, the only two customers

in the room took note of each other at the same time and nodded in a gentlemanly gesture, Pieter lifting his coupe glass to the man waving welcome from the safe haven of his customary post. He looked about ten to fifteen years younger than Pieter and, in the white golf shirt and unbuttoned green cardigan, somewhat overweight. He kept his short gray hair creamed, parted to one side.

“Cheers!” he called, toasting Pieter before taking his own first sip.

“A votre santé!” Pieter replied, finishing his drink before stepping from the hearth to introduce himself, saying he thought he recognized the man from a brief peek into the pro shop earlier in the hour.

They shook hands. Frank Talbot confirmed that he was indeed manager of the shop next door which, for want of clientele, he had just closed up. Obviously relishing some company, Frank T. encouraged the newcomer to occupy the stool beside him, simultaneously making a sign for the bartender to bring their guest another of whatever he had been drinking. Pieter recited his own cover story about checking out the Vignettes at Monteflores as a potential residence for his daughter and son-in-law. The man’s easy smile revealed whitened front teeth filed straight across the edges. His cheeks suggested years of too close shaving, and narrow lines incised in the skin around the ash-colored eyes of his broad face hinted at a lifetime of exposure outdoors.

“Proost!” Pieter declared, initiating another toast with his new cocktail in hand.

“Cheers!” Frank replied, lifting and drinking from his glass.

The Golden Eagle’s habitué fiddled with a long toothpick frilled with cellophane curlicues of white and green while the stranger elaborated upon the reason for his visit and volunteered that he was extremely impressed by the development’s superb opportunities for golfing, what with two 18-hole courses already in use, and the third course called The Cabernet under construction, not to neglect mention of the mammoth-size driving range behind the Cummings Complex and the practice putting green and sand traps down at the lodge. The man removed the toothpick from his lips to state that what he said was “music to his ears,” for he had been the original Golf Manager

at The Zinfandel course at Monteflores and, with the completion of The Chardonnay at Vignettes II, he had been promoted as the development's first Director of Golf, at one time in charge of two Assistant Managers, two Superintendents, the crew at the club fitting and repair shop, and a slew of golf pros rotating through positions at the Golf Academy. But some health issues had arisen along the way, and he had been forced to give up the directorship. When he could no longer "hit 'em hard and hit 'em long," he went strictly into coaching, then took a position in administrative assistance, which he had ultimately let go when the Cummings Complex opened and a sinecure heading up Ye Olde Pro Shoppe had been provided; upon the insistence of the organization and to everyone's relief, Frank Talbot had embarked on his third decade employed in the Second City on the Hill. Of course, he concluded, "that cocky new Golf Director they hired from outside," as well as the Golf Manager he brought along with him, "they don't give us old timers the time of day." But one long-term Superintendent still came to him for advice, and most of the original residents remembered him, calling him "Champ" and "Boss" or just "plain old Frank." He upended his glass, cracked a cube of ice between his teeth, and gestured for another drink. "Drink up, Pete, drink up. Denny there knows how to make a cocktail, doesn't he? And boy, can he talk your ear off about wine! His golf game's not so great though—is it, Denny?"

"Excuse me, sir?"

"Just give me Jack on the rocks and lots of it," Frank chuckled, declaring aside, "Jack Daniels, that's my drink." A new tumbler arrived, filled to the brim. "Here we go, down the hatch."

Watching his companion imbibe, Pieter wondered if Frank Talbot's fondness for Jack Daniels had been the source of his "health issues," perhaps the cause for what sounded like a series of demotions within the Monteflores operation. Pieter took out his tin of cigarillos before noticing no ashtrays in sight.

"Hey, Denny, get our friend here an ashtray." The young bartender promptly provided a clear glass ashtray from beneath his side of the counter. "I told you Denny's a white man," Frank said then raised his

voice again: “Denny! Nobody else is coming in here tonight, right, to complain about a little cigar smoke?” He lowered his voice: “I used to smoke the gaspers myself until I took a cue from Arnie ... Arnold Palmer, back in 1970, then I quit too. Been twenty-four years and I’d still like a smoke. But you go on, Pete, go on. Wish I could.” He raised his voice again: “How about some pretzels or nuts or something, Denny Boy?” The barkeeper poured some mixed nuts into a glass bowl and delivered it before returning to his chair to leaf through a magazine, from time to time glancing up at the muted TV.

When Frank commiserated about how the lousy weather had probably killed the lodge guest’s prospects for a round or two of golf—unless he was like “the intrepid Scots of old”—Pieter clarified that he wasn’t the golfer in the family; it was his son-in-law who was the fanatic, living only to play the game.

“Why, you old so-and-so, you!” Frank burst out, patting him on the back of his shoulder. “Here I thought all along you were one of the old duffers around here.”

“Duffers...?”

“Yeah, you know, a duffer, a hacker.” Frank laughed. “Somebody who plays a lot of golf but never very well.”

“Oh, no. I never played a game of golf in my life, except miniature golf.”

The pro shop’s manager snarfed on a mouthful of salted nuts, wiping his mouth with a cocktail napkin, clearing his throat. “Miniature golf? Did you say miniature golf? That’s a good one, Pete, that’s a good one!” He clapped him on the back. “You’re all right, pal. Where are you from anyway? All that French and German shit ... pardon my French,” he added, grinning.

Omitting significant and traceable details, the Dutchman gave an abbreviated account of his immigration and assimilation into American life, with his career finishing up in 1971 after more than twenty years working as an agricultural agent for Santa Cruz County.

“Then I was right. Thought I heard a little foreign accent the way you talk. And how does your son-in-law make his money if you don’t

mind my asking? I mean, if he's even considering living around here ... well, he better come loaded because this place.... Listen, I don't know if you heard about the initiation fee for membership in the golf club, and that's above and beyond what the homebuyers pay just to get in the door. Too rich for my blood, I'm telling you."

Pieter fabricated a short story about his son-in-law's lucrative position appraising risks on policies issued to international shipping firms on behalf of a Dutch maritime insurance company.

"Then he's Dutch too and your daughter married a compatriot. Good move, gal!"

"Oh, no. Robert's American. But he comes from money, frankly, and he has lived all over the world."

"And California's where he wants to play the game—good taste, that son-in-law of yours," he concluded, tossing another handful of nuts into his mouth. "Alister MacKenzie did say this was a wonderful place for golf, this whole stretch of coastline. MacKenzie, you know, Pasatiempo...?"

"Sure, sure, Pasatiempo ... beautiful. Frank, maybe you could tell me something."

"I will if I can, Dutch. Say, d'you ever see The Dutchman play ball?"

"Ah... The Dutchman...? I'm afraid..."

"The Dutchman. Quarterback for the Rams then the Eagles. Coached a couple of teams after that. What was his real name...? Norm something ... Brooklyn...? Maybe that was it."

"Breuklen...? No, I'm sorry. I really don't know of—"

"... ah, never mind, never mind. The Dutchman was a Hall of Famer though. I always liked The Dutchman. But weren't you going to ask me something?"

"Yes, you can clear something up maybe for me."

"I sure will if I can, bud. What is it?"

"Is it true that Monteflores only accepts people fifty-five and over? Those kids of mine have another fifteen years before they reach that age."

“Is that what they told you at the Sales Center, fifty-five and up?”

“I forget where I heard it. I’ve heard a lot of things in the last twenty-four hours.”

“Bet you have, buddy, bet you have. Well, it is sort of understood that people under a certain age aren’t exactly encouraged to apply. I don’t know if it’s written into the charter or not, but you look around here when this place is busy...? You won’t see youngsters like Dennis the Menace there unless they’re delivering packages. Most everybody living here has hair the color of yours or else it’s gray like mine. But don’t give up on us yet, Pete, because I’m going to share a little secret with you—then again you’ll have to talk to someone in the Sales Center to get the official scoop. Say, have you hooked up with an agent in the Sales Center yet?”

“Ah, yes ... I mean, I attended the presentation there this morning—”

“... no, I mean, did you talk to an individual rep on the new and future real estate side? No? Well, never mind, you will if you ever get down to the short hairs. You’ll be talking to those guys and dolls plenty if you and your son-in-law ever make a move. But here’s the deal. Vignettes IV—d’you just hear me? Vignettes Four is already in the works. Now this has not been announced publicly, but it’s on the drawing board, believe you me. And from what I’ve heard, part of it’s supposed to be designed for just what you’re talking about: younger people, like your kids, and families with kids. See, the resident folks are only getting older and they want to be able to see their grandkids and their kids too for extended periods of time. The way it is now, they have to travel and.... Anyway, the rate the original residents are dying off around here...? The operation’s going to need some younger blood kicking in dough just to keep the lights on, kids or no kids.”

“When will that Vignettes IV be—”

“... can’t say, don’t know. I probably shouldn’t even have brought it up. It won’t be a secret forever, but with all the politics around permitting and the damn environmental regulations, they want to roll out the next phase very, very carefully—hey, your glass is almost

empty, Pete!” Frank waved to catch Denny’s attention. “The same or something else?”

Pieter noted the pomegranate red radiating from a single drop on his white paper napkin; he could think of nothing better than a third Garnet and blinked twice to Frank. “Sure, sure, another one of these, please.”

“You got it.” He pointed to Pieter’s glass and gave Denny the thumbs-up. “*Four* is supposed to be quite the departure for YMS. You know who I mean, right? YMS, the overseas investors. Ten-acre vineyard estate lots for sale, with eight of those going into vines, two for the house and yard and all. Or maybe it’s twenty acres, I don’t know. Or maybe it’s twenty acres, I don’t know. They’re going to sell those as home sites, tax write-offs, *and* as agricultural investments. Denny here tells me the vine guys won’t have any trouble with some bug that took out quite a few vines in this part of the country last year—but you must know about that, having worked in agriculture, huh?”

“Oh, *jaja*, I heard about the root louse and all like that.”

“From what Denny here tells me, they’ll replant new varieties and in three, four years, production’ll be better than ever. Dennis knows all about that stuff, to hear him talk. Anyway, get this. Almost nobody knows about the executive course that goes along with that Vignettes IV. That ought to perk up your son-in-law’s ears. That’s what I’m excited about anyway. I only hope to live long enough to see it go through, the snail’s pace things go at these days.”

“*An executive course...?*”

“You know, a short course, a 9-holer, but not a short course for beginners, oh no. What the owners have in mind is a prestigious 9-holer to challenge the very best players in the game. This won’t be something your average executive can or will even want to rush through between board meetings. Oh, I’m sure it’ll have some standard stuff—perfectly smooth greens, native roughs, bunkers, the usual rock and water hazards—but the way they’ll lay it out, they’ll be lots of twists and turns, ups and downs. See, they want to incorporate some pretty dramatic terrain that exists right along the first ridgeline



out there, and you can bet they'll be one helluvah ocean view on each and every hole. A variety of shot-making opportunities, that's what makes for a great game, in my opinion anyway. If they have to reduce a certain number of redwood trees to increase the scenic vistas, they will, they will. In other words, Pete, she'll be one premiere, world-class course to rival those pretty babies at Pebble Beach or Spanish Bay. Not a links-type course and not a bunch of treelined fairways either. Something absolutely unique with a view down to the lodge and out to the Pacific. "The Seaview at Vignettes IV." I always thought they should call it that, but that *Seaview* name's already taken. So they've decided to call it 'Summit-to-Sea' and that's fine by me. Except the outfit out of Frisco, Sea-to-Summit, they're still challenging them on that one. Filed a lawsuit on trademark infringement or something like that. And just think: Monteflores and that bunch used to work hand-in-glove back when this whole mountainside was just one big cow field. Funny world, huh? 'Summit-to-Sea.' I can't think of a better name than that, not that anybody's asking for plain old Frank's input." He drank.

"So, this the first I heard of any golf course right there along the ridge."

"Those people in the Sales Center probably aren't supposed to talk about it yet. Hell, maybe most of them don't even know about it yet. That executive course is the brainchild of the big wigs in Singapore or Japan or wherever the owners whet their whistles and dip their dicks. Tell your son-in-law about that one! But don't tell anyone you heard it from me."

When Pieter's next cocktail was served, he reached for his wallet; Frank waved it away. "Come on, pal. This is one of the perks of senior status around here, right, Denny? Twenty-four years and counting." He took a gulp of whisky. "The old lady says the Golden Eagle is a job liability not a job benefit, but it sure beats driving home in the rain to watch Saturday Night Live with the wife."

"Cheers," Pieter said, hoisting his glass.

"Thatta boy! Hey, your little band-aid's falling off."

Pieter pressed it to his cheek.

“Knick yourself shaving? I know what that’s like.”

“*Jaja....*”

Frank T. voluntarily launched into more self-portraiture, relating how he and his wife had downsized to a condo in Half Moon Bay once the children left the house in Belmont, and how the real liability of having to show up at the Ye Olde Pro Shoppe five days a week was commuting home on the coast highway in lousy weather and after dark, too, half the year. He caught Pieter glancing at his watch. “You’re not taking off on me, are you? What, has that Nigel guy got movies and popcorn lined up for the old folks down at the lodge?”

“Oh, well, I guess I’ve already missed the supper hour. I can ask the driver to take me back when—”

“... hell with that noise! I’ll drive you down when we’re done here. It’s on my way home. Come on, pal, you hungry? Hey, Denny, how about zapping us a couple of sandwiches in that micro you’ve got in back? Like ham and cheese, Pete? They’re prefab but they’re not bad, not bad at all.”

The young man refilled the bowl with pretzel sticks and waited for further instructions. Pieter looked at the cocktail on his napkin, the tin of Schimmelpennincks, the bowl of salty pretzels, and his garrulous host. “Sure, sure. I like ham and cheese.”

“Order up!” Frank shouted, as if the barkeeper were at the far end of the room instead of standing less than a yard away. “Good man, good man!” he bellowed to no one in particular.

Without further prompting, Frank T. resumed his monologue, using vague terms and tenses to imply that he may once have made a living playing professional tournament golf. Pieter was free to follow his own thoughts, for the speaker was rambling, not even checking to see if his listener was following his words. Frank was definitely not looking him in the eye when he spoke indistinctly about playing alongside the likes of Arnold Palmer, Jack Nicklaus, and Gary Player in the Sixties; Pieter surmised that the retired golfer might have once upon a time or two been on the same course watching those celebrities at play, but he doubted that the retail pro shop manager had actually

played with or against the biggest names in the game. The man finally drained his glass and rose to his feet. “Got to go bleed the lizard. I guess I didn’t belong in their league after all,” he confessed. “S’why I can’t afford to live where I work. Now don’t you run out on me, Dutch. We’ve got those lousy sandwiches coming up.”

“*Jaja.*”

“Tell the kid to bring us some potato chips with those sandwiches too. Be right back.”

Although Pieter suspected that Frank Talbot was some garden variety of former semi-pro holding court in many a 19<sup>th</sup>-hole bar & grill, he probably knew of what he spoke when it came to the scene at Monteflores. Still, Pieter harbored doubts about the full reliability of the man’s narrative of some secretive plan for yet another nine holes at the development. At his orientation before Friday supper, the suave Lodge Master—so confident that the future was bright and the horizon endless for the most noteworthy residential resort on the Central Coast—Nigel Oliveira had not intimated that any ultra-elite golf course, let alone any family-oriented neighborhoods, were on Monteflores’ planning radar.

Denny delivered two small plates and raised his eyebrows at the empty barstool, as if observing to himself that the old has-been would soon be sailing at the top of his nightly alcoholic game, if not falling off the stool. At least, that was how Pieter interpreted the smirk on the young man’s face and the slight shrug of his shoulders as he deposited two packets of potato chips on the counter, retrieved the empty tumbler, and walked away.

At the Sales Center’s orchestrated presentation that morning and during the tour of model homes, Pieter had been among a select audience exposed to the master plan for Monteflores: multicolored maps and slide shows had indicated designs for a future movie theater, an equestrian center, improved trails out to Lookout Rock and down to a private beach club at Hidden Beach—but no images of any 9-hole course destined to become the crown jewel of a golf complex with a total of fifty-four holes already in play. Looking at the simple fare

on the counter before him, Pieter said to himself *croque monsieur* • and watched the sandwiches grow cold while waiting for the toast-master to return. He wished he were already unlacing the dress shoes squeezing his feet, and lying in his hotel bed reading about another bad meal consumed by Monsieur le Commissaire while on a case in some seedier section of Paris or while exploring the underside of a tourist town on France's Atlantic Coast or the less touristic aspects of daily life in some out-of-the-way village in Belgium or a border town with a lock-canal. Yet Pieter felt oddly at ease waiting for his drinking "buddy" to return, for Frank Talbot resembled many of the middlebrow nurserymen he had dealt with as a county agent in the decidedly un- and anti-intellectual milieu of commercial plant growers. Poorer stepchildren of agriculture, the American field-grown and container-grown commodity crop producers had always struck him as conservative to the core and as slow to entertain or embrace change as most farmers were, comparable to the traditional Holland bulb growers with whom he had grown disenchanted during his pre- and mid-teen summers working on the family polder. Perhaps the new generation of Old World agronomists was more open to innovation than his ancestors had been, but he guessed that most industrial European farmers there did what most American agribusinessmen did here: year in, year out, collectively trafficking in boom-and-bust crop cycles, depressing wholesale prices, deepening their addiction to agrichemicals, ruining their soil, fouling the air.

As Frank Talbot headed back toward the bar, Pieter realized the man looked a little and behaved a lot like Ed McMahan. Moving stiffly, the ingratiating showman—who would obviously never be swinging competitively from any tee box at "Summit-to-Sea" if it ever did get built—reclaimed his seat. Pieter knew it wouldn't take much to push himself deeper into falsifying his identity in order to find out what else his unwitting informant might disclose.

The two ate their sandwiches and chips with drafted lagers then Frank announced that he wanted to treat himself and his guest to one

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• *ham & cheese sandwich, served hot (Fr.)*

last beverage before “hitting the road,” and he entrusted Denny to do a number on a Whisky Hot Toddy for him, and for their visitor—the cocktail of his choice. The Dutchman surveyed a menu and chose a White Lady made with Bombay Gin, Cointreau, freshly squeezed lemon juice, and a dollop of egg white, all served chilled after being shaken in half a cup of slivered ice. While they both watched Denny concoct their drinks, Frank reverted to rambling reminiscences: how he had been born and raised in Connecticut, seen the West Coast while in the service, come back to marry a Southern Californian girl and how, during a life chasing a little white ball on what he referred to as “the circuit,” he had come to consider the Golden State his home.

Denny delivered their drinks.

*“A votre santé!”* •

“Up yours too! Hey, that’s just an old bad joke, Dutch. Don’t worry about it.”

*“Jaja ... a bad joke....”*

Frank blew across the top of his steaming mug, licked his lips, then set his glass on the coaster, stirring it with the cinnamon stick and stabbing at the floating lemon slice. “Tell you the truth...? I’m glad I was on the road when it was still a white man’s game, if you know what I mean. Way it’s going now....” He shook his head and hazarded a sip. “It won’t ever get as bad as basketball, but still.... Anyway, let’s change the subject. Hey, what’d you say your daughter’s name is, her first name?”

“My daughter?” Pieter struggled to recall what he had been telling others. “Katerien! Her mother and I named her Katerien. Kathy for short, sure.”

“You’re kidding! Kathy? That’s what we named our first girl. Isn’t that something, Pete? Small world, huh?”

“Is a popular name,” Pieter responded.

“I wish my Kathy had married your son-in-law instead of mine. She’d be better off. My Kathy’s husband’s a deadbeat. Sometimes I’m glad they live in Texas or I’d have to see that guy face to face more

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• *Cheers (Fr.)*

often. What are you looking at, Denny Boy? This is our last one. You can start closing up shop. We won't be long now."

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In the employee parking lot, Frank stopped beside a two-door sedan. "Better not smoke in the car, if you don't mind."

"Sure, sure..."

"I don't care but it's the wife's new car, and she'll be all over me if it stinks like one of those little Dutch jobs you smoke."

"Is not a problem."

"Thanks, Pete, you're all right."

"Frank, are you...?"

"Oh, yeah, I'm fine, I'm fine. We'll take her real slow going downhill. Slowest five miles in my day, I tell you. Then I'll drop you off at the lodge and hit the highway."

On the dark, winding drive down Grade Road, the passenger took the opportunity to revisit the subject of the non-existent executive course at the non-existent Vignettes IV, hoping to grill the driver about the construction timetable. "So, you're pretty sure that next phase of housing will be all about family-style living and all like that...?"

"Part of it will. S'what I hear on the grapevine ... so to speak."

"And I can tell my son-in-law about the prospect of that special 'Seaview' course...?"

"You can tell him, but don't call it that or 'Summit-to-Sea.' And better keep that lawsuit business to yourself. I'm probably putting the cart before the horse, mouthing off about that controversy and everything else. Besides, I can't promise you any of that'll come to pass any time soon. Oh, hell, tell him, go ahead, tell your family. But if you call it 'Seaview' he'll probably think you mean the Golf Resort near Atlantic City, if he's the fanatic you say he is."

"Oh, he is, he is. Robert's just crazy about golf."

"I don't know. Whoever knows what'll happen when those environmentalists go on the warpath? Overeducated Indians can be a real pain in the ass too. Or do people like you say 'arse'?" The speaker chuckled. "Some of these new regulations about water quality, storm

water management...? When I arrived this side of the hill, nobody had to pay any attention to that shit. Who ever heard of designing a course to leave 'wetlands' right where they are just for some turtles and birds? What about that owl shutting down logging in the Northwest? How far will that dumb shit go? All the agencies you have to deal with, jumping through hoop after hoop after hoop just so some newt—and I don't mean Newt Gingrich, everybody's heard of him—but nobody's ever heard of some red frog who can now have, all to himself, a thousand square feet of land worth God knows how many thousands of dollars. When the first eighteen went in at the Zin, they just staked the course according to the plans, started grading, and dug the trenches. Now they're not even supposed to move a shovelful of dirt during the rainy season—between this date and that, I forget what they are. So, how much does that cost, shutting down construction on a new course for a month or two? Plenty! Don't tell anybody, pal, but they've got scab laborers working back in there right now in the middle of shutdown season to finish off M-III on time. M-III—that's the Cabernet course, right? Number three."

"Right, course number three. Scabs ... is non-union workers?"

"That's right. They drive 'em in from Everson Road—if you know where that is—drop 'em off where they can walk to the worksite without being seen. They've got Mexicans busting hump with small equipment in the rain seven days a week, irregardless of any regulations. The unions have to honor those winter season closure dates. They'd be in big trouble if they got caught. But the owners have to get the course open for spring, right? How else are they going to stay on schedule? What are those overseas investors supposed to think? They make this huge financial investment in the United States and not get a return on it as fast as possible? Just keep paying the property taxes, so people can look at empty land? I don't see how these environmentalists think we can live on the face of the earth without making any impact. 'Zero impact building?' Heard of that? What the hell are they talking about? It's getting so you need to file one of their EIRs just to get out of bed in the morning and go to work."

“*Jaja*, I see what you mean, Frank, I see just what you mean. There must be a lot of money tied up—”

“... a lot of money...? I’ll say a lot of money! Listen, I don’t really have a dog in that fight. I can’t afford to live up there. Could never afford the golf club fees—who can? Maybe your son-in-law ... what was his name? Bill...?”

“No, no, it’s Robert.”

“Yeah, that’s it: Bob. I don’t know if the sound of fifty thousand dollars will scare Bobby boy off, but last I heard that’s the initiation fee and it just keeps going up. Takes a lotta rounds of free golf to pay off that amount of money.”

Pieter was sifting through the final questions he might get away with asking without revealing his true motive, but the other man could not keep his mouth shut.

“Getting that executive course built, that’ll be the tricky one.”

“Tricky, you say...?”

“See, those sixty-five, seventy acres they’re looking at all lie within the Coastal Commission zone. I don’t know how our man will make an end run around that one.”

“How do you mean, our man?” Pieter asked, as eager to hear what Frank meant as he was to get back to his room where he could jot down notes in order to make his report to Katie when next they met.

“Up till now, the Vignettes and the little vineyard plots and the other courses, they’ve all been built on land lying outside the jurisdiction of that Coastal Commission. Oh sure, there’ve been environmental obstacles enough even without that agency involved, but you lay that Coastal Commission on top of the rest...? It’s what my old army boss would’ve called a ‘major clusterfuck.’ Hey, don’t pick up my bad English, Pete. But you do know what I mean, right?”

“*Jaja*, sure. We all know what that is, Frank. But what did you mean when you just said our man? What man? Whose man?”

“Oh, there’s this big crazy guy who somehow always knows how to get things done. I don’t know what his background is exactly, maybe sod sales ... turf seed ... something like that, up in Oregon. Anyway,



that guy's been all around the block when it comes to golf course construction. Freddy's the one who brought those Audubon people in to certify Zinfandel and Chardonnay—retroactively—which helped persuade Fish and Game and the local bird club that we're A-Okay, that M-III will be built with nothing but the birds and the bees in mind—bullshit like that. Building barn owl boxes in the vineyards, you know. Nature lovers just love stuff like that.”

“The Audubon Society certifies golf courses...? I didn't know that.”

“Well, it's not exactly the Audubon Society....” The driver snickered, banking into another wide curve. “I guess there was some controversy about naming that one too. ‘The Audubon ... International Cooperative ... Sanctuary Program,’ yeah, I think that's it. Does sort of sound like the official National Audubon Society, doesn't it? It's a pretty new outfit in the industry, helping companies like ours clean up our act without impacting the bottom line—negatively, I mean. They're on our side. See, I was on the scene when Zinfandel went in, from tee to green. I was right there, bud. And the general expectation was that with that first course under our belts, the county and the state—and everybody else's cousin in Milwaukee—they'd more or less be rubberstamping the plans for M-2 ... the Chardonnay. City of Fern's been on board since day one. But with M-2 we ran into a whole new raft of expensive rules and regulations. And that's when our man Fred got called back in, to help fix things. Been with us on and off ever since. I don't really like the guy personally, but I have to admit he knows how to make things work.”

“This Freddy ... is a contractor ... or a consultant ... or...?”

“That's right, something like that, I forget exactly. You must know how these projects can go. You must've had to enforce some rules and regs in your time, maybe write a few citations, hey, Pete?”

“A few... but just a few... as few as possible.”

“Well, you go into any of those Gath Construction trailers out in the cow patties, you'll see how they paper the walls with all the violations they get written up for. Of course, those are just photocopies. The

main office, where they pay the penalties, that's where they keep the originals. Then everybody just moves on, fuck it, if you know what I mean. Who cares? Those penalties are peanuts to YMS. Ten thousand here, twenty-thousand there. It's no big deal to them."

"Is just the cost of doing business," Pieter said, wishing the ride—and his charade—were over.

"Now you're talking! Maybe I shouldn't be spilling the beans like this, but you've got your head screwed on right, Pete. And now you've got me wondering just who Freddy Miller really is ... like, who pays that guy? And how much? He's got connections with some smart consulting firm, I know that. Environmental consulting. Anyway, he's a strange bird but he knows how to pull strings. You sure won't ever see him with a shovel in his hand, tell you that much. I don't know where the guy is right now, probably Palm Springs or Hawaii. But believe you me, the closer the big shots get to closing in on that exec course, the more you'll see old Freddy popping up in the strangest places at just the right time."

"He sounds like an interesting fellow, your Freddy."

"Oh, yeah, he's interesting all right!"

"But you don't really like him, you said...?"

"Did I say that? That's true. No, I don't. Something too squirrely about the man."

"Does he ever drink, say, at that bar back up there?"

"The Golden Eagle? Oh, no. Herr Fredrick's been eighty-sixed from the Golden Eagle."

"Eighty-sixed?"

"S'that a new one for you, bud? 'Eighty-sixed.' Thrown out, not welcome."

"Persona non grata...?"

"Persona non grata. Right on, Pete!"

Pieter wearied of having to pay attention to the slurred, gravelly voice in the darkened cockpit, but the opportunity wasn't to be missed for, prompted or not, the man could not stop talking. "Why Freddy is not welcome at the Golden Eagle, Frank?"

“Why? ‘Cuz he’s a slush. Gets stinko and can’t shut up. That guy makes me look like a sober saint. And he always seems to get around to the subject of Germany, talking about how great Germany is, how if the Germans had won World War Two—blah blah blah. Rubs people the wrong way when he gets going like that.”

“I can imagine,” Pieter said, one of the cocktail toothpicks stuck between two of his crooked teeth.

“What’d you say, Pete? Couldn’t hear you.”

“I said,” Pieter spoke up, freeing the toothpick, “I can imagine he does rub some people the wrong way talking about Germany and all like that.”

“I mean, don’t get me wrong. He’s American, born in America. He’s a white man and everything, but I guess his people from way back came from Germany. Anyway, that pro-Germany shit just does not fly inside the Golden Eagle. A number of those homeowners are veterans from World War Two and Korea. He was told to stay out of the Cummings Complex altogether. No, Fred Miller hangs his hat with the rednecks in Gath’s construction trailers. Jerkoff probably lives out of his Suburban. White trash in my book.”

“You mean he drives a Suburban automobile?”

“That’s right. Freddy the Fixer just loves those Chevy Suburbans. That’s all I’ve ever seen him drive anyway. Every year, a new model Suburban a different color from the year before. And the same Nevada plates.”

“Why Nevada?”

“You’d have to ask him why, don’t ask me. The guy’s quirky.”

“Oh, I’ll probably never meet that man,” Pieter said.

“But if you come back with your family someday, you’ll look me up in the Eagle, right? You hear me? I’m there about five nights a week. If I’m not in the Ye Olde Pro Shoppe, I’m holding down the fort next door. Hell, I’ve outlasted all the bartenders so far. Dennis the Menace is just the latest kid on the block. Good kid though, good kid.”

“So, maybe that Freddy will be coming back to Monteflores again soon.”

“Oh, he’ll be back. When the designers start specifying materials for number three—the seed, sod, soil, plants, mulch, sulfur, lime, whatever it takes—Freddy’ll be in on that part. Then, and after the permits pass and the material bids open...? That’s when our Freddy Boy shines every time. Our value engineer...” Frank’s words trailed off.

“And what does that mean, Frank—value engineer?”

“What...? Oh ... well ... maybe that’s enough about good old Fred Miller—”

“... Müller’s his name, eh?”

“Yes, the damn Kraut! Hey, there’s our landing pad. Doesn’t look quite so cheery with all the lights taken down, does it? You should’ve seen this place at Christmastime, Pete.”

“*Jaja*, I should have ... I probably should have, Frank. So, where does this Freddy do all his drinking? Not in his Suburban, I hope.”

“Oh, you can be sure a guy like that’ll be driving and drinking till he kills himself and takes somebody like you or me with him. Last I knew, the saloon in Fern was his watering hole. Place’s not for you, Pete, far as I can tell. Bunch of low-lifers in there, bottom fishers. But if you really want to see him in action, you look for his Suburban in front of the Fern Saloon. If there’s a brand new Chevy Suburban parked anywhere outside, you’ll find him inside. Where’d you say you live anyway?”

“Soquel ... Soquel Highlands.”

“Oh, hey, you’re almost from right around here, pal. The Highlands ... I think I’ve heard of that. Brand new subdivision...? Nice, right?”

“That’s right. At least we think it’s nice,” Pieter added.

“So, okay now, if I can just get through this ... without hitting one of these ... damn ... red ... wood ... trees ... there, home safe. I guess that pair of old timers dates back to when the original lodge was built here a hundred years ago or something. They couldn’t bear to saw those two geezers down, but it does make for a tight squeeze ... and when you’re a little tight....”

“Why are you stopping, Frank?” the passenger inquired, surprised to find the sedan come to a halt halfway down the driveway to the lodge.

“I was looking up there where that blue light’s on inside that building. I guess it’s a greenhouse or something....”

Despite Katie’s explicit prohibition, Pieter shared a long look at the property next to Monteflores Lodge West. “Yes, I think you’re right. Maybe a glasshouse...?”

“They say that’s just about where the 9th green will be, if it comes off as planned.”

“The golf course will reach all the way down here?”

“If the Japs get their way, it will. I guess one of the big wigs was up on the ridge a year back, and he had some opera glasses or something with him, scoping out his dream course—that executive course we were talking about. I wasn’t there, but the story goes he spotted the big meadow between the lodge and some old house back there on the other side of that fence, and that’s exactly where he wants to put the final green, right in there.”

“Where the greenhouse is now, you mean?”

“There ... or in the meadow behind the lodge ... I guess. You check it out in the morning, take a look. You’ll see what he had in mind—well, if you were a golfer you would. Imagine teeing off from Cuesta Ridge and working your way all the way down, down, down to the final cup right behind the lodge, or thereabouts.”

“But that house there, that greenhouse and all.... I can’t see much in the dark right now. Isn’t somebody living there? Or does Monteflores already own that land?”

“Well, that’s a kettle of worms, Pete. That there’s a real kettle of worms. Somebody does live there and apparently she’s not selling, at least not to Monteflores. But I’m not really up to speed on the latest in that department. I do know the idea is, if they ever get hold of that property, they want to clear the land and leave it idle. Just scrape it clean before anybody can look too closely for the latest weed on their endangered species list or some holy lizard hiding under some sacred

stone. That way they might avoid some pain-in-the-ass regulations later on down the road. You know, get a leg up before the biologists get around to making their inspections with a fine-tooth comb. Oh, they might have to pay a little penalty later on for doing shit like that but so what? If the Japs want the 9th hole to drop down to the lodge and have the players shuttled back up—”

“... in time for Happy Hour at the Golden Eagle!” Pieter chimed in, desperate to disguise his thoughts and keep his interrogation covered up during its closing moments.

“Now that’d be a unique situation all right—sweet! Drop down to the lodge and get a lift back up for another round—of golf, I mean, of course, of golf!”

Frank guffawed and flicked his headlights at the doorman emerging from underneath the porte-cochere and advancing toward the car until he was on the passenger side, walking alongside the arriving sedan. “Well, Pete, it’s been a real pleasure meetin’ you. Maybe we’ll see you again someday. Soquel’s not that far away so don’t be a stranger. And don’t you worry about those kids of yours living and loving it at M-4 no matter what they end up calling that executive course?”

“How about calling it ‘Jack Daniels?’” Pieter suggested, his hand on the door handle.

“Jack Daniels?” Frank beat his palms on the steering wheel and cracked up laughing. “Oh, Petey boy, that’s the best thing I’ve heard all week! Yes, yes, step right up, folks, step right up. It’s the Jack Daniels Executive at Vignettes IV! Fore!”

Once the man had stopped laughing, Pieter hit his parting shot: “I sure am glad you told me that next phase at Monteflores is about family living, Frank, and about the executive golf. That might make all the difference for Robert and Kathy and all like that.”

“Hey, if those Nips want to build family housing at Monteflores, they’ll build it. Pony up, right? And one beaut of a 9-holer too! Funny how we won the war but they’re beating the shit out of us now, economically. Anyway, tell your son-in-law and your girl they can bank on

it—well, maybe not bank on it, considering his line of work,” Frank added, chuckling. “But Vignettes IV and that ‘Summit-to-Sea’ will get built, environmental laws or not. More than one way to skin a cat, if you know what I mean.”

“I know what you mean, I know what you mean. And it’s been a real pleasure, Frank. You drive safely now.”

“Hell, I could turn off the headlights and close my eyes the rest of the way home, I know that coast road so well.”

“Well, don’t be doing that, Frank. Please, don’t be doing that.”

The doorman held open the car door.

“Goodnight, Frank.”

“Come back and see us again, Pete.”

“Sure, sure, I will. I sure will, Frank.”

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On February’s first false-spring day, Pieter and Katie met outside Cabrillo College’s greenhouses to exchange news, but the acacia pollen blowing ochre in the breeze drove them indoors, where his rheumy, swollen eyes continued to tear and his rosy nostrils to drip. While the older man’s allergies acted up, Katie brought him up to date on the status of her short-term construction loan, although she was more interested in hearing whatever he had learned about Monteflores. Yet between blowing his nose and sneezing, he was fit neither to speak nor to smoke, which would have been his preference but was, in any case, not permitted in the student lounge.

During her recent visit to Santa Cruz, Katie reported, she had found it irksome to be greeted by an officious, entry-level loan officer, a junior banker half her age, who had sat her down and started off tactlessly relaying that, while her “character” report had not elevated her creditworthiness in the estimate of the review board, the market value of her property was unquestionable, and the second draft of her business plan had passed their scrutiny with high marks. Although the long-term operating expenses of her rental enterprise (increased insurance, higher utility bills, franchise taxes, maintenance costs,

and the like) had been credibly factored into the revised plan's sound financial analysis—and properly adjusted for inflation—no postponement of repayment could be arranged, no waiver of late payment penalties granted, no leniency of foreclosure in the event of any failure to pay the note in a timely fashion. Thus, only one obstacle remained: the applicant would have to verify that sufficient funds were available to cover the initial loan repayments while the income-generating rental unit was under construction. He reminded her—it had felt more like a threat—that the repayment clock would start ticking as soon as the bank issued the loan, not whenever her first tenant paid for occupancy. Otherwise, all seemed to be in order, and she could bring her proof of sufficient funds with her when she and her cosigner returned to the bank during normal business hours any time after February 15th.

Using up the last square inch of his sopping wet handkerchief, Pieter nodded his understanding and managed to utter that he would advance her the initial repayment funds as a no-interest personal loan; she could start paying him back once the addition was inhabited and her income was in the black. Katie passed him a handful of paper napkins from the dispenser—so he could dry his ruddy nose—and placed a kiss in his fluffy white head of hair as she rose to fetch the sugar packets and creamer which she knew he was dying to add to the bad, black, lukewarm cafeteria coffee.

When she returned to their table, having collected himself, Pieter was due to render an account of his stay at Monteflores Lodge West and his visit to the Golden Eagle, where he had gotten a much closer look at the Goliath-like size and dimensions of Katie's archenemy. He said he had expected obsequious, liveried servants at every turn, Muzak wafting Viennese waltzes throughout the halls; yet there were no glass chandeliers anywhere in the lodge, and the private dining room's close quarters had in fact only reminded him of the mess hall on the freighter he had taken on his first voyage to America, the latter only slightly gussied up for the dozen paying passengers on board. He had been pleasantly surprised to be left entirely alone to settle into his well-appointed but simply furnished room before the Happy Hour



hosted by the Lodge Master himself, Nigel Oliveira, the same “silver-tongued devil” she had described, who claimed he would try to keep his welcoming words addressed to the lodge’s eleven guests—all of them plainly perceived as credible candidates for ownership uphill—brief. Yet in the end, Mr. Oliveira professed he simply could not help himself from taking the opportunity to mention some lesser-known benefits of ownership, such as elective membership in the Golf Club matching the overall lifestyle at Monteflores. The undisturbed tranquility of the Vignettes blended with unparalleled experiences on what would soon be three championship golf courses—but he would stop and leave them to enjoy more samples of the fine wine, all from the house of Monteflores, naturally. After that, all Pieter could recall was a volley of *beauséjour’s* and *bon appétit’s* and “all like that.”

After Saturday morning’s continental breakfast, their group had been transported up to the Cummings Complex, which Pieter described as modernist in design, its clover-leaf shape laid out on a rise of the terrain equidistant between Vignettes I and II. Stemming off a roundabout, with three sheltered valet stations at the curb and a concrete Italianate fountain inhabited by Bacchus and company at its center, one wing contained administrative offices; a second, shops and restaurants; and a third, the Sales Center, where an embarrassingly self-congratulatory multimedia presentation began as soon as they arrived. Midway through the obligatory opening lecture on the history of the developer (YMS International) and its Central Coastal California showplace, the guests were encouraged to use the first break to book appointments with individual representatives, especially if they preferred a certain time slot in the afternoon. Following the lecture, they were urged to meander through the adjacent showrooms which housed regional maps, miniature dioramas, backlit color-photo panels, and a giant 3D wall map with buttons activating lights to indicate specific locations—present and future—within the Monteflores development. A young woman with a cordless microphone had called them back and spoke—too rapidly for Pieter to comprehend much—about “people with a passion for chic and styling....” He supposed she herself

could be described as “chic and stylish.” Her name was Masha or Macca or Mika—he could not remember, nor had he understood if she was promoting a beauty salon, a spa, an interior design service, or all three.

“I’m going quick to the bathroom,” Katie said. “Be right back.”

Pieter donned his prescription readers and, through the least grimy portions of their lenses, checked the notes he had made on a piece of MLW’s stationary. He seemed to have covered everything except the most important and troublesome part: the threat of Monteflores’ further encroachment upon her privacy, if not its actual appropriation of her land. He still hoped that he could somehow spare her the notion of a 9-hole golf course lurking along the ridge overlooking the Lowrie place. After all, that project was only a rumor mumbled in the dark by a browbeaten, racist, self-aggrandizing windbag, whose ruling domain had been reduced to a retail shop and a barstool. How much credence should be lent to such a dubious source of information, a man as short on details about his own supposed career in professional golf as he was long on generalizations about the grandiose future of Monteflores? Yet what if even half of what he had said came true? What if YMS did manage to continue buying off all stakeholders and coopting the rare outspoken resisters in the process of bluffing the region’s citizenry? Couldn’t this epitome of an anonymous, insensitive, multinational corporation bully its way through California’s stiffest regulatory processes and—as a built-in fallback plan—pay “peanuts” in penalty fees, which a new Golf Club membership or two would make up for with a few strokes of a pen? So, he argued to himself, why should he alarm her now by divulging the specter of such a development sited at her property’s border above Chapel Grove? Perhaps it would be better to gloss over the full truth; how much reality could any one person be expected to withstand? What would it do to the woman’s *raison d’être* if she heard about the prospect of improved Western riding bridleways through the woods of her childhood or the widening of footpaths into golf cart paths leading out to Lookout Rock and down to a privatized Hidden Beach, not to mention the creation of a luxury

beach club there? If Kaitlin Lowrie ever fully apprehended the scope of what she was up against in her determination to stay put at One Grade Road, to maintain healthy gardens and grounds there, to run a specialty organic nursery, to manage sustainable timberland, all of which embedded her health, her hope, and her values in one cherished place—what might happen to her morale?

He crumpled the paper in his hand and stuffed it into his jacket pocket. He didn't need prompting about what to say or omit saying. Being who he was, knowing what he knew, what else was there for him to do but tell her the truth? How could he be less than honest with Elisabeth Lowrie's daughter? Pieter truly didn't know enough about the Teutonophilic Fred Miller to bother his younger friend with that puzzler, one he ought to solve before bringing any half-baked theories up to her. For who was "Freddy the Fixer?" What did he fix? Problems with regulators, but what problems? Why had Frank Talbot called him "our value engineer" before clamming up? What value? What did he engineer? Frank himself had wondered aloud about the man's crucial but ambiguous role in golf construction at Monteflores, and who paid Fred Miller's bills. It wouldn't be fair to lay these uncertainties upon an anxious Kaitlin ... Katie ... Kathy ... Katerien. Pieter could still instantaneously pine after his Hendrika and the child they never had; he used a fresh wad of paper napkins to wipe his watery eyes.

"So, what else?" she asked, startling him as she sat back down. "No mention of any bumps in the road over years past and to come?"

"Bumps in the road...?"

"Problems with permits, vandalism," Katie said. "How about that crackpot lady living in the house on the hill behind the lodge, the hippie bitch who won't sell out? Any mention of her?"

"Not a word. *Nee nee*, you know how people in sales are, Katie."

"More optimistic than a seed catalogue, you mean."

"*Jaja, das is het*. That's it. And you know when they're telling a lie, do you?"

"When?"

"When they open their mouths."

“Oh, great, just what I need: more Monteflores liars! So, that’s all? Come on, Pieter, look at me. I know you. What else?”

“Oh, let’s see now ... where was I? *Oh ja*. I tried hiding from those salespeople, watching some little movies playing over and over on those little television sets they got all over the place. The history of West Coast golf; the history of winemaking in the Santa Cruz Mountains, all like that. But somebody found me, so I had to rejoin the group in some chamber where a gentleman showed us slides of those sonsagun Vignettes III lots sold, the lots in escrow, the lots where houses are still being built, what else...? Oh, lots still for sale, of course, lots and lots of those sonsagun lots still for sale! Then some young man who looked like he just got out of an Olympic swimming pool showed us more slides of some master community maps, *jaja*. Maps and diagrams and charts with arrows always pointing up, up, up. Then another older gentleman was introduced, and he privileged us with what he called ‘exciting news’.”

“Which was...?”

“The organization is negotiating the last significant acquisition of ... what do you call it...?”

“Land?”

“*Jaja*, land, for sure, but land from ... that company, you know....”  
“The Cummings Land and Cattle Company?”

“*Jaja*, *das is het*, Katie. That Cummings Land and Cattle Company. That YMS wants to get all the land that might be good for development someday. And you know, the usual: ‘They’re not making any more land’ ... and all like that. Then we were free to go to lunch—*o mijn god!*—I know I was ready.”

“And after lunch...?”

“After lunch? There was that tour of those model homes. And since the weather wasn’t for golf, there were more opportunities for meeting with that sales staff they got going there, but I snuck away—”

“... oh, Pieter Tuelling, you bad, bad boy!”

“*Oh jaja*. I’m bad, I’m bad. I went looking around that shopping center. You know, they got a grocery store in there and a hardware

store with a cobbler and a knife sharpening service, *ja*. They got a post office, and a dry cleaner, sure, and lots of shops for clothes and jewelry and all like that.”

“What don’t they have?”

“*Ach*, now I remember I forgot to bring you a bag with all their literature, promotions, *prospectussen*, key chains ... all like that.”

“Next time. I’m getting the picture without those. So, Agent Pacifico, did you meet with one of their reps or not?”

“*Nee nee nee*. I got a ride down to the lodge to take my nap. I told you that over the phone, eh? *Ach*, what a nap! Just wonderful, with the rain outside, under the warm duvet, and that long *ondersteunen*—”

“... that long *what*?”

“The *ondersteunen* ... *le traversin* ... *ach*, how do you silly peoples say it? It’s the long thick pillow with—”

“... oh, I think I know what you mean....” Katie said, thinking of a room, a room downstairs in a house, a room downstairs in a house in New Brunswick with a bed, a bed with a comforter and a long thick pillow she had slept with and clung to and hugged for dear life. “A bolster!”

“What’s that you say?”

“Those long pillows, they’re called ‘bolsters.’”

“That’s it then. That’s probably right: bolsters....”

How long had it been since she had thought of that room sunken at the bottom of that narrow house, or of the Kergonts, Lisette and Raymond, living there outside the village of Mentanque, where she had started the long, slow recovery from being raped alive, raped asleep, waking from a nightmare of spiraling down and down and down?

“... but when I woke up—well, then what? I wasn’t able to visit you at proper British teatime, was I, my dear?” He smiled, winking, then wiped goo from the corners of his eyes and blinked repeatedly until both lids opened and closed at the same time. “So, I went back up to that Cummings Complex. Then I hit a hole-in-one.”

“What? You didn’t play golf, did you? I don’t believe you. You don’t really know how to play golf, do you?”

“*Nee nee nee*,” he chuckled. “I don’t play golf, Katie. But I hit *een gat in een* at the Golden Eagle, Miss Katie.”

“What’s the *Golden Eagle*?”

“Is a very nice bar.”

“Oh, a very nice bar, is it? I bet that’s the one and only Golden Eagle still flying around up there, the way they’ve torn this side of the mountain up. So, what hole-in-one did you hit? Don’t tell me they have slot machines up there. Actually, it wouldn’t surprise me.”

“I met a man with a very big mouth, Katie. A man named Frank. I learned more from Frank Talbot over three, four drinks than from three, four hours with all those Brittanys and Adams and Dereks in that Sales Center—”

“... what’d you learn? Who’s Frank Talbot?”

“Is a numbskull. Oh, he’s not so bad. He’s just an old duffer, you could say.” Pieter smiled, pleased with himself for having remembered the term. “They say there are natural fools, and there are old fools. Put them together...? *Ach*, I hope nobody ever says that about me, Katie, being a natural, old fool.”

“I know I won’t. So, what did you learn from whoever he is?”

“He’s that drinker with the loose lips, if you know what I mean.” Pieter tilted his empty cup this way and that, frowning into it. “The loose lips what sink the ships....”

“Okay, okay, I’ll get you some more shitty coffee. I sure hope your story is good or I’ll be thinking you’re just a bourgeois who enjoyed a couple of nights at the old boys club and a few rounds at a ‘very nice bar!’ I was already starting to think you might be a double agent.”

“A double agent, did you just say? A double agent? *Jaja*, that’s good, that’s a good one! Double Agent Pacifico, you call me that from now on, Katie Lowrie. Finally, I got a title in retirement!”

“Be right back.”

Over his next cup, he told her everything he could remember from his fortuitous encounter with Frank Talbot, including the plans for the construction of a golf course reaching from the ridgeline to her meadow, if not exactly all the way to the sea.

*You are cordially invited to attend the groundbreaking of*



**SATURDAY THE FIFTEENTH OF OCTOBER,  
NINETEEN HUNDRED NINETY FOUR**

*Enjoy tours of model homes & an invitation-only long-drive competition  
to celebrate the upcoming construction of the  
Summit-to-Sea Executive Course*

— — — — —  
OPENING CEREMONY AT 1 P.M.  
REFRESHMENTS & APPETIZERS FROM 1:45 P.M.  
LONG-DRIVE COMPETITION AT 2:30 P.M.  
OPEN HOUSE, TOUR OF MODEL HOMES &  
PLOTS OF VIGNETTES IV FROM 3:00 P.M.

— — — — —  
*Master of Ceremonies*      *Guest Speaker*  
RICHARD "DICK" SMYTHE      DIEDERICK "DIRK" VANHEUSEN  
VICE-PRESIDENT, YMS INTERNATIONAL      DIRECTOR, MOUNTAIN VINEYARD MANAGEMENT

— — — — —  
*Limit two guests per ticket.*  
RSVP BY OCTOBER 1ST TO RECEIVE GATE PASS & TICKETS TO THE EVENT.

*(No one will be admitted without a ticket)*

Pieter T. had not been invited to the Grand Tee-off on the back nine at the Cabernet Course that spring but now, with Katie's blessings, he sent back the RSVP and began to groom himself for the October event presaging the start of Summit-to-Sea. When the clear, warm day arrived, he fine-trimmed his facial hair, dressed in pressed slacks, and put on a pair of new, tolerably comfortable dress shoes. He even sported a brand new Panama hat, its leather band finished off with a brass golfer pin—the better to play the part while protecting his skin. At the sign-in table in the roundabout, a preprinted name tag was pasted onto the front of his new clean white windbreaker; boarding the last of the 8-passenger carts shuttling attendees to the ceremony site, he saw that his Ford Taurus was the most modest of the vehicles being parked by valets.

Over one hundred people were seated in folding chairs rowed out on Astroturf covering a level clearing twenty yards in from the ridgeline. A beribboned spade had broken the ground, and a speech was in progress, its amplified phrases lost with every gust of wind on which the presenter's placards threatened to sail off until his assistants folded up the tripod and set the paperboard panels to lie flat on the ground, retired from service. A smiling youngster ushered Pieter to an outside seat in the rear row and gave him a presentation folder with illustrations of Vignettes IV, artistic renditions of the family-oriented community and the vineyard estates, which Frank Talbot had suggested would indeed be the essence of the development's fourth phase. Although the slick sheets were difficult to read without sunglasses, he made out two- and three-story patio homes interspersed among communal lawns, playgrounds, and a centralized childcare center located in the lower portion of the new tract; in the upper portion, more expansive empty lots of land—set aside for the customized vineyard estates—were simply suggested with pale borders and crosshatched lines. Although neither pictured nor defined by any strict boundaries, the general location of the Summit-to-Sea course was indicated by directional arrows and some shading. The text alluded to the course's eventuality, and Pieter heard



the speaker mention that some minor construction details were still pending approval from the County Planning Commission and other agencies, but it was only a matter of time and technicalities before the handicap-accessible trail to Lookout Rock would be installed and considerable user-friendly enhancements made to the existing path along Lower Steep Creek leading to Monteflores' Hidden Beach beyond the Whale Watch Shoppes.

When the master of ceremonies took back the crackling microphone—attached by an expandable, coiled cable to a portable amplifier toted by a young man outfitted in a caddie cap and wearing a white top and green plaid slacks—he emphasized one underlying message: the development's owners had charged Monteflores with responsibility for taking all measures necessary to satisfy the letter of the law while realizing the spirit of the place and of the times, conserving and improving upon the natural environment. He then passed the microphone to Dirk Vanheusen, introduced as the president and director of Mountain Vineyard Management. Another colorful brochure was distributed by a team of eager youngsters circulating up and down the aisles. Pieter took a disposable Fuji camera from his pocket and rose, stepping outside the block of chairs to snap a few shots, presumably of the incomparable sea view out front and the festive white party pavilion behind them; no one seemed to mind.

Dirk Vanheusen expounded upon the virtues of the site's 1,000-plus feet elevation in the so called banana belt above the fog line, where vines captured warming sunlight by day and, by night, the cooling coastal breeze. While he extolled the benefits of the rocky, well-drained soils defining the landscape of the Santa Cruz Mountains' southern and western range—a terroir that could be tasted in the final product, “a landscape you can drink”—Pieter allowed a pretty girl to strap a simple pair of mini-binoculars around his neck so that he could be among those audience members turning about in their seats in order to follow the director's commentary on significant landmarks being pointed out across Ben Lomond Mountain's gentle slope: for instance, the one-thousand-square-foot block of vines surrounded by vintage

fencing just visible on a distant rise. Enclosed within those weathered grape stakes, he said, were the sole relics of the original Zinfandel stock planted by Dante Monteflores over one century ago. Dry farmed and head pruned for more than seventy years— having survived the phylloxera scourge of the late 19th century then the blight of Prohibition—the living vines had been taken out of production and now only yielded a few grapes the size of pebbles and just as hard, although the director assured attendees that he was in constant conversation with researchers at UC Davis in order to ascertain if there might be techniques to draw larger, juicier fruit from such gnarly and truly legendary Old Vine Zinfandel. He encouraged the audience to imagine using those vines to craft a fine wine universally renowned for its palette of intensely concentrated flavors leaving a velvety finish in the mouth. “Put me down for a case!” one anonymous male voice cried out and, amid general laughter, as if suddenly at auction, another veteran combatant called out, “Make that two for me!” Apparently money was not an obstacle to the members of this laughing crowd.

Mister Vanheusen closed by saying that he would be joining members of his staff at MVM’s table in the event tent, where the company’s full spectrum of services—from initial consultation to the timely delivery of custom-labelled bottles of one’s own boutique wine—could be discussed. Vice-President Smythe reclaimed the microphone and indicated that a fleet of carts was ready to carry all interested parties on a brief ride up and around the area slated to become Vignettes IV. But he asked enthusiasts not to stay out bushwhacking for long; chimes would be rung ten minutes before the start of the long-drive competition taking place at two thirty just yards from where he stood. In the meantime, snacks and beverages were waiting—“out of this blasted wind!”

Pieter beelined to the tent and was at the head of the line to receive a glass stein—engraved with Monteflores’ logo on one side and “Vignettes IV” on the other—brimming over with Anchor Steam Beer from a freshly tapped keg. Recognizing no one, recognized by no one, he meandered, steering away from the table festooned with MVM’s

self-promotion and, still standing on aching feet, observing the parade of guests milling about under the big top, wondering where he had seen such people before. <sup>1</sup> When done with the finger food and his second Anchor Steam, Pieter debated whether to go back for a third beer or to jostle with the wine beggars where he had spotted Frank Talbot pouring generous samples to a group of aging, midday tipplers. He set aside the empty stein and got up from his chair, crossing the carpet of artificial lawn.

“Hey, Pete! You old duffer, you! How’s it going? Hey, is your son here today?”

“My son-in-law, you mean. No, Frank, actually he couldn’t make it. He was planning on it but at the last minute something came up ... a business trip ... to South America, in fact. So, he asked the old man to pinch hit for him and....” he paused, pulling the camera halfway out of his windbreaker’s pocket then dropping it back in, “he gave me this silly thing.”

“Gotcha! Better than a thousand words, they always say. But don’t take any pictures of me! I spilled some red on my pants! These people are making me sweat, I’m telling you, the way they’re going through the inventory!” He dried his fingertips on the bar towel tucked into his waist then extended his hand across the narrow table for a shake. “Well, Dutch, what’ll it be? At your service, monsieur! Cab, Zin, Merlot? I’ve got a grrr-ate Syrah ... you don’t seem like a big Sauvignon drinker to me, and puh-leeze,” he declaimed, raising both palms, feigning protest, grinning at his own routine: “Hold back on that rosé!”

“Have you got some of your blend of Zinfandel and Pinot Noir, Frank? I can’t—”

“... good taste, my man!” he retorted, checking the labels on his open bottles then throwing up his hands. “You see? We can’t keep that one in stock. But what do you know...?” He reached into a case and pulled out a new bottle, taking a waiter’s corkscrew from his back pocket and going to work. “Isn’t this one a winner though? Yes, sir! Fifty-fifty Zin-Pinot, comin’ up!”

“You were sure right about the Vignettes IV and all.”

“How’s that?” he replied, evidently having difficulty getting a purchase on the cork. “It’s pretty noisy in here, at least for this bunch.”

“Oh, is nothing, Frank. Is nothing.”

“Here we go,” he asserted, pulling the cork.

“Say, Frank.” Pieter leaned forward while the man poured him a plenteous portion. “If that Freddy fellow is here now, could you point him out to me?”

“Say, listen, bud,” Frank replied, whispering conspiratorially. “I thought I told you. They keep that fellow you’re talking about under close wraps. Mum’s the word,” he concluded, winking and passing the wine glass. “Well, hello there, gentlemen!” he bellowed, looking past Pieter to three moving mannequins sans dames. “Great seein’ you, Pete! Glad to know you and your kids are still in the game.”

“Oh, *ja*, we are, we are ....” Pieter said. “*Pardonnez-moi, messieurs. Je vous en demande pardon.*” • Toasting the trio with a sweep of his glass, he drifted off to a nearby table where a selection of gourmet, crackered pâtés and caviar had been picked over by the well-washed masses. He could hear Frank shouting: “Oh, but yes, we do too, we do too! We just happened to have one more bottle of our grrr-ate Syrah right here and now! *Que serà, serà!*” the man declaimed, aiming his corkscrew. “*Que serà, serà!*” Pieter watched Frank bobbing and weaving as he pulled the cork and, with exaggerated gestures, poured three good sized servings of deep purple. The chimes sounded and Pieter joined the outgoing crowd tottering back to the clearing, where they looked on as a quintet of serious golfers set about playfully competing for bragging rights—and magnum bottles of wine—hitting their farthest drives off Cuesta Ridge. Without concern for accuracy, with metal clubheads swollen at the ends of graphite-shaft woods, the five players took turns smacking Monteflores-branded white balls into the wild blue yonder. With the loaner pair of binoculars, Pieter traced the trajectory of their shots sailing 250-400 yards out, usually but not always landing where the sharp descent leveled out into a wide

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• *Excuse me gentlemen. I beg your pardon (Fr.)*

ledge some 100 yards lower than the ridge. In the field adjacent to the forest bordering the ancient redwood trees of Chapel Grove, ball boys in white took measurements after each player's round, calling in the numbers on handheld radios. Beyond the range of their longest drives, Pieter could see the lodge, the causeway leading in from Grade Road, the bottom of Grade Road teeing into Highway One, and the Whale Watch shopping center, although the view of Katie's house was obstructed by trees.

Easing away from the scene, he held on to the binoculars, first paying a call on the restroom and then hailing the roving bar cart for a bottle of Heineken before boarding the shuttle providing rides to the 1,200-foot elevation where the paved road ended in a cul-de-sac. From this highest vantage on usable property, surrounded by rock outcrops rupturing the short, browned grasslands between heritage coast live oaks, the uninformed driver misidentified familiar sights in view across the whole of Monterey Bay and shared what little he knew about the configuration of the overall layout of plots in the vineyard estates acreage of Vignettes IV. On the way back down, Pieter perceived a cluster of construction trailers and, as other passengers had done, requested the driver to pause right there for one moment. Without explaining anything to anybody, he used the baby binocs to focus on a newer model Chevrolet Suburban, its deep metallic blue sparkling in sunlight at a distance too great for him to read the silver license plate.

Deposited back at the clean, black, newly minted asphalt curb closest to the pavilion, Pieter surrendered the binoculars and decided against revisiting the tent. He had sounded Frank Talbot's measure and concluded that any other jewels of information in the man's secret treasure chest were none that would be shared. His pockets were stuffed with enough promotional literature, and he had heard enough cover stories issued from the mouths of Dick Smythe—probably one of dozens of "Vice-Presidents" carrying the torch for YMS—and the development's chosen vineyard manager, Dirk Vanheusen. Most memorably, he had seen Freddy the Fixer's Chevrolet Suburban

parked at the construction company's field headquarters, from which the Summit-to-Sea course would apparently be built, come what may.

Pieter skipped the first round of cart rides, taking in the sweeping seascape and taking the opportunity to smoke, without popular reproach, a Schimmelpenninck or two on the quarter-mile walk back to the Cummings Complex. Well in from the ridge, the sun warmed his back; he recognized that he didn't need to wear his windbreaker except to hide his shape from public display, but he did need sunglasses. The fresh air seemed to open his nostrils so that the tobacco tasted novel, and the lukewarm breeze laced with hints of a nascent autumnal chill made him imagine he could quaff the atmosphere like a bitter beer or sip it like fine brandy in a large sniffer. A passing cart slowed to see if he wanted to get aboard; as soon as he had waved it on, he regretted his decision: the laced dress shoes, the largest and widest he had been able to find, were killing his arthritic toes.

Pieter realized he had drunk more than he had eaten, yet he reasoned that a gin and tonic would perfectly harmonize with the warm day following upon the first few cold nights on the heights above Soquel Gulch. He wondered what to do with the information he had gathered in print, on film, and in his head, and if he should be jotting down notes while he remembered details. When he went to report it all to Katie, how could he mitigate the harsh truth: that the development of Vignettes IV was virtually off and running, and that the construction of the Summit-to-Sea course seemed a foregone conclusion, if not a *fait accompli*. Would she not feel all the more isolated once her neighbors further roped her property within their network of trails designed for motor driven vehicles and their premiere golf course forever altering her upland view of the horizon between her home and Ben Lomond Mountain? Even if he emphasized that the long-distance golf contestants had been ignorant of her existence as they slammed balls into oblivion, would she nevertheless feel that she was the implicit target of their game? How could he make light of the seemingly inevitable presence of an ultra-private, ultra-elite beach club at Hidden Beach? And what could he do with his suspicions about

Freddy the Kraut? Pieter felt more flummoxed than ever about his own role in a three-ring circus of deceptions that even boasted its own white-top tent.

The image of the deep blue Chevy Suburban with the Nevada plates, shining like a mirage he had once chased during a winter road trip in the Sonoran Desert, seemed far more consequential than the sight of his own parked Taurus, dwarfed by a gallery of luxury vehicles in the lot he passed on foot; it would have to be brought to him by whichever valet held the keys. Pieter toyed with the money clip in his trouser pocket. Did these people customarily tip such employees or was that considered gauche? He determined that he would press a few dollar bills into the hand of whoever gave him back his humble Ford and allowed him to make a quick getaway. But at the last moment, he veered away from the valet's station and toward the shopping wing of the Cummings Complex. His shoes were torturing him. An Irish Whisky at the Golden Eagle would get him off those tortured feet and help him realign his thoughts before calling on the owner-occupant at One Grade Road downhill. He paused before a pile of pumpkins and a scarecrow propped outside the automatic entrance doors. *But isn't it too early for Sint-Maarten. Isn't Sint-Maartenfeest • still a month away...?*

Clear about Monteflores' multiple irregularities in the past, uncertain what to do about its inevitable environmental offences in the future, Pieter Tuelling walked the busy mall's main hall, identifying Bing Crosby's voice piped in over the sound system. Boring shops, discreetly decorated for Halloween, entertained grandchildren who stood out for their rarity and well-behavedness among the older adults. *What the hell I'm doing here anyway in this America, in California, in this Monteflores? What good can come of my imposture in this phony City on the Hill? Who's going to stop the crimes those sonsaguns are prepared to pay for, jaja, altering Katie's place, including the obliteration of the last good person living there?*

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• Saint Martin's Day - celebrated on its eve—November 11th—in the Netherlands (Dutch)

*Ach, een Nederlander named Dirk and his Disneyland version of some historical Dante Monteflores and some fabled Monteflores Vineyards and some mythical Monteflores—wat dat ook moge zijn!* • As he pushed open the double glass doors to the Golden Eagle, he felt he could breathe again, have a drink, and then take on any murderous marketeers, come who may.

Denny had a full house and help, a waitress who was serving patrons lounging in stuffed chairs around the fireplace, where the gas flame was lit but kept low, and others who half-stood, half-sat at the tall cocktail tables. Pieter took the first stool freed up at the bar and waited for the bartender to greet him, perhaps to remember him, whether perceiving him as an owner or a guest of owners or the prospective owner he was pretending to be. But Dennis gave no sign of recognition when they did face each other across the counter, and Pieter realized that over the last ten months the young man had served any number of older men looking or acting distinguished, passing themselves off as if they were essentially a considerable cut above your average senior citizen in matters of class and taste. He inquired about the Indian Summer Special advertised above the punch bowl behind the bar. Denny slid him a card listing the ingredients: London dry gin, sweet Italian vermouth, elderflower liqueur, crème de pêche, lemon syrup, apple juice, and aromatic botanicals added to chilled tonic and sparkling waters. The next time Pieter caught Denny's eye, he blinked twice, nodded yes, tapped his fat pointer finger on the recipe card, and mouthed the words: "One of these."

Resting on his barstool, he refrained from bending over far enough to relax his shoes' grip; the days when he could inconspicuously cross his legs and, one after the other, slacken shoelace knots were over. Cognizant of California's new ordinance prohibiting smoking in non-bar areas of a restaurant, he observed that cigarettes were still being smoked throughout this room, yet it seemed to him that a cigar—even one of his petits—might be viewed as obnoxious,

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• *whatever that might be (Dutch)*



and he did feel wary of drawing too much attention to himself. Unless the bartender suddenly recollected him from January and—if the crowd ever thinned out—sought him out for small talk, Pieter realized he could almost revert to his real identity undetected, in which case he had no business even being there.

He studied the visible attributes of the patrons and thought that, with so many masks worn in present company, no one could tell a true face from a false one. He wondered if every day at Monteflores was more or less a genteel Halloween party with sweet treats and hidden dirty tricks. The icy punch slipped smoothly down his throat and, knowing he would be ordering a second, he resolved to perpetuate his make-believe persona, enhancing the possibility of learning something from the fair-skinned, sandy-haired, seemingly approachable youth behind the bar. Besides, it was so easy to lie, acting like one of them.

Pieter signaled for a second serving and sat waiting, stymied about how to distill or water down the news he felt obliged to share with Katie. All he had witnessed only confirmed the improbable odds of her successfully confronting the Goliath looming ever larger from Fern down to the tideline on Cliffport Beach, casting its shadow over her backyard, her front yard, her side yards, and everywhere else. Wasn't it probable that the entire process of getting Monteflores' dominion further built out would be based on the same solid foundation of graft, corruption, and deceit employed to date?

The televised college football game ended, and the barroom emptied out by more than half. Pieter considered relocating by the fireplace with a third glass of punch, but he knew that if he did he would lose his chance of any tête-à-tête with his possible source of more telling information; if Denny became available, he wanted to engage him in conversation, fighting lies with lies.

“Would you like another, sir?”

“Sure, sure,” Pieter agreed, admitting to himself that he had better give up pretending that he was going to drop in on Katie Lowrie later that day. Embracing the new, cool glass between his heavy paws,

at the first moment of semi-privacy, Pieter spoke up: “Say, Dennis. Have you seen Fred Miller in here lately?”

“Fred Miller?” The young man smiled upside down, lifting and lowering his shoulders, musing, then finally nodding no. “Sorry, sir. I guess I don’t know who you mean.” He occupied himself with his tasks then placed himself back opposite Pieter. “I was just thinking. Do you mean Freddy the guy with the big mouth?”

“*Dat is het*—I mean, that’s it, *jaja*. That’s the one!”

“Why, are you ... German?”

“Am I what? Am I German? I am not German!”

“Oh, I’m sorry, sir. I just thought that sounded like German. You have a little bit of an accent or something....”

“*Jaja*, is okay, is okay, Dennis. Is that Freddy German?”

“I don’t know. I guess so. I never met the guy. I’ve only heard about him, but I was told not to serve him in here. I guess he gets pretty loud and rowdy....”

“Oh...?”

“Tell you the truth...? Well, why not? I’m on my way out of here at the end of the month. But all I really know is what I’ve heard from this older guy who comes in here on a regular basis. A real regular if you know what I mean.”

“Sure, sure, I know ...” He was now certain that the youth didn’t remember him from his one and only visit much earlier in the year. “Go on, go on.”

“He works right here in the mall. Been at Monteflores since it started, I guess, but he’s kind of a blowhard so I don’t always believe what he says.”

“That’s wise, Dennis ... very wise.”

“When I started here about a year and a half ago, they gave me a list to keep by the phone and I’m pretty sure that Fred guy’s name—did you say Miller is his last name? Wait a second, let me check.”

Pieter watched his unknowing informant fish around a drawer then return with a laminated index card.

“Here it is,” Denny said, showing his customer the flipside: “Fred ‘Freddy’ Miller. There he is, right at the top of the list like I thought.”

“I see. That is German, isn’t it? From Müller...”

“I guess. Anyway, these are the people who, you know.... If they come in here asking for a drink or something, I’m supposed to call Security right away.”

“Security? I haven’t seen any police at Monteflores, except down at the main gate.”

“Oh, you’d be surprised. There are some private police milling around.”

“Secret agents?”

“Plain clothes security. You know, so if there’s any trouble. The management doesn’t like to make a scene calling the regular cops and all: bad publicity. Anyway, that’s about all I know about whatshisname, Freddy Miller. All the shops have the same list,” he concluded, slipping the card back into the drawer.

“A list of well-known troublemakers, eh? But tell me, what did you mean when you said you’re on the way out? I hope you’ve got another job lined up....”

Denny cast an eye over a dozen customers still seated here and there. “I have. Mountain Vineyard Management is finally giving me a shot. They’re the reason I even took this job in the first place. They’re the company that takes care of all the vineyard plots in the common areas up here. But I’ll be working with the new boutique winery project if you know what I mean....”

“*Jaja*, the vineyard estates, Vignettes IV.”

“Wait a second. Were you just out there at the ceremony this afternoon?”

“I was.”

“So, that Mister Vanheusen, the one making the pitch for MVM—he’s the guy I’ll be working for. And I was stuck in here!”

“I understand, I understand,” Pieter responded. “That’s too bad. That’s a very smart businessman you got for a boss there. That’s a Dutch name, you know: Vanheusen.”

“I know, I mean, I know he’s smart. I met him when I was finishing up at Davis, at a kind of job fair they threw for grad students. That was June last year, so I’ve been waiting for long enough, keeping this bar.”

“What took Dirk so long? You seem like a bright young man to me. What’s your last name, Dennis?”

“McGuire. And thank you. I guess it’s taken so long because they had to get some zoning regulations changed or get a variance or something. They weren’t sure they could make the vineyard estates fly with County Planning. The Monteflores execs were all for it, but then they found out there were some rules about how the land in that area had to conform to some only-one-house-per-hundred-acres zoning ordinance. Are you from around here, sir?”

“Not exactly, not exactly, but go on, please. Teach me.”

“Well, I guess during the great North Coast feuds in the Seventies or sometime—I was just a kid growing up in Monterey back then—but all the people against development wanted to keep the land in agriculture or at least keep it out of tacky subdivisions. Anyway, Monteflores got Fern to get the county to reduce that zoning to one-house-every-ten-acres, which is supposed to preserve the quote rural flavor unquote.”

“Well, that Dirk was pretty convincing. Seems like they’ll be nothing but blue skies ahead for the Vignettes IV vineyards.”

“I’m sure he was positive. Tax breaks on your eight acres in grape production. Payment for any grapes you sell. The challenge of being a gentleman farmer or a hobby vintner or something. And the thrill, of course, when you get to give out your own private wine at Christmastime. I’m not going in on the marketing side, but I get all those bells and whistles.”

“But is there really any profit for the homeowner in such a small enterprise?”

“Well, if you do the math, over the long run, yes, as a matter of fact there could be. 175 to 250 tons per acre on a good yield after a dry spring. Fifty thousand dollars for ten acres once the vines start producing after three, four years. I’d call that good money.”

“Oh, my, Dennis. You’re an agronomist.”

“Well, I did study this stuff. But Mister Vanheusen is first off looking to put my knowledge of pests and organic pest control to work revising and expanding the booklet they want to pass out to new owners and, you know, people looking to buy in—”

“... people like me!” Pieter chimed in.

“I guess so if that’s why you’re here. Anyway, integrated pest management is my field. I’m more into viticulture than viniculture. Just last year there was another bad outbreak of this root louse ... that’s a pest that kills the vines—”

“... *jaja*, that phylloxera blight...”

“So, do you know about vines?”

“A little ... a little.... I read a lot, Dennis. Retired, you see. I got the time.”

“Well, that outbreak just opened up opportunities for MVM—that’s Mountain Vineyard Management—because, of course, only new plants will be going into any new Vineyard Estates. The upside to the downside if you know what I mean. New zoning, new clean plants.... I think Mister Vanheusen’s probably right, or I wouldn’t be hiring on, tell you the truth. Of course, it’ll be a challenge going organic. We sure can’t let the ground squirrels move in because the coyotes and the hawks—even the real Golden Eagles—they can’t keep up with ground squirrels once they get ahead of you. ‘Organic’ means all we’d have would be traps and that’s a bear, if you know what I mean....”

“*Jaja*, is a bear, I know....”

“And then there’s always the possibility of ten thousand million starlings dropping by for a bite to eat. And gophers ...? Your regular pocket gophers do love to colonize newly cultivated soil. Pierce’s disease, sharpshooters, leafhoppers, you name it. That’s why they need someone like me on staff.”

“*Ja!* That’s exactly why they need someone like you,” Pieter echoed.

“Thanks.” Dennis assessed his clientele and smiled. “I’m pretty sure my boss didn’t mention any of those pests in his presentation. Or what if there’s a glut on the grape market—”

“... pardon me, but a glut, it means...?”

“Too many grapes all at once, too much harvest throughout the state. That causes prices to depress—”

“... but that’s the farming, eh? *Overvoeren* ... a glut...”

“Right, I guess. Too much, a glut. But I better go help my helper now. Would you like another, Mister...?”

“Just call me ‘Pete’.”

“Okay, Pete. How about one on the house?”

“I better not, better not. Have to drive soon and all like that. But one more question I got for you then I let you go. Why are they calling that short course ‘Summit-to-Sea’ when it won’t start at the summit and it won’t reach all the way to the sea ... or will it?”

“But it sure sounds good!” Denny quipped. “I mean, doesn’t it? ‘Summit-to-Sea.’ That’s marketing for you. Boy, you should have heard the racket the exec’s made in here the day they found out they could use that name after all. What a celebration! I almost called Security on them!”

“Oh, *ja*. I can imagine. But didn’t I hear about some piece of private property in the way of building that course? Some really difficult neighbor ... something like that...?”

“I think I heard about that too. I don’t know. Some old house next to the lodge, right? I guess if that place weren’t in the way, they might be able to build the course right down to the beach. But I really have to go now, sir.”

“*Jaja*, me too. Better get home and feed the dog, eh?”

“It’s been nice talking with you ... Pete.”

“Same here, same here, Dennis,” he replied, extending his hand to shake. “Thank you for the excellent taste of Indian Summer, eh? And best of luck in your new position.”

“Why, thank you! I’m really looking forward to getting out from behind this bar and...” He broke off, rolling his eyes toward the door that let employees into and out of the shop on the other side of the wall.

*Chapter 6: The Golden Eagle*

“*Oh, ja!* I can understand how you feel,” Pieter commiserated, ambiguously adding, “I can understand how you feel about that one.”

Denny stepped into the back room. Although the charge should only amount to twelve dollars or so, Pieter left a twenty tucked under his empty glass and got down from his elevated seat, limping his first few steps on the red carpet leading back out into the mall.