

Prologue

GREENWICH, CT

It was a quiet, contented Sunday evening in August. The shore traffic had cleared on Sound Beach Avenue, leaving only the hot pavement and the dreary rivulets of air conditioner condensation to mark its passing.

A brick, two story elementary school demarked the end of the street's passage through the residential area. It was flanked on one side by a pedestrian crossing and on the other by the exit way of a circular drive that, on a school day, would be filled with mothers dispatching children from tony BMWs and Mercedes sedans. On this day, however, there were only empty, faded parking spaces to look up at the half drawn window shades of the final weeks of summer vacation.

Michael and Faith checked the traffic in both directions before crossing the street. They knew from past experience that the evening's seductive silence was deceiving and could be shattered at any moment by the engine whine of a frantic, overdue sunbather rushing to get back home.

Speed limits meant nothing to these drivers absorbed as they were in the pressure of deadlines that even a modicum of foresight would have prevented. They would round the bend down the street going fifty in the twenty-five mile an hour speed zone and have no time at all to react to street crossers even if they were paying attention. And, most of the time, they weren't. So, both Michael and Faith shortened up on the leashes of the dogs tugging to race across the walkway in front of them and peered toward the distant turn before stepping out onto the hatched white lines.

Michael's six foot, six inch frame produced long strides which he consciously shortened in order to stay at the side of his diminutive wife. They were an incongruous pair. In addition to their difference in height, he had sandy hair that was flecked with gray and a face full of freckles, while she still proudly sported the jet black tresses and pale, clear complexion of her youth. They had met in high school, dated for awhile and then gone their separate ways. Twenty-five years later, after each had been married and divorced, he had tracked her down the old fashioned way - by looking her up in the Manhattan phone book - and five years after that, they had said their vows. As she teasingly described their latter day union, "Michael was always a slow learner."

Once across the street, they started up the slope of the driveway toward the path that led around to the back playground and field. It was a steep journey for their two long-haired, miniature dachshunds, but the dogs forged ahead anyway, excited by what they knew was coming. Any time the harnesses came out, the leashes went on and the walk began not down the sidewalk but by crossing the street, they knew it was romping time. Michael and Faith would run the leads out to their fullest extent and race around the field side-by-side with the

dogs, offering them, as best they could in this heavily populated neighborhood, a chance to feel what it was like to run free.

Michael and Faith exercised the dogs this way at least once a week. They both believed that it was not only kind, but healthy to throw off the daily constraints on these furry members of the family – for that’s what they were – and let them experience a fuller measure of their natural ability. The liberation, however, would always be civil and play out by the rules. And, the sign at the corner gate to the field left no doubt about at least one of those strictures – *Dogs MUST be leashed at all times* it read in big, black letters.

The day’s heat hadn’t yet withered away on the field, so the couple jogged slowly around its perimeter and then stopped to give the dachshunds a chance to catch their breath. The air was oppressively humid, but at the sun-baked grass level where their pint-sized pets sat, it was even more stifling. They wagged their tails happily, however, and leaned forward as if to say they were ready to go again.

Michael smiled at their enthusiasm, and looked over at Faith to see if she was ready for their next lap. She had dropped to one knee to tighten a shoelace, but to his surprise, she was staring intently in the direction of the corner gate. He turned to follow her gaze, and that’s when he heard it. The commotion was invisible, but definitely coming their way. A storm cloud of dark noise, it seemed to creep closer and closer to their patch of evening solitude.

Suddenly, two huge German Shepherds bounded onto the field without leashes. They were followed by a woman dressed in stylish running shorts and a bright pink tank top who was walking slowly alongside a man peddling on what appeared to be a mountain bike. Despite the distance separating them, Michael could tell that both dogs were fully grown and rippling with well-honed strength. Their every move said they had been bred to see themselves as a dominant species and the lords of all they encountered.

At first, the animals were so busy leaping back and forth between the man and woman they didn’t notice the four figures peering at them cautiously from across the field. They were wildly exuberant, but their energy was concentrated within a tight orbit that circled around their masters. The cacophony of their baying pulsed outward like an invisible force that seemed to enforce a judgmental separation and mark an assumed distinction from all others around them.

The grouping resembled a triumphal procession carving its self-absorbed way through the lives of ordinary people. As one of the dogs pivoted to run past the other, however, it caught a glimpse of the two humans and two small dogs standing silently in the distance. It let out a loud yelp of indignation which caused the other dog to stop and look in their direction. At that point, instinct took over, and both Shepherds let loose a full-throated, confrontational howl and raced off toward the strangers.

Not knowing what to expect, Michael quickly stooped and picked up both dachshunds. They had seen the two huge canines begin their charge and were shaking with fright. Their leashes jerked up and down over his arms as he struggled to control their anxious squirming. Faith stepped closer to him as she too was intimidated by the charging beasts. At a loss for what else to do, Michael began to shout a single word over and over again as loud as he could.

“Stop! Stop! Stop!”

His voice echoed across the field but seemed to have no effect at all on the fast approaching Shepherds. Saliva flecked from the dogs’ mouths, and their strides lengthened as they closed in on their targets. The gap between the surging animals and the huddled couple narrowed to twenty feet, then ten. The beasts’ eyes narrowed in anticipation of their assault, their barking

collapsed into a dark, fierce growl. Then, just as they reached the point of attack, the man on the bicycle yelled an unhurried command.

"Romy, Remy. Halt!"

The two Shepherds immediately slid to a stop and looked back over their shoulders. They stood there panting and whining softly as they swiveled their heads back and forth between their masters and their prey. The larger of the two dogs barked in frustration, knowing that it was only a single, long leap from the weak, little intruders in its domain. It barked again as if to plead for permission to resume the attack.

"Romy, stay," the man yelled.

He and the woman began to move slowly, almost leisurely across the field toward the dogs. The casualness of their approach left no doubt that, in their view, nothing at all out of the ordinary had occurred. The man said something in a low, private voice that made the woman laugh and look indulgently at Michael and Faith. When they reached the Shepherds, the man leaned over from his bike and scratched both in turn behind the ears.

"Good boys," he said. "Good boys."

"Hey," Michael yelled. "Your dogs are supposed to be leashed."

"So," the man replied.

"That's the rule. It's posted right there on the sign by the gate."

"So?"

"So, follow the friggin' rules."

"What are you, a renter," the woman asked waspishly.

"Am I a what?"

"Do you rent your house in Greenwich?"

"What does that have to do with anything," Michael retorted.

"The rules over there," the woman said nodding toward the gate. "They're for people like you."

She turned to look back at Michael with a smug lift of her chin.

"We own," she continued, her voice laced with condescension. "The house we live in is our property. And, this is our town. So, the rules don't apply to us. They're ..."

She paused as if to find the right words. "They're meant for outsiders like you, not those of us who belong here."

"Hey, look lady," Michael shot back hotly. "We have as much right to be here as you and if you ..."

"Michael," Faith interrupted. "Don't bother. It's not worth it. Come on, let's go home."

"Yeah," he replied. "Home. We may not own it, but that doesn't make us second class citizens. And, anybody who thinks otherwise is full of crap."

Michael glared at the woman and then at the man. He expected some sort of angry retort from one or both of them, but all he got back was a silent slap in the face. They just stood there and looked at him with self-satisfied indifference.

The next day, the German Shepherd owner strode confidently into his office just to the north of Greenwich Avenue. Its elegant appointments matched the Ralph Lauren Drake single-

breasted, pinstriped suit he was wearing. His Crocket & Jones shoes shone like dark lanterns and contrasted starkly with the aggressive red silk Gemelli tie he was wearing. The total look, as he intended, proclaimed his role as the perfect American businessman, a titan of the investor class.

He settled comfortably into the rich leather chair behind his desk and ran his eyes over *The Wall Street Journal* headlines. No online subscription for him. He still preferred the crisp, dry-ink smell of a printed newspaper. There was nothing above the fold that caught his attention, so he turned to his appointment log to remind himself of what the day ahead would hold.

As he read through the listings, an irritated frown drew itself across his face. A new call had been penciled in by his executive assistant. He picked up the receiver and punched in her intercom extension.

"Linda, what's with this call from Bryce Willis at PharmaTech?"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Phillippe. I just added it. He said it was urgent, but he wouldn't tell me what the subject was. I know you don't like to take unscheduled calls, but I thought ... well, I ... it just seemed like this might be an exception."

PharmaTech was one of his hedge fund's largest investments, and Willis was its CEO. Originally, Phillippe had taken only a small position in the company, but a tip from the expert network firm he had on retainer had whetted his appetite for more. The FDA, his informant disclosed, was close to approving the company's blockbuster new drug for final trials, so he had quietly, but quickly tripled his stake. In a year or so when the company went public, he would make a bundle for himself and for his fund's investors. That would undoubtedly attract more clients and give him more money with which to work his magic. Yes, David Phillippe was on a roll, and nothing was going to stop him.

"All right, but I don't want to do the call at 10:00. Get him on the phone now."

"But, he said he was going into a very important meeting and wouldn't be available until then."

"I don't care when it's convenient for him. Get him on the phone now or tell him I won't be available today."

"Yes, sir. I'll buzz you as soon as I have him on the line."

Five minutes later, she had the CEO on hold and notified Phillippe.

"Bryce, David here, what's so important?"

"Damnit, David, I was in the middle of ..."

"You were the one who said it was important, so let me have it. What's going on? Has there been a problem with the FDA? If those bureaucratic assholes are holding things up, I'll have Senator Clemson come down on them like a ton of bricks."

"No, no, that's not it at all. I mean, we're still on track to get approved for the trials so the drug's safe, but in order to do them - the trials, I mean - we need at least five more senior scientists."

"So, hire them. Why's that an issue?"

"Well, all of a sudden, we can't find anyone to take our offers."

"Then, throw more money at them. Everybody has a price."

"I thought so too, but it seems ... well, it's almost as if we've got a scarlet letter on our logo. We can find people to fill the jobs, but for some reason, the really good scientists - the ones who will make or break the trials - they won't even listen to us. As fast as we connect with them, they tune us out. If I didn't know any better, I'd think there was some sort of a conspiracy going on."

"Come on, Bryce. We aren't talking about some rare earth mineral here. These are just workers. There's plenty of them out there, and all of them need a job. No one's going to turn down an offer in this economy, I don't care how good they think they are."

"You're right. They aren't turning down every job offer, just ours. These people – especially the clinical guys we need – everybody wants them. So, they have choices. That's what we were trying to deal with in the meeting I was just holding. It seems as if BioLogic ..."

"What do those shitheads have to do with it?"

Biologic, Phillippe knew, was Pharma-Tech's biggest competitor.

"They're going after the same people we're recruiting. That's no surprise. But, what is strange is that their offers are getting accepted. The really good candidates are saying 'Yes' to them, but not to us. And, that's not the half of it. We just lost one of our best managers – in fact, the guy we had slated to be the deputy PM on the trials – he just accepted an offer from them too."

"What the hell are you saying?" Phillippe couldn't hide the edge of desperation that had crept into his voice.

"One of your current employees went over to BioLogic?"

"That's right."

"Well, sue the son-of-a-bitch!"

"We could do that, but it doesn't solve our staffing problem for the trials, and it might even make it worse. He's never coming back here to work – not after going to BioLogic – so all we're doing is throwing good money after bad and maybe giving ourselves a black eye with other people we do want to hire."

"Well, Christ, you have to do something. We need those trials to go off without a hitch. I've got a ton of money riding on them."

"I know that, David. It's why I called you. There's a chance now that the trials will have to be delayed, at least for awhile. We're stuck in place here, if we keep hemorrhaging good people. It's like ... well, it's like the company is being hollowed out. We don't have the talent we need to get the work done right. And, if we can't get the work done right – and it's got to be perfect for us to pass the trials – well ... basically, we're dead."

He paused and then finished his thought in a soft voice.

"We're both dead."