

## Intro

We do on stage the things that are supposed to happen off.  
Which is a kind of integrity, if you look on every exit  
being an entrance somewhere else.

—Tom Stoppard

Two nights ago I stayed up till dawn singing rock-&-roll, gospel, and blues with old friends and strangers in a bar near the Rio Grande. We'd come here across many miles and years to celebrate a life most of us didn't quite believe was over. *Paul della Costa, musician, age 67. On his Texas ranch, following a brief illness.*

How could a man with so much lust for life be plucked out of it by a brief illness?

Endings leave you standing on a cliff edge, but also at a crossroads. Now what? Which path should I take from here?

This death has opened a path I blocked off twenty years ago.

That was before the information age took hold. The media were still plural. Cell phones and the Internet hadn't yet turned the world global. News was as precious and elusive as truffles. You had to sniff it out. Dig for it. Track down rumors. Stick close to people who stirred things up. When an ordinary moment blew up into a headline, the only way to know was to be there.

And if you were there, you could decide what to say about it.

Twenty years ago, a harsher death than this one dumped me at a much more dangerous crossroads. I had to choose on the spot: agree to bury some key facts, or report the whole truth and risk several lives?

I chose the cover-up.

Being a detective's daughter, I got the whole story anyway. And being a journalist, I wrote it down.

Now that agreement has expired.

Now I can tell you what really happened.

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## Chapter 1: Magical Mystery Tour

The swan boats in the Public Garden were tied up for the night, and the Goodyear blimp was nosing toward Fenway Park, when I walked between two seven-foot gold lions into the Faneuil Plaza Hotel.

Across the street behind me stood a glass tower topped by the notorious penthouse where my onetime idol Mickey Ascher died. Past that was the river-view condo where I'd been holed up since January.

Two provocations had brought me here on this balmy spring evening. One was the invitation in my purse: *Please join Hands Across the Sea, 7 PM Friday, June 3. An Adventure in International Good Will! A handwritten note added: Hope to see you J.O.* The ink was blurred by a damp rust-colored stain. Blood? Pizza sauce, more likely. I'd fished it out of the trash after provocation #2.

"Hey, Cory."

Three syllables and I had to set down my teacup. "Rik?"

"Long time. How's the teaching biz? Done for the summer?"

"Fine. How's the media biz?"

"Busy busy, same as ever. You ready to have some fun?"

Not the question I'd braced for.

His voice lowered. "Your mission, if you choose to accept it, is to infiltrate Hands Across the Sea's kickoff bash and find out if their so-called Mystery Band is a scoop or a crock."

Was this a threat? *Help me out here or read about your not-officially-a-separation in "Names and Phases"?*

"I thought Hands Across the Sea's gimmick was a Mystery Destination. Pay your plane fare and you might wake up in an igloo or a grass hut."

"Yeah. Peace Corps for the fast track." Rik blew out cigarette smoke. "Sponsored by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce. Can you see Jerry Leroy and John Otis dropping a planeload of socially conscious, upwardly mobile professionals anyplace without fresh-ground coffee and the Sunday Times?"

"I don't have to. I quit, remember?"

Remember? Walking off the bus into Rik Green's office at

Phases; handing him my first story. I and a hundred other grungy, sleep-deprived college students from Western Mass had spent the previous weekend protesting the Vietnam war in D.C., where I'd interviewed lead singer Mickey Ascher and guitarist Dan Quasi of The Rind. I was a nineteen-year-old English major. And Rik waved his blue pencil and turned me into a journalist.

"I'm not asking you to cover it. Just find out what the Silver Fox has got up his sleeve."

"Why? Come on, Rik. You can't believe Aerosmith or Pat Metheny would spend five days in some Mystery Destination with a bunch of yuppies."

"Cory. *Plausible* doesn't make news. But if it's *true*, we could be talking Fourth of July cover."

That shut me up. As Rik knew very damn well, there was a time when I'd gladly have woken up in an igloo or a grass hut for a cover story in Phases.

But July 4 was also the deadline Larry Thorne and I had set for deciding, like King George III and the American colonists, whether to reunite or declare independence.

I turned over my sodden tea tag as if it might hold a clue.

Darjeeling. *You are about to embark on a journey.*



The Faneuil Plaza's matchboxes call it "Boston's most accommodating institution." While corporate executives plot America's future in the Revere Room, you can lounge beside a palm tree in the Plaza Court, watch water splashing from a dolphin's mouth, and nibble triangular sandwiches from a tiered silver tray.

I discovered this oasis during my first Thorne Cosmetics sales conference two years ago. After we'd all toasted my husband's decision to join the family firm, I slipped out of the Grand Ballroom and commemorated the event privately by scratching my initials on one of the Plaza Court's marble tabletops with his great-grandmother's diamond.

CGT. Cordelia Goodwin Thorne. Named for King Lear's daughter by my godfather, a New York private detective; nicknamed Cory by my socialite mother. My father stayed out of it, since he worked for the one and adored the other. My parents were married but didn't live together—the same arrangement in which, for different

reasons, I now found myself.

Waves of cocktail chatter lapped at the twin cupids on the rococo barometer by the front desk. Those must be Hands Across the Sea's upscale professionals milling around the name-tag tables: Hosts and Ambassadors. A pair of paunchy polyester sales types at check-in were ogling the women in their summer dresses.

*Sales types*, we used to call them in Paris . . .

A red-jacketed waiter wedged past me with a tray of champagne balanced on his shoulder. Through the ballroom doors . . . and he was gone, vanished in a flurry of grabbing hands.

Piranhas. My fingers closed around my evening bag, where my notebook nestled like a pearl-handled revolver.

But that was where I'd find John Otis.

Inside the Grand Ballroom I scanned the hors d'oeuvres tables. Any clues to the Mystery Destination? Skewers of tandoori chicken and teriyaki beef, mini-quiches, finger-sized egg rolls . . . A secretive devil, the Silver Fox.

For our wedding reception he'd served Gulf shrimp and Oysters Rockefeller. And Mumm's Cordon Rouge—homage to our whirlwind French courtship. We'd been married in the eyes of the law before we left Paris, but it took the massive Episcopal pageant mounted by Elizabeth Thorne to sanctify us in the eyes of Boston. I didn't want it; Larry didn't want it. What deal our parents cut, I never found out. Mine showed up long enough for Archie to walk me down the aisle and Lily to fly us to her Montana ranch for a week's honeymoon. Knowing that this time tomorrow I'd be riding a horse up Sandy Spring Trail got me through a hallucinatory day. Standing under a crystal chandelier for what felt like hours, one white glove peeled back from my wrist, a champagne glass in my hand where my notebook should have been . . .

Someone bumped my elbow and I clutched my evening bag. Then let it swing back on its gold chain: socially conscious, upwardly mobile professionals don't purse-snatch.

"Cory!" said a hearty voice. "So glad you made it. What a dress! And those earrings!"

We exchanged air-kisses. "Lovely party, John."

He did look like a fox—wavy silver hair, gray silk suit, sharp nose, inscrutable smile. "Where's your glass? Here, wait. Pierre! Open a bottle of the Mumm's for Mrs. Thorne."

I pretended to adjust my hair, secured in a figure-eight by a gold

barrette. What was I doing here? If I'd learned anything in the past five months, it was that Larry's and my friends, like our wedding presents, fell into two piles: His and Hers.

"Needless to say, you and I aren't drinking anything bottled in New York State." John handed me a tulip glass. "School's done for the year? How'd you like it? Teaching literature to young ladies?"

"Fine. Easier than writing feature stories."

"That's just what Larry said to me last week about being a VP at TC. 'Hell of a lot easier than writing a novel.'"

I clung to my smile.

"We had lunch. A short one—he had to get back for a new product meeting."

"I guess when you're dealing with eye shadow, timing is crucial."

John set down his glass. "Cory, the first time I met you, you told me writing was the most important thing in your life. Larry, too. The core of your relationship."

I thought: He can't have talked to Larry about this, or he'd know what a rotten core it turned out to be.

"Don't you miss it? Seeing your name in print? Chasing wherever your story leads till you track it down?"

"Spending the night in a snowbound airport? Scrounging a bag of pretzels from a hotel vending machine at two AM because the plane was late and they didn't hold the rental car and room service closed hours ago?"

"You didn't mind when you were doing it."

"Maybe I've grown up."

I reached into my purse. John's eyes followed my hand: not the right one, pulling out cigarettes, but the left one with its empty finger where Larry's great-grandmother's diamond used to be.

"So, I hear every Hands Across the Sea exchange includes a Mystery Band."

"That's right." John flicked his lighter. "New Orleans sent a Dixieland combo. Munich's nuts about jazz; who knew? Dallas sent country western. Lot of dancing. New York sent a string quartet, not a big hit."

"And Boston?"

"I'm mum. Like the champagne."

"Why? Isn't this the night when mysteries get solved?"

"Not that one. I tell you, Cory—"

A burst of static drowned him out. A short blonde woman on the ballroom stage was blowing into a microphone.

“Ladies and gentlemen! I’m delighted to welcome you to Hands Across the Sea’s gala kickoff party. At last, the moment we’ve all been waiting for! Are you excited?”

“Sheila Bailey,” John murmured. “Gordon’s wife? Bank of Boston?”

“Now, in just a moment, I’m going to introduce our our Mystery Guest, who’ll give us clues so we can guess our host city. But first I’d like to thank just a few of the many many people—”

“Host *city*?” I sipped champagne. “What happened to the grass hut?”

“Metaphorical. This is all about networking. Opening new doors for the technology and products created by our partners in the Greater Boston area. You saw the logo? A globe with a keyboard.”

“Ah. And what is the Mystery Destination?”

“Paris.”

The string of bubbles rising from the bottom of my glass scattered like pearls.

“Nice, eh? If I was thirty years younger— Oh, wait.” A man in a red jacket was waving from the doorway. “That’ll be the governor. Want to come say hi?”

Spotlights, cameras, aides patting down Jerry Leroy’s too-brown hair, turning his sagging profile best side out. “No thanks.”

“If I’m not back in ten, come to my office and we’ll have a drink at the Plaza Court.”

He strode across the gold and blue carpet, purposeful as a bullet. Paris. John Otis, you bastard.

In my head Joni Mitchell sang the song Larry and I used to play in our flat near the Place St. Augustin. *I was a free man in Paris: I felt unfettered and alive!* No demands to satisfy but our own. Nobody to please but each other.

“And now,” Sheila Bailey blinked out at us, “I’m thrilled to introduce this gentleman, whose name I can’t tell you because it might give away the surprise! So listen carefully and see if you can guess our Mystery Destination!”

I’d met him the very first night of my summer assignment. Standing on a balcony where I’d fled for a cigarette break, eager to go explore that rooftop landscape, dizzy from jet-lag and Bordeaux and chatting with people I didn’t know in a language I’d half forgotten;

when a breezy American voice inquired, “Hey, are you the Cory Goodwin who writes for Phases?”

Since Larry and I (so he said) were probably the last two writers in Montparnasse, we left the party for our own moveable feast. Aperitifs at the Café Sélect, where we scanned the bar for Hemingway look-alikes. Supper at the Restaurant aux Artistes: walls like a tattooed lady which Larry assured me really were painted by starving artists in trade for meals. Then onward to the Boul' Mich', to toast *la vie en rose* with a Pernod and watch the sidewalk parade of tourists, vendors, and bohemians. The Pernod, which struck both of us at the time as a poor substitute for cognac, took on a glow of nostalgia back home over Courvoisier on Chestnut Street.

My mother's friend who'd hosted the party called to warn me off. Thorne Cosmetics. Loads of money. A committed bachelor. Hard-nosed, hard-headed, and too damn charming for his own good. A trail of broken hearts from California to the Côte d'Azur.

But who could believe such a string of clichés? Not Cory Goodwin, international journalist. Anyway, it wasn't like I planned to marry the guy. Marriage to me was the Emerald City, a happy ending miles and miles down the Yellow Brick Road.

Onstage the nameless gentleman was tossing out clues. Famous monuments! Museums! Monarchs! The crowd leaped on each tidbit as avidly as it had devoured the hors d'oeuvres.

Harrison and Elizabeth Thorne apologized in advance for not meeting us at Logan Airport. The fall sales conference, Elizabeth explained—her voice a tinny buzz from the antique receiver pressed to Larry's ear. Harrison's keynote address on Retail Strategies for the Twenty-First Century. I'd guessed her first question from Larry's answer: “Of course it was legal, Mother. The man at the registry said my only requirement was to obtain the lady's consent.” Then, his smile fading: “He didn't ask for yours. Just Cory's.”

“Rome! Athens!” A hysterical young woman stood on her chair waving both arms at the stage. All over the ballroom people were shrieking, thumping each other on the back, splashing champagne on John Otis's carpet. The tables were littered with forgotten dolma and Swedish meatballs.

I yanked my notebook out of my evening bag. Enough! One circuit to look for the Mystery Band, then find John and get the hell out of here.

My high heels teetered on the soft carpet, forcing me to slow



down. A familiar *frisson* of panic prickled the back of my neck. I reminded myself that I wasn't Mrs. Thorne Cosmetics tonight, nobody was watching me, there was no reason to be so edgy—

A slant of light from the chandelier glittered off the sequins on a pink satin shirt.

There were two of them. The young man in the pink shirt had hair so short it looked like iron filings. He stood with his arms folded, staring at the stage. His friend, in a white poodle jacket and sprayed-on black pants, shifted and glanced around as if she couldn't figure out what was taking these people so long. Her mop of brown hair was pinned up haphazardly with little plastic bows. One curl had gotten loose and tickled her neck. She scratched absently.

No way could those two be ambassadors for Hands Across the Sea.

I started to go ask them and stopped. If I were in a Mystery Band, would I spill it to a lady in a silk dress and gold designer jewelry?

Too late. He muttered something to her and stalked off, head down, thumbs in his studded leather belt. I knew that slouch: half hoping nobody will recognize you and half disappointed that nobody does.

"Hey, and Niko? Bring me some more shrimps," she called after him.

I sidled up beside her. "Aren't you Lacey Sky? The keyboard player?"

She looked at me, surprised and pleased. Her eyes were black-rimmed, smudged with purple above and below. "Yeah."

"Cory Thorne. We met at the homeless benefit concert last fall. My husband's company was a sponsor."

"Oh, sure." Lacey grinned apologetically. I could see she didn't remember.

"That was a great set you did with Magic Fingers."

"Wow. Thanks."

"Are you involved with—?"

"This? Yeah."

"Five days in Paris? Not bad."

She grinned. "When we've never even played in public. Bizarro, huh? Terry said these guys are rolling." Her arms waved, taking in bars, buffet, and chandeliers. "Too bad I hate champagne."

My heart thumped. How many Terrys could there be in Boston's

music scene?

“Terry Morrissey?”

Lacey frowned and ran a finger across her mouth: Lips sealed.

“What, it’s a secret? Like the Mystery Destination?” A wary nod. “Then won’t they announce it tonight?”

“Not till the plane leaves. Everybody’ll know then because we’re on it.”

“You and Niko and Terry? And who else?”

She stared at me, stricken. “I can’t talk about it.”

“Only till Wednesday, right? So . . .?”

“That’s the deal. Zero publicity.” Shaking her frizzy head. “What are you, a reporter?”

“Me? No. Not exactly.” I felt my cheeks heating. “Not lately.”

“Oh.” Lacey looked at me as though she didn’t know how to take that—fair enough, given that I didn’t either. “What’d you say your name was?”

“Cory Goodwin. I used to— I sometimes write for magazines. In fact the first piece I ever published was an interview in *Phases with The Rind*.”

“Oh yeah?”

“When I was in college. Their free concert at the demonstration in D.C. over Nixon’s bombing of Cambodia.”

I could see she’d never heard of it. “Right after *Outta Sight, Out of Rind* came out.”

“Oh, wow! Awesome, huh? That album’s why I’m in this band. I hardly even ever *heard* The Rind until a couple months ago. But when Roach and me moved out here, he kept going, ‘Lacey, you won’t fucking believe this!’ And I’m going, ‘But who *are* these guys?’ So he plays me *Outta Sight, Out of Rind*. Both disks.” She sighed. “Wicked hot! The first night we went over there, I was shaking. I thought Dan would be seven feet high and glowing, like Darth Vader.”

But I was thinking: The Rind is reuniting. Dan Quasi’s re-emerged from wherever he’s been hiding for the past twenty years. He’s brought back Terry and Roach, and hired two kids to replace Mickey Ascher. And they’re going to Paris on Wednesday night with *Hands Across the Sea*.

I must be hallucinating.

“So you met Roach, huh?” said Lacey. “I always wondered. What was he like back then?”

“I only talked to Dan Quasi and Mickey Ascher. And their manager.”

“Oh.” Lacey thought this over. “You’ll probably still recognize Dan. Roach says he’s changed, though. Terry, too.”

“They’re not *here*?”

“Nah. They OD’d on this kind of deal. Not me, man. Yo! Room service! Big silver bucket of Jack Daniel’s!”

“Does Hands Across the Sea have room service?”

Lacey’s nose wrinkled. “They better! Terry’s working on it. *They* wanted to put us in all different houses, like the ambassadors.”

I shook my head sympathetically, less for the band than for those five unsuspecting French host families.

A wave from the doorway: Niko, shrimpless, beckoning to Lacey.

“Gotta go.”

I remembered John Otis waiting for me in his office. “Me too.”

We walked together toward the lobby. In her theatrical eye make-up, her fluffy white jacket, shiny black pants, and spike-heeled boots, Lacey drew stares. If they only knew.

I opened my purse to find change for the phone. Behind us a shout rose, as a taped brass band struck up “I Love Paris.”

I looked at Lacey, she looked at me, and we both laughed.

“To Paris!” I raised my champagne glass.

She picked up a half-full plastic cup from under a potted palm. “Room service!” She sniffed it, then downed it in a gulp. “See you Wednesday.”

No! Should I tell her? On Wednesday I was meeting my mother in New York. I’d be listening to a young friend of hers play Bartok and Brahms when Phases’ potential July 4 cover boarded their plane for Paris.

I shut my purse. Rik Green could wait. I needed to talk to John Otis.

## Chapter 2: I Can See for Miles

Whose hotel room I was walking into I didn't know. Graham Douglas, The Rind's manager, had given me only the number on the phone, and the time: noon. Early for musicians.

The king-sized bed was unmade—sheets twisted, pillows and blankets spilling onto the floor. Half-empty plates, beer bottles, and coffee cups littered the furniture. From the bathroom came the hiss of a shower. A leftover groupie?

"This is Cory Goodwin," said Graham Douglas as he led me to a window alcove.

He didn't need to tell me who they were. Dan Quasi cradled a cup of coffee in his hands—those long flat fingers that could pull such heart-wrenching music from a guitar. Mickey Ascher sprawled in his chair gazing at nothing, a faraway sparkle in his eyes.

Mad Mick, the fan magazines called him. Dominating the stage with fringe and feathers and blond hair that gleamed in the spotlight, and the voice of a fallen angel luring souls to Hell. While Dan Quasi paced through the shadows like a panther, lean and intense, his guitar cord trailing behind him, dark hair curling with sweat.

"And what were they like?" John Otis prompted.

He regarded me across his smoked-glass desk. Half an inch of shirt cuff made a neat margin between his wrist and his gray silk sleeve. His fingertips clicked noiselessly, impatiently, over the buttons on his phone.

I smiled. "Terrifying."

"Oh, Christ."

"They were rock musicians!" How to convey what that meant in those days? "Arrogant, sexy as hell, charming when they felt like it, rude when they didn't. Furious about Kent State and the Cambodia bombing—but so were we all."

"Were they involved in the protest?"

"Sure. Music and politics were intertwined then, remember. And everybody under thirty opposed the war."

Clutching my notebook and my Instamatic camera in clammy hands, my throat dry. "Dan, Mickey, you've talked a lot about the role of rock music—and musicians—in the antiwar movement. What's

your role at this demonstration?”

And Dan Quasi, staring me down through cold blue eyes: “Nixon says he represents the American people. We’ve had more people come to our concerts and buy our records than Richard Nixon got votes. We’re here to speak for our people. Stop the bombing! Stop the goddam war!”

Leaning forward for emphasis; while I struggled to focus on what he was saying and not on the glint of gold in the V of his shirt. A good luck charm? A love token?

Then Mickey, half a beat late, with a bright artificial smile that chilled my heart: “Our people want to make *love*, not war!”

John Otis’s fingers interlocked on his desk. “Did The Rind stay mixed up in politics after Vietnam?”

“I don’t know. They broke up around the time Nixon resigned.”

“Then what?”

His foxlike features, the way he was looming at me across the smoked glass, made me reluctant to answer. I found myself choosing my words, as if The Rind were not a thing to be dissected so casually. “You know what happened to Mickey Ascher.”

“Beaten to death with a champagne bottle by an unknown assailant. Right over there,” John pointed at the window. “I spoke to the detective in charge. He says, a welcome-home party that went off the rails. Ascher’d just got out of rehab. His manager found him. Doug something? Could’ve been anybody—thirty or forty people in and out of there—except he’d kicked them all out at midnight. So definitely Ascher let in his killer. The cops jumped on the manager first, only other key, then the band. Dan Quasi claimed he was out of town, couldn’t prove it. But why would he want to kill his partner and best friend?”

“He offered a reward.”

“Fifty K,” John affirmed. “Lot of money back then. Didn’t stop the media circus. Every news outlet on the East Coast had a crew here. I could’ve got three hundred a night for a broom closet. Quasi was in and out of HQ like a revolving door, but in the end he was released without charge.”

“So was *Grind*,” I said. “Instant platinum. But The Rind was over.”

“And Dan Quasi . . . ?”

“Disappeared. Nobody’s heard from him in twenty years. Congratulations, John.”

“Yeah. We’re betting, twenty years, no arrests, cold case, sixties revival, there’s more up side than down side PR-wise.” He flexed his fingers. “I’ll tell you, though, Cory. I’d rest easier if I had somebody going to Paris with them. Just to keep an eye out.”

His eyes were on the pair of chairs across from his desk. I’ve never sat in one. With their gray pin-striped upholstery, they look too much like executives who’ve been shot and stuffed.

“What about Sheila Bailey?”

“Sheila’s a mother hen, not a journalist.”

“I thought your deal with the band was no media.”

“Not up front. But when they get back . . .” His eyes met mine. “Didn’t you say you talked to Rik Green?”

“Didn’t you say the governor’s office is sending a PR guy?”

“Hah! Some crony of Jerry’s from a radio—”

The door slammed open with a bang like a gunshot.

I froze.

The Governor of Massachusetts strode to John’s desk, halted, and clamped one hand on each of the former executives.

“Dammit, John! Who the hell picked these criminals for Hands Across the Sea?”

His eyes were flashing. On his cheeks glowed crimson spots—and not, I judged, the work of his make-up department.

“What criminals would that be, Jerry?”

“Murder suspects! Known ringleaders of the New England antiwar movement! Burned their draft cards right here on Boston Common! And we’re sending them to Paris to represent our business community?”

John eyed the governor as if wishing he were shot and stuffed. “If you’re talking about the Mystery Band—”

“Damn right!”

“—we’ve been over this. The French committee requested them, because back in the day of burning draft cards—and may I remind you, that was twenty years ago?—they drew bigger crowds than the Red Sox.”

“Unsolved Mysteries wasn’t twenty years ago. It’s airing in three weeks. I just saw the trailer. Their leader, slaughtered like an animal! Bludgeoned to death! Found half naked on a polar-bear rug after an orgy in his penthouse, drenched with blood and champagne! Is this the image we’re out to project? Accused killers? Rabble-rousers who led a thousand kids on a rampage through Washington,

D.C.? Who had to be dispersed by riot police with tear gas?"

The way he spluttered you'd have thought The Rind was whipping up a mob in the Faneuil Plaza lobby. I kept still, though I'd have liked to ask Jerry Leroy if he'd ever dodged police clubs and choked his lungs out on tear gas.

"Governor?" A red-faced young man poked his head in. "GBH is ready for you in the Adams Room."

"Jerry," said John. "Eighty-two percent name recognition. No other Hands Across the Sea exchange comes close."

"One minute," said Jerry Leroy. "Dammit, John, I will not send a bunch of goddam subversives to Paris!"

Subversives. Dan, Mickey, Roach, and Terry. My roommate Penny and me and our busload of comrades from Mount Holyoke, Amherst, Smith, and UMass. A hundred thousand young Americans gathered in our nation's capital, high on Spring, outraged by the Kent State massacre and the Cambodia bombing, wound up from the tension of finals, jubilant at finally getting the chance to tell Richard Nixon what to do with his war. The mood all over the city was heady. It's our turn now! You could feel it in the crowd that filled the Ellipse for the speeches and the music. Jackets and shirts off, pale skin open to the sun after a long winter. Joints passing from hand to hand: peace pipes on the eve of battle.

And from those four specks on the makeshift stage thundered "Government Man," The Rind's explosive hit from the '68 Chicago convention. Anger and comradeship swept the crowd. People were finding space to dance, linking arms, waving fists, shouting. When the song ended a thousand warriors surged into the street. Look out, you bastards, here we come!

The cops were ready. In minutes the ragged army was on the run, fleeing tear gas that seemed to come from everywhere, so that you ran and choked and didn't know if you were getting away or in deeper, and fuck! here came some more cops, and you didn't know where you were going but you kept running, the asphalt hot and hard under your feet, till suddenly you were panting in some unfamiliar street and it was all over. An eight-foot cast-iron fence toppled, the papers said later, and three dozen arrests.

"What do I tell Monsieur Tréville?" The governor brushed off an aide straightening his tie. "Not a problem? These troublemakers we're sending you are a media magnet?"

"They're not troublemakers, for god's sake." John was exas-

perated. “So they burned their draft cards. Played rock music at a few demonstrations. So what? You’re talking kid stuff. Wild oats. Nothing *dangerous*.”

Nothing dangerous. We took over the streets of our nation’s capital, fought with police, helped to oust the President of the United States; and now John Otis could sit here behind a smoked-glass desk and say The Rind had done nothing dangerous.

“I’m telling you, Jerry. When word gets out about this band? The press’ll be on you like cabbage on corned beef. And I don’t mean WGBH. I’m talking Barbara Walters. Johnny Carson.”

“I don’t care if—” The governor halted in mid-sentence. “What?”

“Front page of the *Globe and the Herald*. Now, *go*, will you? Don’t keep your public waiting.”

For a moment Jerry Leroy teetered. He frowned. He shrugged. Then he wheeled and marched down the hall.

Of course, I unclenched my fists, John’s right. Who’s into revolution nowadays? If a Rind reunion is news, it’s as the soundtrack for a nostalgia trip, not a new assault on the system. We *are* the system. With Eldridge Cleaver out stumping the lecture circuit, with Bobby Seale marketing barbecue, what’s Hands Across the Sea got to fear from a couple of old rock musicians?

Yet in my heart I couldn’t accept it. Lou Reed might pitch motorcycles; Eric Clapton might sell beer; but that Dan Quasi would play “Government Man” and “Tear It Up” for two hundred upwardly mobile, socially conscious professionals—

“I need a drink,” said John. “Shall we?”

“Who’s Monsieur Tréville?”

He grimaced. “One of our French supporters who’s got a bug up his butt about The Rind. Or, I should say, Quasi & Company. New age, new identity, they tell us, and it damn well better be true. Your father-in-law calls Victor Tréville a conservative crusader—Reagan with a dash of Ross Perot. He’s some kind of honcho in a big public-private development zone outside Paris. Marne-la-Vallée?”

Aha. “Thorne Cosmetics and EuroDisney.”

John nodded. “Harrison said he was instrumental with the TC siting in ‘80-’81. They met ten years earlier, when Tréville was at the French consulate here in Boston.”

“Is that where he got spooked by The Rind?”

“Could be. The thing is, why jump on us? It was their



committee who asked for this band.”

“You said that before. Who asked for them? The Rind broke up twenty years ago. Rik Green didn’t even know if Dan Quasi was alive.”

“Search me.” John rose. “You interviewed them. What do you think? Is this Quasi & Company a front to go over and blow up Paris with the Weathermen?”

I laughed. “Like Errol Flynn left Hollywood to go rob the rich in Sherwood Forest?”

But as John and I stepped into the foyer, an old pulse was quickening in my blood.

*Gonna lighten up my load!*

*Gonna leave this road behind me!*

A hundred thousand joyful voices joining those four silhouettes on the stage and their backup choir from a D.C. church. Penny and I singing till our throats were ragged, clapping the beat, craning past love beads and ponytails, hands waving in the V sign of peace. Surely a nation that’s landed a man on the moon can end war!

*Got to get back to the time*

*when my mind was full of wonder,*

*And this burden that I’m under,*

*It won’t weigh me down no more!*

Our childhood dreams cast aside—no more going to the chapel to get married when your boyfriend was hiding out from the draft in Canada or holed up in the psych library devising a 4-F. Our destiny was ambitious but clear: We would forge a new era, the Age of Aquarius, when bombers would turn into butterflies and Richard Nixon would drown in music, love, and flowers.

“Cory?”

“Tell you what,” I said. “If you can change a ticket to New York for a seat on that plane, you’ve got yourself a journalist.”

### Chapter 3: 2000 Light Years from Home

Sheila Bailey, her blonde curls squashed on one side, led us off the plane into the surreal brightness of l'Aéroport Roissy-Charles de Gaulle.

I still didn't see my photographer, Wendy Peres. Since I wasn't meeting a host family, I'd hoped we could catch up and make plans before I headed for the village of Fraises-des-Bois. John Otis had granted my wish to stay outside the city with a room at his friend Gaston Vlaemenck's country inn, halfway between tonight's opening banquet in Paris and Sunday night's farewell party at EuroDisney.

I hadn't seen the band yet, either, beyond a glimpse of denim and black leather, an acid-green sleeve (Lacey?), and a tall tangle of hair (Roach?). They'd boarded last, sat up front, and shut the curtain after takeoff.

Rik Green had chortled at the news. So Quasi's pulling a Rip vanWinkle! High time. Best guitar player who ever came out of Boston.

"Phases' Fourth of July cover?"

Silence.

What about Unsolved Mysteries? Ringleaders of the New England protest movement? Sex, drugs, revolution, and murder? Project sponsors on both sides of the Atlantic up in arms?

"Smoke." He was succinct. "I'm seeing page six here. You want the cover, find me a fire."

"Such as?"

"Will Quasi bomb the Eiffel Tower? Did he whack Mickey Ascher?"

"I'm not a detective, Rik, I'm a journalist."

I could hear his grin over the phone. "Two days ago you were a schoolteacher."

Now I was Hands Across the Sea's official media consultant. John Otis gave me one order: "Any fire you find? Put it out!"

I waited till I got to Logan Airport to phone Larry's answer-ing machine. He'd left for the Island, to help Harrison and Elizabeth open their summer house. I pictured them half a mile below our plane as we rose toward cruising altitude: chatting on the porch about tennis

and the Dow and waterproof mascara, over gin-and-tonics that got stronger as the sky above the Sound darkened to purple.

Through the roar of the engines, a tinny orchestra clamored for my attention. *Da-de da dom-dom . . .*

*Baby, don't waste it! Come on and taste it, taste it!*

I craned up in my seat.

No reaction from the band. They must be used to this—kick-ass rock-&-roll turned into kiss-ass background music. “Taste It” sounded grotesque with horns playing the bass part and violins where the lyrics used to be.

Was Dan Quasi listening? Writhing in his seat belt?

More likely counting his royalties. Dreaming of limousines and groupies, gold records and silver buckets of Jack Daniels.

*Come on and taste it, taste it!*

There'll be a party tonight after the march, he'd told me at the door. Come back if you feel like it. Blue eyes suddenly not so cold; wide lopsided mouth turned up in almost a smile. Holding onto my hand a moment longer than necessary. I'd examined his fingers and tried to sound clinical: I'd've thought you'd have calluses. No, see?—hard but not callused. They're used to it. So close I could make out every link in the gold chain inside his shirt. That half-smile again: Catch you later.

I'm not going, I told Penny loftily. I'm here to cover a demonstration, not group onto a rock star. My hand still tingling from the pressure of his uncallused fingertips. But you've got to! she wailed. Dan *Quasi*? Are you *kidding*?

She nudged me when he walked onstage. I frowned and shushed her. That wasn't a man you could party with, that tiny figure floating on a sea of waving hands and bobbing heads. I couldn't even see his face, only listen for him in the amplified roar from the speakers.

“Baby, don't waste it!” Behind Mickey's voice, the sweet sharp bite of Dan's guitar. “Come on and taste it, taste it!”

We'd gotten supper in a church basement: munching salad and spaghetti and counting up the missing. Somebody had the handout with phone numbers for legal and medical aid. Should we call the police station to see if they arrested Mark and Eric? No, don't us deal with the pigs, man, leave that to the lawyers. At the other end of the table, a hushed discussion about four people who'd been caught last week carrying a homemade bomb into a New York bank. Seventy or eighty of us, all slated to sleep here, with four sleeping bags and a

dozen Army blankets to go around.

“Come on,” Penny punched me in the shoulder. “Let’s do it.”

We pushed each other out of the hotel elevator into a hall thick with smoke, girls, beer, and noise. A hand grabbed the seat of my jeans. Three girls were screaming with laughter, pouring beer over the head of a roadie in a Rind T-shirt. Another hand thrust a joint at Penny. She took a toke and passed it to me. I shook my head: Where was Dan Quasi?

We found the room. A TV was blaring, not quite loud enough to cover the heaves and moans of a girl in the bathroom. Someone was snorting coke off the shiny surface of a bass guitar. Through the smoke, long hair, grinning bearded faces, and dilated eyes, I saw Mickey Ascher, a cashmere-sweatered arm around his shoulder, crimson-tipped fingers stroking his ear.

A party. Penny and I had expected a celebration of our battle that day to end the war. We’d pictured ourselves linking arms with the band, singing “We Shall Overcome.” And afterwards Dan would hold my hand again, only this time instead of making some stupid remark about calluses I’d give him a silent smile . . . I’d thought a lot about losing my virginity, and on the bus coming over it had seemed to me that to spend the night with Dan Quasi would be not only thrilling but politically responsible.

I looked in again at Mickey Ascher. “Let’s go back to the church.”

But Penny’s eyes were glowing. “What are you, nuts? When will we ever get another chance like this?”

I didn’t follow her inside. I wandered up and down the hall for maybe five minutes, wondering if I’d get mugged if I took the bus and if anybody at the church would have money to pay a taxi, till a door opened and I saw Dan Quasi. He was sitting propped up in the pillows of a king-sized bed, watching the demonstration on the news. The rest of the bed was occupied by four people playing cards and a girl who sat cross-legged beside Dan’s feet, tickling his toes with her long hair.

He saw me and waved: Come on in!

I stood awkwardly beside the bed and told him how much I’d liked the concert. Nobody else even looked up. I asked him if the police had done any damage. Not much, he said, and pointed at the TV. They’re just getting to that.

From the far side of the room came cheers and hisses. Hey, you

guys, there's us! I looked at the screen, where tiny police in gas masks were advancing on an even tinier stage. I couldn't relate to it. My eyes went back to his feet. Thin, brown, bony, long-toed. Dan Quasi's feet.

When the news ended I turned to leave. "Stick around if you want," he said, without turning his head.

I found Penny up the hall. "What happened with Mickey?"

"Stoned out of his gourd." She grimaced. "Come on, let's get out of here."

But we'd done it: We'd marched in Washington against the United States government, and we'd gone to a party with The Rind. When we got back to Mount Holyoke we were heroes. Penny signed up for the student strike committee. I wrote up my notes for the campus paper. The next weekend, still fired with revolutionary zeal, I stormed Rik Green's office in Boston and badgered him into buying my story for Phases.

*Domp-dom, dum-de dum domp-dom . . .*

I should send Penny a postcard. She'd married a history teacher in Minneapolis during graduate school. Every Christmas I got a picture of them with two different kids since last year. Dear Penny, guess who I'm in France with!

*Da-de da domp-dom, domp-dom . . .*

We're here for the cherry blossoms, Mickey had winked at me. Graham Douglas cut in smoothly: in Washington to mobilize support, protest Nixon's unconscionable, forced to reschedule two major West Coast, news media unfortunately misinterpreted, grateful to the hotel management for their excellent, sole concern is peace and quiet. And Dan pushed abruptly out of his chair: Peace or quiet, take your pick.



*Bienvenu à Paris!* Though the flight crew served coffee and croissants as cheerfully as if it were really morning, nobody was fooled. Getting off the plane, I looked again for Wendy Peres. No luck. There was Niko, skinny as a teenager in a black leather jacket, and Lacey's acid-green blouse. I elbowed through the crowd after them.

Could that broad back in a plaid flannel shirt be Terry Morrissey? Yes: still the same old moon face and walrus mustache, but now with a bald patch on top. The Rind's drummer and lowest-

key member. When Penny used to lay out her cards during afternoon tea at school—King of Hearts for Mickey, King of Spades for Dan, King of Diamonds for the bass player (not Roach then but his predecessor, a mystical Afro-Asian known as Turbo)—it was always a letdown if you drew a club.

Roach loomed above the ambassadors like King Kong in New York. In 1973, when he'd pushed through my ticket line at Harvard Stadium, all wild hair and beard, I'd thought he was the scariest human being I'd ever seen. Now he looked historic, like a waxwork or a picture off an old album cover.

I caught up with him as he and Niko stepped onto the moving belt that carries passengers from the outer satellites to the airport's central core.

"Hi. Cory Goodwin. I'm doing a piece for Phases on your band."

Roach grunted and inclined his head a fraction of an inch. Niko eyed me as one inspects an insect before brushing it off one's sleeve.

"Niko Marx," he conceded. "With an X." Then, to Roach: "Who's that with Lacey?"

He pointed up ahead at a rainbow-striped Guatemalan shirt. I'd noticed the same man taking pictures on the plane. Curly dark blond hair, aviator glasses, strong jaw, cleft chin: hip but slick. Unlike Hands Across the Sea's other male ambassadors, who'd opted for a buttoned-down look to meet their host families, this one wore jeans and snakeskin boots.

"Beats me," growled Roach.

Before he could go find out, our moving belt emerged into sunlight. Suddenly we were gliding through the air in a giant tube of transparent plastic, one of several that crisscrossed above an open courtyard. Down below a fountain tossed up curling jets of water. Businessmen and families sat at tables with brioches and coffee, oblivious of their fellow travelers overhead.

"Walt Disney in Airportland," Niko grinned.

Ahead of us Lacey—alone now—pounded on the plastic and waved at people in the other tubes. I thought: Walt Disney called it Tomorrowland. Not the high-tech glitz of Star Wars and Captain Eo, but a stirring future when men would fly rocket ships to the moon. Walt's kind mustached face smiling at me from our black-and-white TV: "Each week, as you enter this timeless land . . ."

"Cory Goodwin?"

I whirled around.

A dark-haired man in a mocha linen shirt. A fine gold chain around his neck. Blue eyes.

Dan Quasi.

The greeting I'd rehearsed on the plane evaporated. All I could do was stare and hope he'd shift back into proportion. Ignore the scrapbook in my head, the TV clips, magazine photos, and record jackets, and grasp that this man riding beside me in a plastic tube through l'Aéroport Roissy-Charles de Gaulle expected me to say something.

"Yes," I managed. "Hi."

Lacey was right—he'd changed. Not the overall impression but the fine points. Chiseled features not so angular . . . Lines between his eyebrows, around his mouth. Threads of gray . . . and surely his hair had been longer in The Rind. Did he have a beard back then? A mustache? I couldn't remember. It was like trying to recall an old song with a new one blaring in your ears.

"How's your French?"

"Not bad," I gulped.

Dan Quasi still loomed two sizes bigger than life, but that wasn't what made me want to step back. This was the man I remembered from D.C., who could stride onto a stage and transform a hundred thousand spectators into a demonstration.

"I have a problem." He extended one hand in front of me to the rail.

What incredible eyes! With black lashes that turned up at the tips—the kind of lashes Larry's father used to say women would endure torture for, if only the R&D people could find the right rack.

"Hands is supposed to provide us with a French road manager and a crew. They haven't shown up. Most of our equipment we're renting here, but we've got luggage and guitars and all that. I've left messages—"

His shirt was open at the top, making his skin look tawny and showing off the sinews of his neck. A fine brushing of black hair curled just below the hollow of his throat.

"So what I need is help explaining that to Customs. What do you think?"

What *could* I think? "Sure. I'll try."

We walked together up the moving belt into the central terminal. Sheila Bailey, at the head of the line, was looking harried. Now she

and her volunteers had to pilot a planeload of curious Americans past postcard racks, money-changing booths, and food stands into the baggage-claim area.

Tough luck, Sheila. I cruised past her with Dan Quasi.

We commandeered an airport official. “He says they’ve got a truck waiting for you outside,” I told Dan.

“A truck? What about the car?”

The official didn’t know.

“I’ve got to find Terry.” Dan slung his dark head around impatiently.

“Do you have the forms you filled out on the plane?”

“There he is. Hang on.”

The official shook his head: Americans! I apologized and looked to see where Dan had gone.

The embarkation area was crowded. Some other big flight must have just come in—a girls’ school on holiday, judging from all the designer T-shirts and jeans. And the excited way they were chattering . . .

Then I noticed the video cameras. And the purposeful glint in the eyes scanning incoming passengers.

They spotted Roach and let out a shriek.

Roach realized what was happening just in time to duck back into the crowd. A flock of teenagers ran after him.

The airport guards weren’t prepared for this. They cut off some of the group, but two or three dozen were already through.

Roach’s bushy head slipped between Hands Across the Sea’s ambassadors like a beaver swimming through a logjam. Somehow he’d managed to grab Lacey. He dragged her along by the hand, with Niko loping after them.

Where was Dan?

I found him four seconds before the kids did, standing beside a luggage van with Terry Morrissey.

I started running.

Dan saw me and the approaching horde at the same instant.

“Over here!” I waved at a stairway entrance.

Dan and Terry reached it right behind me and we went flying down the stairs. “This way!” I felt surprisingly exhilarated. The airport’s layout was coming back to me—mostly restaurants on this level, a good place to lose pursuers.

We skidded around a coffee shop through a maze of tables and



chairs and thundered past a cafeteria. Startled customers scattered in front of us like pigeons. Another coffee shop. Then a mini-mall: souvenirs, a bar, pizza and pasta . . .

Dan, in the lead, swerved into a newsstand.

We stood panting in the corner. The stout woman at the cash register glared ferociously, clearly convinced we were fugitives. As soon as I got my breath I stammered an explanation. I backed off again as a patrol of teenagers came running past. They glanced in—but Dan was hidden behind a folding panel of paperbacks, and Terry had flattened himself between the wall and a revolving map display.

As the footsteps died away, Terry stepped into the aisle. “Looks like we lost ‘em. Dan, you OK?”

Dan was emerging with some difficulty from the paperback section. “Goddam ridiculous,” he muttered.

Watching him disentangle first his shoulders, then his long legs, I squelched an impulse to offer a hand.

“Fifteen-year-old kids! Who do they think we are?”

“Madame?” The woman at the cash register beckoned to me.

“That should be airport security.” I moved to the counter to take the phone.

“And another thing,” said Terry. “How did they *know*?”

As I picked up the receiver, I noticed a Japanese couple who must have watched this whole incident from the magazine section. With a wary eye on Dan and Terry, they resumed browsing.

“They’re sending down some guards,” I told Dan. “Your truck is right outside the door upstairs.”

“What about Roach and Lacey and Niko? And our stuff?”

But I had already hung up.

“Dammit, we’ve got to get back up there!” Dan slammed a hand down on a stack of Herald Tribunes.

The *smack!* and the exasperation in his voice sent the Japanese couple backing hastily away. Madame the proprietor, alarmed, let loose a rapid torrent of French.

I calmed her down. “Listen,” I said to Dan, surprised by the authority in my voice. “The airport people should be here any minute. Why don’t you wait here for them, and I’ll go back upstairs and see what I can find out.”

Dan didn’t look enthusiastic, but Terry nodded, “Good idea.” He turned back to Dan. “Just to make sure everything’s under control.”

I could see from Dan’s face what he thought of entrusting a job

like that to a journalist. All he said, though, was, “We might have to do the switch. Go out in a cab and have the truck meet us.”

“Yeah,” Terry sighed. “Shit, I hope Roach and them got through OK.”

“Watch out.” Dan pulled Terry back into the corner as another band of teenagers came prowling up to the window.

Hide-and-seek has never been my game. I nodded to the woman behind the counter and headed for the stairs.

## Chapter 4: Sunny Afternoon

The airport staff assured me the band's belongings were even now on their way to the truck. Madame could be confident that both luggage and instruments would be handled with the greatest of care. That was cute. One thing no one had ever mistaken me for before was a roadie.

Outside the airport's sliding glass doors the world was strangely quiet. A distant shriek of planes landing and taking off, a rumble of bus and car engines, an occasional shout from a porter—in spite of the exhaust fumes, I felt released. And tired. I leaned against the sun-warmed side of a bus, glad for a moment by myself.

Above the concrete wall one airplane was cocked so that its wing and tail made a V. I watched it rise like a butterfly toward the sun.

Then I jumped. Over by the airport door a row of rock-&-roll fans eyed me hopefully.

Now, when they weren't moving, they looked like any harmless group of high-school kids. I framed Terry's question: *Comment avez-vous découverte . . . ?*

The glass doors slid open silently. Out came Dan Quasi, with a guard on each side.

The kids moved up. No screams this time, only giggles and murmurs. One of them called boldly, "Bienvenu à Paris!"

Dan grinned at them. "Merci."

That drew a squeal or two. The guards tensed; but the mood here was friendly. Several camcorders aimed at Dan, but their owners stayed back, and the rest seemed content to watch him.

I stayed back, too. Between the stolid uniformed guards Dan Quasi was a star, shining and confident. I felt suddenly shy of him.

As he passed he tossed me a smile. "So how's it going?"

His offhand tone shrugged off both the goggling teenagers and the two men who had stopped when he stopped. "Good." For me it wasn't so easy to ignore all those intent faces. "Your stuff's supposedly on its way to the truck. I haven't seen the rest of the band."

"They're inside."

“Are they OK?”

Dan nodded. “Roach lost most of his shirt. Otherwise, no damage. Except now we can’t move without—” He jerked his head to either side.

“Too bad.” I heard myself holding him with conversation, angling to keep him from ending our shared adventure. “Does this blow your no-publicity plan?”

Dan shrugged. “I doubt it. We’re not that famous.” He reached into his shirt pocket for cigarettes. “We’ll know better when we know why they’re here—who leaked what to who. You got any ideas?”

“I’ll see what I can find out.”

He offered me the pack: Marlboros. I took one. “Are there people waiting for you?” he asked. “A host family?”

“No.” I told him about the Hôtel des Fraises.

“You should come to sound check, then. Get a sense of the band.”

Sound check? “Thanks,” I said. “I will.”

Dan cupped his hands around a match and held it toward me. “Three things. One, this is a new band, not a reunion. Ask whatever you want about Quasi & Company, but stay off The Rind and Mickey Ascher.”

I couldn’t help asking: “Do you think that’s realistic?”

“That’s the deal.” He lit his own cigarette. “Two, no reviewing the music. We aren’t far along enough. And three, no taping, audio or video. I don’t care if you tape interviews, in fact I’d rather you do, but absolutely no taping of gigs or rehearsals.”

“OK.”

“The truck’s over here someplace, according to these guys. You want to interpret for me?”

I could tell as I translated Dan’s questions that the driver didn’t like the idea of chauffeuring a bunch of American rock musicians. When I asked him if this truck would be at the band’s disposal all weekend, he refused to commit. “Aujourd'hui, oui. Demain, je ne sais pas. Vous devrez parler à Madame.” He jabbed a thumb at the airport door. “Moi, je ne suis que conducteur.”

“I can guess,” said Dan. “Don’t ask me, I’m just the driver! So who is this Madame and where do we find her?”

“Comment s'appelle Madame?” I asked.

The driver was scornful of our ignorance. “Madame Tréville.”

Tréville! I glanced instantly at Dan. He gave no visible sign of

recognition; but it seemed to me that something changed. As if someone had hit his Pause button, and for just a fraction of a second he went still.

Before I could be sure, though, he was saying, “She must be on the committee. I’ll go see if I can find her.”

As Dan and his retinue bustled off again, I wandered back toward the truck. This was disturbing. According to John Otis, Victor Tréville might very well remember The Rind from when he worked for the French consulate in Boston. It hadn’t occurred to me—nor, I was sure, to John—that The Rind might remember Victor Tréville.

“Excuse me.”

I looked up.

“Are you Cordelia Thorne?”

Standing beside the truck was Lacey’s sandy-haired friend in the Guatemalan shirt. Now what?

“Steve Connelly.” He smiled, put down his flight bag and held out a hand. “Bonjour, neighbor. I’m also staying in Fraises-des-Bois.”

I tried not to look startled as we shook hands. “Are you sure?”

He pulled a yellow Hands Across the Sea card out of his pocket. “Here’s the address. Max and Judith Croft, Rue de Clos Chardin, Fraises-des-Bois.”

He was right. Two large coincidences in five minutes. I didn’t like it.

“Oh!” Steve grinned apologetically. “I forgot to mention, I’m your photographer. You were expecting Wendy Peres, right? She couldn’t make it. Came down with the flu.”

I didn’t smile back. The Paris airport was no place to be finding out that the images for everything I wrote would come from someone whose work I’d never seen. Nor did I relish sharing my seclusion with Mr. Hip-But-Slick.

“Are the Crofts picking you up, then?”

“Unfortunately they couldn’t make it. Sheila—Mrs. Bailey—suggested I hitch into Paris with you and the band, and then we can share a cab to Fraises-des-Bois.”

That sounded to me like a most unlikely suggestion to have come from Sheila Bailey. “Sorry,” I said, “but I’m going to sound check.”

“Sound check?” Steve raised his eyebrows. “Hey. Great. I’ll come with you.”



How he talked the band into it I couldn't imagine, but Steve Connelly did ride with us into Paris. The truck was a small white enclosed U-Haul. With Quasi & Company's instruments loaded along the back and the suitcases in the middle where we could sit on them, there was still room to dance, had anyone cared to. The contract specified both a truck and a limousine, according to Terry, but nobody was about to hang around waiting for the car. Roach said he guessed the French crew had picked it up and were half-way to Monte Carlo.

He and Lacey sat in a semicircle with Terry, Niko, and Steve around the truck's open end. I stood behind them, where I could just make out Dan Quasi in the back, hunched over a guitar.

"Well, shee-it!" Roach slapped Lacey's knee. "What do you think? We're going to have to schlep our own stuff like some two-bit bar band?"

"Your shirt's buttoned wrong." Lacey reached inside his jacket.

"Where was goddam Neil? Hey, cut it out."

"What I want to know," Terry interposed, "is why were those kids after us?"

"Yeah," said Niko. "What happened to zero publicity?"

"I can tell you that." I shrank inside as five pairs of eyes focused on me. "They said a TV station in Paris has been talking up the American Mystery Band. Offering a prize to the first person who brings in proof of who it is."

"Well, shee-it!" said Roach again, this time in wonder.

"A TV station?" Terry was shaking his head. "Dan, did you hear that?" He looked toward the back of the truck, where from the sound of it Dan was fitting a new string to a guitar.

"We could maybe get some big crowds if they let in people who aren't in Hands Across the Sea," Lacey said hopefully.

"Fat chance," drawled Roach. From a pocket of his jeans he pulled out a half-squashed cigarette pack. "Anybody want some Rooftop Red?"

"You hippies," said Niko. "Dope, dope, dope."

"Roach, I wouldn't if I were you," I blurted. "Drugs are highly illegal here."

"Drugs?" Roach scowled at me. "This is *marijuana*."

"She's right, though," said Terry. "We had a roadie on our first tour who got locked up for half an ounce of hash. Even Dougie

couldn't get him out."

"And he never returned," Niko added solemnly, "and his fate is still unlearned."

"So, what?" said Roach. "We're supposed to play for four days straight?"

"Pretend you're back in Texas," advised Niko.

Lacey patted Roach's arm. "Roach used to deal in Texas."

Roach, sensing he was about to acquire an audience, stretched out his legs. "Yes sirree." He looked around at all of us with a wicked grin. "Drive down across the border with a couple of bows and arrows. Buy us a key, chop it up, tape it in baggies. Tape the baggies on the arrows. Then shoot 'em across this narrow stretch of the Rio Grande into Texas. Drive back home, pick 'em up, and yee-ha!"

Steve Connelly stared at him with mixed shock and admiration.

"You know, there's a metal wall between us and the driver," said Terry. "And nobody's watching the tailgate."

"Gentlemen," Niko intoned, "start your engines."

I looked back to where Dan was sitting. He was still working on his guitar string. He didn't look up even as marijuana smoke began to fill the truck.

As the joint went around, the mood grew more expansive. Roach and Terry started recalling their favorite French hangouts from past tours, which segued into wild nights with The Rind. Some tales I'd heard years ago—the time Mickey and Turbo stole a statue from the Tuileries and dragged it down into the Métro, and that party on the Bateau Mouche that ended with four nightclub dancers and Mickey and Dan stripping off their clothes to swim across the Seine. What staggered me now was Terry's nonchalance. This amiable, balding fellow leading the French police on an all-night chase through the gravestones of Montparnasse?

Steve Connelly had been taking his turn when the joint came by. Now he made his first plunge into the conversation.

"If you could be any musician who's ever played, who would you be?" he asked Terry.

Terry shrugged; took a hit from the joint Steve handed him.

"Come on, Terry," said Lacey.

Dan had the string on his guitar. Its low rising *twang* as he tightened it gave a thin bass line to the discussion.

"Who'd you want to be?" Lacey persisted.

"Shit, I don't know." Terry let out a stoned giggle. "Me is good."

If this band takes off?"

"Boooo!" Lacey reached over to swat him on the shoulder.

"Boo yourself! You weren't around in the old days. Lot of people wanted to be us."

"I sure did," Roach agreed.

"Where were you then?" Steve asked him.

Roach was mellow enough to be obliging. "I was with Brass Knuckles for a while."

"Then Pynk Pyg," said Lacey.

"But I always wanted to get in The Rind. The first time Turbo split—remember, Terry? Looked like it was going to work out. But then he came back." Roach shook his head sadly.

"Turbo," said Lacey, "like the engine?"

"Like the fish," said Terry.

"The *fish*?"

Niko said, "You brought back the lost energy."

"That was mostly Mick," said Terry. "Why Turbo quit?"

"Nodding out, or else bouncing off the walls," Roach agreed. "Even when he was straight, you never knew if he'd make it through the set."

I pressed my forehead against the truck wall. That thousand-watt sparkle in Mickey's eyes the day I met him: a rough night, I'd told myself. Film clips of Mad Mick in fringe and beads, feathers in his hair, chanting cryptic revelations into a mic; dancing at the edge of the stage while the band rocked on without him. All part of the mystique, right?

"Was that where The Rind's energy came from?" Steve asked. "From Mickey Ascher? Is that why you didn't try to re-form the band without him?"

There was a long pause.

"I'd be Janis Joplin," Lacey declared. "Or you know who else? Billie Holiday! She wasn't a rocker, but I love how she sings—kind of growly, but not, like, *rough*—more sweet, and sad—"

"Babble babble!" Niko mocked.

"Shit, Lacey, everybody you want to be's dead," said Roach.

She fixed him with a lofty stare. "You gotta suffer if you want to sing the blues."

"You gotta suffer if you want to play the drums," said Terry. "Highest mortality rate outside of organized crime."

"I wouldn't mind being Michael Jackson," Niko said



reflectively. “Talk about a truly gross income.”

From behind them came a flat metallic *twang!*

“Capitalist!” said Roach.

Steve turned toward the sound of the guitar. “Dan!” he called boldly. “What about you? You’ve played with the best. Who’d you want to be?”

They all swiveled expectantly.

Dan didn’t even look up. “Jesus fucking Christ.”

Silence. Roach took a slow hit off the last half-inch of joint and passed it to Niko. Lacey peered out the back of the truck, as if she’d just noticed we were coming into Paris.

At last Dan lifted his head. “Terry. You got the schedule?”

“In my suitcase. You want it?”

Dan shook his head and stood up. There was a quiet stirring all around the truck.

“We’ve got one set tonight at this banquet.” He leaned his guitar against a suitcase. “Roach. Is the list done?”

“Almost.”

“We need it by sound check. I want to run through ‘Time’ again, and a couple other things if you’re up.”

Evidently they were. Lacey and Terry were watching him with solemn concentration. Niko had slid around to face into the truck. Roach pinched out a newly lit joint.

“Neil and the crew should have everything set up.” Dan stepped forward, in among the band. “Niko, you’ve got 73 keys tonight plus the DX-7. Lacey—”

Steve Connelly took his cue and walked over to me at the side of the truck.

“Round One to Quasi! What do you think? Am I off the guest list?”

I didn’t know what he meant, nor care to. I wanted to listen to Dan until I figured out how he made every casual remark sound so important. But I could see from Steve’s unfocused grin and puffy determined eyes I wasn’t going to get the chance.

“I ask too many questions, right? That’s what my mom’s always telling me. ‘Stop pushing, Steve!’ That’s what ticked him off. When I asked about Mickey Ascher and The Rind breaking up.”

I shot him a quelling look meant to convey that if he wanted a sympathetic ear, he hadn’t found one.

“Touchy, though, isn’t he? Twenty years . . . but hey, no statute

of limitations on murder. Means, opportunity— They just couldn't pin down a motive.”

Or any evidence, I didn't add.

“Why kill the golden goose? Your front man's losing it—give rehab a chance. ‘Course, looking back, the up side: album sales through the roof. Signed copies of *Grind* bootlegging for hundreds of bucks. Plus with Ascher dead, so was the court case. I never did hear that whole story. The big drug bust? Like where Quasi fit in, and why the cops hushed it up?”

“Steve, listen to your mom, OK?—and stop pushing.”

“The whole thing doesn't add up. You know? Top of the charts, and where's The Rind? Gone! Poof!” His hands fluttered. “Where else but the wild and crazy world of rock music?”

“Everywhere else. Remember Richard Nixon, who used to be president? Remember the war in Vietnam?”

“And here they are, starting over.” Steve was still staring intently at Quasi & Company. “Why *now*? Why Paris? Why Hands Across the Sea? If they want a reunion, do a benefit. Starving Africans! Rainforests! Rind type stuff. But this? A mickey-mouse networking trip to not even a third-world country?”

“Don't ask me,” I said sincerely.

“Sure. That's why you're here, is to find out.” Steve chuckled. “Be careful what rocks you turn over, though. You never know what might crawl out.”

I looked past him at the band. Niko was scratching the back of his leg with a sneakered foot, listening to Dan and Terry. Lacey and Roach sat on their suitcases: Roach with one arm braced against the truck wall, Lacey with her head on his shoulder.

“That's what makes a story, Steve. Surprises.”

As soon as I heard it come out of my mouth I knew I'd just issued Fate an invitation I was going to regret.

