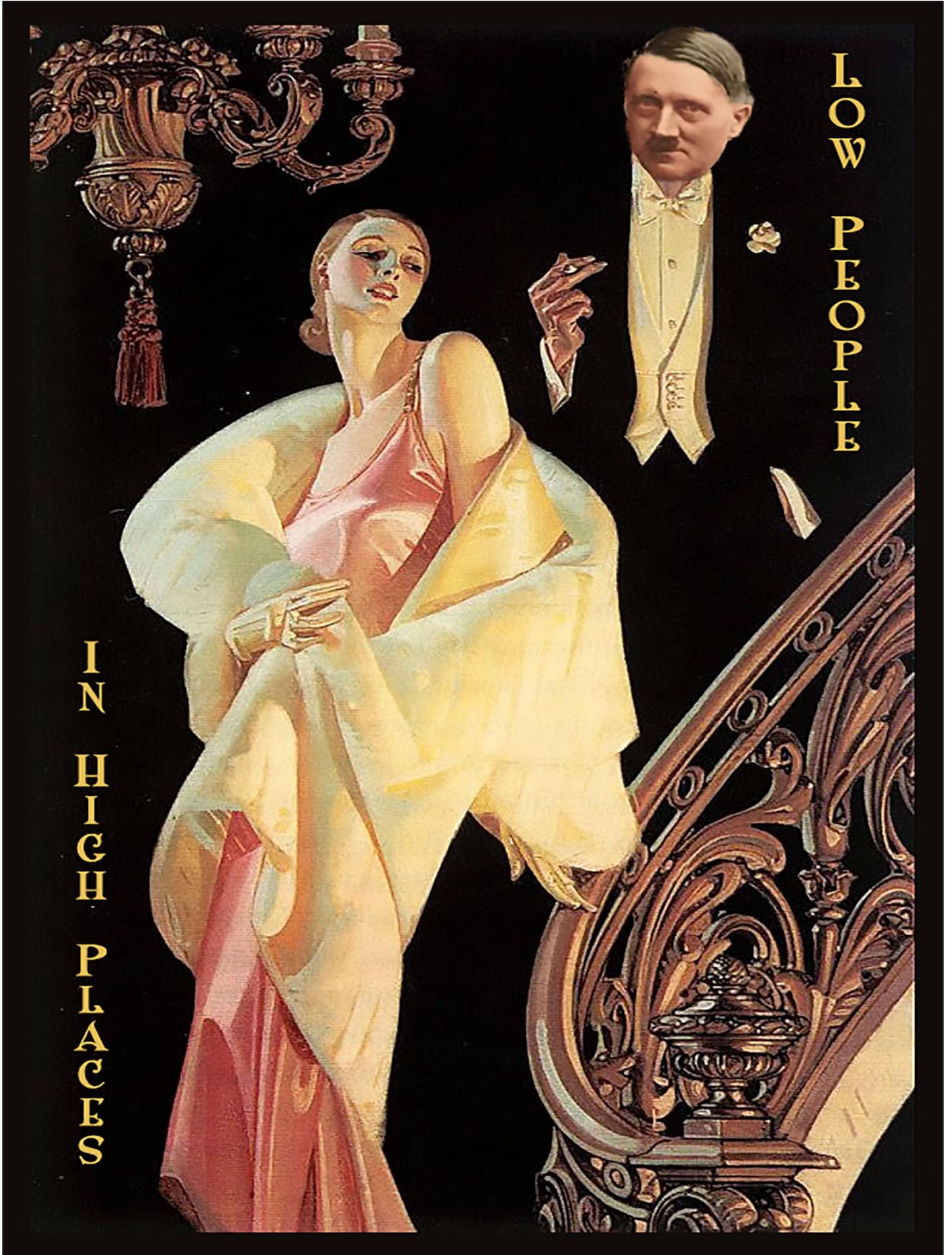


LOW
PEOPLE

IN
HIGH
PLACES



Low People
In
High Places

Low People in High Places

A Mystery By

Emery Miller

*To my friends who provided feedback
And helped improve my writing (I hope!)*

*To my wife whose critiques allowed me
To avoid errors that would otherwise have made it
Onto these pages*

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LOW PEOPLE IN HIGH PLACES

THE INCIDENT

October, 2015

It was late October and the weather had turned, earlier than usual. The wind was up and sleet was starting to mix with the rain. The man hugged his threadbare coat close to his chest trying, as best he could, to keep the cold out, having earlier abandoned any hope of staying dry. As he shuffled along the deserted street, hunched over and limping in arthritic pain, he kept an eye out for the shelter a few blocks ahead. Bucking the wind and cursing himself for not having set out earlier, he was oblivious to the slight tremor that passed beneath the worn soles of his shoes.

Three blocks away on the other side of the shelter, and moving briskly toward the destitute man, was a fellow, clearly of means, decked out in the best of Savile Row, Gucci loafers and protected from the rain by a Burberry trench coat and Davek umbrella. His stride suggesting a certain relaxed urgency only exuded by those of great confidence, wealth and self-assurance. Caught up in matters of great importance he also missed the tremor as it passed him by.

The only person who seemed to twig to the unusual occurrence was a cab driver on his way to pick up a fare at the shelter. As the waves passed under the wheels of his vehicle he slowed and looked around to locate the source of the disturbance but dismissed it quickly enough seeing nothing out of place.

In the shelter lobby Katherine Carlisle stands protected from the weather, awaiting her ride. She noticed the tremor under her feet but thought little of it, being engrossed in other thoughts as the cab, the indigent, and the man of substance, all converged on the entrance.

Suddenly, a loud crack, not unlike a gunshot, but much louder, emanates from the core of the building. This does not go unnoticed by any of the four, causing the cab driver to pull to the curb and stop in front of the shelter; the tramp to quicken his pace toward the entrance; the gentleman coming from the other direction to hurry to gain refuge in the building; and Katherine, all the while, trying to exit the shelter to grab her cab.

In that instant a low rumble fills the air and the ground heaves. Time freezes as all watch in horror while a number of bricks seem to float from the sky bouncing off the taxi, and the entryway turns liquid, skewing sideways and creating a doorway from some surrealistic scene in Alice in Wonderland.

Enhancing this Daliesque image is the congestion caused by the tramp trying to push past Katherine to gain access to the shelter as Katherine tries to exit past the distinguished gentleman standing rigid in the doorway, all the while the entranceway keeps shifting with one door gone and the other jammed half open, its bottom edge buried a good two inches into the ground and being the only thing keeping the door frame from collapsing completely.

Amidst this confusion there blasts forth a final, all enveloping roar, as the building shudders one final time, exploding outward, spewing three stories of steel, concrete and people out into the streets.

As the shock and turmoil subside, Katherine lies dazed amidst the rubble, her mind shutting out the immediate horror by regressing, half conscious, half dreaming, to the idyllic days of her university years. Coming from privilege and means she had entered the heady realm of Ivy League universities without pause or angst, was accepted by the best sororities and, being one of them, mingled easily with America's elite.

Images of Eton Bradbury, that statuesque Adonis who headed up the Delta Kappa Epsilon out of Harvard, and who captured her heart on her first sojourn to that campus, swam before her eyes. Images of their whirlwind romance, which lasted all of twelve months, popped in and out of focus finally settling on Paul Anderson; everything that Eton was not. Middle income, public school, modest dress, maybe even a little shabby, well threadbare might be closer to the truth, and humble almost to the point of self-deprecation, but brilliant, my God the man could think rings around just about anybody, and handsome - she remembered thinking at the time, I now understand how a woman can swoon at meeting such a man.

Eton Bradbury and Paul Anderson; the two men who dominated her life during her university years and defined her evolution thereafter. In fact these two men so captured her heart that she could hardly remember any of the other men who had passed through her life before or after, and there had been a few.

Eton was destined to be somebody, having the family background, the money, the looks and the confidence to attain that end. He had certainly made his mark, both in university and after graduation. As president of his fraternity his prestige and social links were impeccable. Links that served him well during his studies and long after graduation. It never occurred to Eton that he could fail at anything, and to that point in his life he certainly had not. Quite the contrary, he excelled at everything he attempted. Not only had he excelled but he had done so without resorting to subterfuge, lying or back-stabbing, maintaining a lifestyle devoid of even a hint of

scandal. In fact it was a hallmark of his credentials that he was an honourable man and one whose word could be trusted. Even in political venues this proved to be so, making Eton an exception rather than the rule. If he promised something he would deliver.

In a career that skyrocketed out of university it looked like Eton was going to ascend to the stars, unimpeded, until that fateful day, in 2010, when his trajectory exploded and he fell, not to earth, but beneath it. And he might well have remained so had it not been for Paul.

Dear Paul, the man with a golden heart as big as all outdoors and a mind that could solve any problem, had come to Eton's rescue, disinterred him, and got him back on his trajectory, albeit at a slightly slower pace and with a somewhat more modest apex.

Thinking back on my university daze (pun intended) I could recall, as clearly as had it been yesterday, the moment I met Paul. He had arrived late for his first semester and, unfamiliar with the campus, was heading north up Divinity Ave., scanning a handheld paper map, while I, headed in the other direction, was texting Eton about meeting for lunch, not seeing him until it was too late. We collided in a flurry of books, binders and loose papers just outside the Yenching Institute. As I looked up to curse this gross ineptitude I locked on to the loveliest pair of deep blue eyes I had ever beheld, and in that moment, I was smitten.

This apparition looking down at me had an embarrassed and sheepish grin and was apologizing profusely while helping pick up the debris from our collision. The sharp retort that I had prepared stuck in my throat and, for the first time in my life, I was tongue tied. Passing over one of my binders, he identified himself as Paul and apologized once again; beginning a lifelong relationship.

Paul Anderson was a man who surely had a destiny. A man with the brains, the good looks and the personality to be able to define his own future. The only thing he lacked was ambition. It wasn't that he didn't set goals and accomplish them. Not at all. In fact he was a bit of a workaholic and generally exceeded his goals and did so ahead of schedule. It was just that he had no desire to scale the ladder of success by stepping over, using, or crushing others of equal or lesser ability on the way up. In fact, just the opposite, he was the man to help nurture and promote others abilities to more accomplished levels, pushing those talents up the ladder ahead of himself.

At this point, Katherine's reverie was being intruded on by distance voices, sirens and a cacophony of disparate noises. She tried to push back the unwanted intrusion, to remain in this comfortable cocoon of disassociation, but someone kept shaking her, calling her name, and the noises kept getting louder while her garden of peace and tranquility started to recede, fading into the

distance, leaving her facing the sad truth that was her reality. Coming around, she found herself lying in a pile of rubble with smoke and dust filling the air and Eton Bradbury gently shaking her. Suddenly the enormity of what had just happened came rushing back.

As the building collapsed around them, Eton and the tramp were caught in the doorway to the shelter, along with Katherine. Timing and the chance congestion in the doorway had saved the three from certain death, as it was the door frame that provided the protection from the disintegrating building and miraculously saved their lives. That, and the indigent, who had had the presence of mind to jam a fallen I-beam diagonally across the opening, halting the cascading rubble from pouring through the doorway and sweeping the three into oblivion. With nowhere else to go the rubble spread out around the door frame and into the street piling up such that the three were buried in a pocket of debris and invisible to those outside on the boulevard.

All around them was a war zone, steel and concrete from the collapsed building was interspersed with desks, chairs, filing cabinets and the occasional body, all scattered across the street and on into the adjacent park. Emergency vehicles and response personnel were dispersed about the area searching for the dead and wounded while others cleared away rubble trying as best they could to ensure the remaining structures didn't collapse around them. Eton's attempts to attract attention were dampened by the tumult that abounded and so the three settled in for the long haul.

In fact it was some five hours before the rescuers stumbled upon them and were able to safely extricate them from the doorway without bringing the surrounding debris down upon them. Dazed, confused, bruised, battered and wheezing from thirst and inhaling dust, the three were brought to a tent erected in the park to provide medical attention.

It was at this point that Katherine finally settled into some semblance of normalcy and turned to the tramp to express her gratitude for his quick thinking back at the doorway to the, now gone, shelter. To which the tramp, head down, mumbled some barely audible response and moved away. Turning to Eton she commented, "Strange fellow. He saved our lives you know."

"Yes he did Katherine. For which we shall be forever indebted to him. I'll get his name later that we might contact him once all this is cleared up."

"Judging by his response to my thanks that might be a bit more difficult than one might think. Doesn't seem to want to know us. Did you see how he avoided us all the while we were trapped in that ... that place?"

“Maybe he’s just shy. Looks a bit of a hermit, what with the clothes, a two day growth of beard and all. Who knows, maybe he doesn’t even speak English. Might be why he’s so uncommunicative.”

“You could be right.”

“In the meantime, what in God’s name just happened?”

“Unh ... The building just exploded?” Katherine responded giggling, her whole body shaking slightly.

“Katherine, that’s not funny.”

“I know. I know! I just don’t know how to respond. I’m scared and I can’t stop shaking. I can’t think what to do. It’s like I’m here but I’m not. You know? It’s like I’m floating. And I’m disoriented. And I can’t get my bearings. I’m scared Eton!”

“It’s all right Katherine. It’s over now. You’re safe. Here, take my blanket.” Offered Eton, handing over the blanket they had given him on entering the emergency tent, and moving closer to her.

“How could this happen? This was one of Paul’s projects. Did you know?” said Katherine, calming down. “He’ll be devastated.”

“I’m sorry? You said that this was one of Paul’s projects? You mean Paul Anderson, our Paul? Are you sure? I mean I didn’t know. I thought his expertise and efforts were directed toward the environment.”

“Well, he considered people to be part of the environment and always said that the environment wasn’t a concern, if not for people. He often commented that we weren’t any better at taking care of our own than we were of taking care of our environment. He started this place to pick up where the government left off when they abandoned financing the safety net for the poor and less fortunate, cutting back on welfare funding. He was trying to clean up the streets of Toronto that had, since the Harris government’s abandonment of the poor, become littered with indigents sleeping on our streets for lack of anywhere else to go and lack of any support to help them get back on their feet. He detested the worship of the almighty dollar at the expense of all else. Claims we lost our humanity to our greed, evoking contempt for the less fortunate. Disparaging the poor and wishing them gone is to follow a false prophet. Since poor is a relative thing, when you get rid of all the poor in a given society you are then left with a society that ranges from rich to poor and so you then get rid of those poor and are left with Well you see where this is

going. At any rate he set up this shelter to try and mitigate against the government's failures. He couldn't stand to see people sleeping in the streets. He felt that it commented poorly on a society if it was incapable of, or couldn't be bothered to, take care of all of its citizens, most particularly in a climate that included winters."

"I had no idea he was such a Liberal. You know what they say about Liberals, they're just Conservatives that haven't been mugged yet. Our friend has had it too easy. Hasn't had to mix it up with the lowlifes."

"Ha, you should talk. Hardship is the last thing you would know anything about mister moneybags."

"And you my dear? What impoverished background did you emerge from? Great, great, great something grandfather a signatory to the Declaration of Independence and father, a fourth generation steel baron. That must have been tough."

"OK, OK, neither of us can compare backgrounds with Paul. But you're wrong about mixing it up with the lowlifes. He knows ten times more about that environment than the two of us put together. You know that he put himself through university from public school through a Ph.D. and MBA, both from Harvard. You don't do that on a whim and a prayer. He earned his stripes the hard way, so cut him a little slack."

"Take it easy, he's my friend too. I just wasn't aware that he was involved in this. I thought his focus was the environment and sustainability. Didn't know he was also into charitable work. All the more power to him."

"Anyway," Eton continued, "what do you think happened here? Was it a bomb, a gas leak, what?"

"I haven't heard anything so far. No one is even speculating and I don't even want to guess." Answered Katherine.

From two beds away the tramp spoke up "Structural failure, I would surmise."

"And you know about such things?" Asked Eton.

"A little, but more about the alternatives," The tramp replied.

"And what does that mean?"

“Well, I know about bombs and this wasn’t a bomb. I know about gas explosions and this wasn’t that. I also know about building demolition and I can assure you that if this was that, then the perpetrator was some kid out of grade school. Since we can eliminate weather as a cause, that leaves either an earthquake or structural failure and if you look around outside none of the buildings on the horizon appear to be damaged - just this one. So structural failure - like a bridge collapsing.”

“Really, and why should we believe you, you don’t exactly look like a Rhodes Scholar,” retorts Eton with a bit of a sneer and looking down his nose at the tramp.

“And you don’t look like any indigent person I’ve ever seen. Yet here *you* are. Listen to your girlfriend. I bet your friend Paul knows a lot more about hard knocks than the two of you together. And being a Liberal is not a bad thing. Just a different point of view, and in a democracy that’s a good thing. Wake up.”

Feeling severely put in his place Eton apologized. “I’m sorry; I should not have said what I did. It’s just that Paul is a friend and I can’t imagine him, in any way, associated with such a tragedy. I should not have snapped at you. Again, accept my apologies.”

“No worries” from the tramp.

Eton turns to Katherine, “So where is Paul. I haven’t spoken to him in months.”

“Last I heard it was the Philippines or Brazil. He has projects in both places.”

KATHERINE'S BOOK

University Days

Setting out for Wellesley College Katherine Carlisle had few reservations and no anxiety. Being an A+ student throughout high school she was not worried at an academic level, and having lived the life of a debutante, mixing with the upper echelons of American society, she certainly had no trepidation about mingling with some of America's top daughters. Residing in the Boston area was also a plus, avoiding any inconvenience that boarding might encompass, not to mention being familiar with all the best spots in town.

So it was with a great sense of ease that Katherine injected herself into the university scene at Wellesley and Harvard, meeting Eton Bradbury within the first week of studies. It was a fact that Katherine spent more time on extracurricular activities than on her studies; however her academic standing never seemed to suffer for it.

By the end of the first year Katherine had dumped the majority of her male entourage and was seeing just two men; Eton Bradbury and Paul Anderson. It was, for Katherine, a major dilemma. She liked both, each for different reasons, and could not bring herself to pick one over the other. If she were to be honest with herself she had more fun with Paul but Eton had the money and family, not inconsequential issues when you came from a background such as Katherine's. That is not to say that Eton wasn't any fun, on the contrary; just not as much fun as Paul. Maybe it was Paul's pedestrian background that added that extra 'je ne sais quoi' that Eton would never have.

One thing was sure. Both men were going to be successful, so no issues there. Paul would be a world traveller all his life, it was in his bones; and the very core of his chosen career was global in nature. Eton on the other hand, aspiring to politics, would likely travel, but closer to home and not for long durations. Not that either mattered much to Katherine. She had no desire to be smothered by a mate, so a little distance from time to time was a good thing. She had her own ambitions and when, or if, she settled down, it would be with someone that wouldn't interfere. Both of these men appeared, so far, to meet that criterion. The good news was that there was no rush to make a decision, if indeed a decision ever had to be made.

By the time graduation rolled around, little had changed except that all three were moving to the Washington DC area, as that is where all of their initial contracts were located. This lasted for about a year, and then Paul moved his head office to Toronto. While Katherine couldn't follow his lead she did manage to snare an architectural contract in Mississauga, a suburb of Toronto. Eton remained in DC.

Family background

The Carlises were old money. Back in the days when the US economy was riding high on steel and heavy industry one of the early Carlises found himself in the mining and smelting business, garnering great sums of money from both sources, feeding his steel mills with iron and coal from his own mines. Owning the industry from end to end proved a very profitable business and set up the Carlisle line for decades to come.

As time moved on so did the Carlisle children, divesting themselves of the steel mills and the mines as global markets saw the shift of heavy industry from the US to the Pacific Rim. They moved their money into banking and insurance, subtly, quietly and over time. When Bradford, Katherine's father, took over his share of the family business the Carlises were one of those families that worked in the background shaping financial decisions in the US and abroad, along with a strong but subtle presence in politics. The Carlises were one of a handful of families in the US that were, for lack of a better word, the 'eminence grise' behind American affairs both financial and political.

Katherine grew up in this environment of power that directed, with subtle influence, matters that shaped the nation. None of which was lost on a bright and precocious child, watching from the wings. Being female in a white Anglo Saxon protestant household, dominant amongst America's elite at that time, she was expected to study the arts, be savvy in matters of etiquette and know her way around polite conversation on current issues and events, both political and mundane; and on marrying, to be the strong and silent support behind the men in her family. What this meant, in practical terms, was that she was to insure that her husband followed the family ideology and didn't step out of line.

But Katherine was a perceptive child with a certain sense of adventure that she learned to keep under wraps until the age of maturity. From that point forward she was frequently a minor source of irritation to the family when she wouldn't kowtow to the dictates of the house of Carlisle. She had developed a mind of her own and could not be swayed by talk of duty, if it should challenge her beliefs.

PAUL'S BOOK

Paul was the product of rural Canada, growing up in North Hatley, a small town some 16 km (10 mi) from downtown Sherebrooke in the Eastern Townships. He was a far cry from a city boy. North Hatley was a town with a full time population of 750 that blossomed into a few thousand during the summer months, when the arts crowd converged on the local playhouse, and the cottagers moved in. It was a storybook paradise during those months, sitting on the tip of Lake Massawippi, surrounded by largely deciduous forests, meadows and the occasional golf course, all catered to by a few local outlets styled in New England conservative and always immaculately maintained. It was the haunt of upper class summer homes (not cottages, really), shunning the middle-management crowd in favour of the executive set. So while Paul might not have been schooled in big city ways he was far from naive and knew his way around high society holding his own in sophisticated company; having been weaned on the upper crust of Montreal's aristocracy, those who dominated North Hatley's summer months.

Having said that, none of this bought Paul any academic privilege, such as graduating RMC or some other private school might have, when applying to university; he being the product of Sherebrooke's public school system. In spite of this, he managed to get into McGill University on a scholarship and acquired his BSc. with a major in Geology, summa cum laude, with a minor in Chemistry. Having to work his way through university Paul had, by graduation, socked away a small nest egg working at a local pharmaceutical lab. It was his plan to continue his education and, with the help of a further scholarship, he had sufficient funds to continue. Applying for, and attaining the requisite scholarship, to Harvard no less, he enrolled in Environmental Science and Engineering working toward a Ph.D., committing to yet another four plus years of education, albeit with at least two of those in a work environment. Finally, noting that he could combine this degree with an MBA, Paul signed up for the full Monty. The whole process was aided by his brothers in the Delta Kappa Epsilon fraternity (Deke's for short), in whose McGill chapter he was a member.

University days

Taking stock of the past fifteen years that had led to this point in his life Paul Anderson was thinking; 'The last two years of my Ph.D. had been great ones, working with real projects, real companies and doing real work. Work that took me as far afield as Indonesia and the Philippines and that introduced me to foreign cultures, different societies and diverse ideologies. Even better, my work used the theoretical that was the basis of my PhD thesis. Because I was able to introduce this into my work it helped prove the viability of the theory behind my thesis, moving it forward

more rapidly and easily than it might have otherwise. Furthermore my work benefited from these new techniques, approaches to problem solving that had been, heretofore, unavailable. So, not only was I putting forward new theories but I was also applying and proving them at the same time. Life was good.

And there was Katherine. The love of my life, who arranged to continue her education in the Boston area so we never had to resort to a long distance relationship. The only drawback was that Eton, my rival for her affections, was also in Boston so I needed to constantly keep my guard up. On the other hand, Eton was my best friend, so I sucked it up and worked at minimizing Katherine and Eton's time alone. Still struggling financially to keep up with my DKE brothers, the additional burden of wooing Katherine forced me to take more trips than usual with my jet set brethren (not wanting Katherine and Eton to have too much alone time). Fortunately, my work was progressing well and, with my theories working out, my value, to the company I was toiling for, escalated along with commensurate remuneration. Even so, I was barely keeping my head above water.

So it was with a sigh of relief, when my jet setting friends decided at one point it was time to get a peek at their brother's background asking if I would arrange a long weekend in North Hatley for all. A weekend that would cost me considerably less than Ibiza or some other fancy jaunt. That fateful weekend when Katherine broke her leg and almost drowned. It was a close call and I still shiver when I think about it. Needless to say the weekend ended early with all heading back to Boston except for Katherine and me. We stayed at my parents place, alone. The good news was it brought us closer together, albeit at considerable expense to Katherine in discomfort, her leg being in a cast and all. Nonetheless, I believe that this was about the only time during our university years that we had uninterrupted time together for more than a day and I believe it was the moment that finally cemented our relationship in ways that had not existed before.

By the time we graduated we were, each of us, set on a solid course for the future. Eton had opened his aircraft supply business and was flourishing even before actual graduation. Katherine had picked up a partnership in an architectural firm and I had finally opened up my own shop with the help of my then current employer, an associate of the one I worked for through my university years. He provided me with a plane, a small boat and a Land Rover with accompanying equipment on a long term buy out and even turned over a couple of clients, so I hit the ground running. Initially I was based in Washington, as that is where my first clients were located. All to the good as it allowed the three of us to stay together since Katherine and Eton were both working out of the DC area. It was a rare week that we didn't get together at least once.

Creation of Eco-Logical

My studies and my thesis revolved around the collection and analysis of data in the assessment of our environment. The environment, as I saw it, consisting of the air, earth, water, flora, fauna as well as mankind and their buildings and industry. My particular forte was in the collection and analysis of airborne multi-spectral imagery, used, primarily, to assess open earth, vegetation and water bodies, however, that did not preclude the use of other methodologies in assessing air quality, geology and additional factors that make up the sum total of any given environment. My emphasis was in taking a holistic approach to any analysis on the basis that to analyze only the earth, exclusive of the other entities that constituted its environment, was to do an injustice to the results. It is all of the pieces of any given environment that makes it what it is, and each piece has an effect on, or interacts with, each other component of that environment.

In practise, this approach provided generally better results than individual surveys conducted randomly, years apart and then compiled at a later date. In addition, my work in multi-spectral analysis allowed me to extract considerably more information from the available data than past methodologies and so I found myself in great demand and on some fairly major projects. It was the demand for my analytical abilities that allowed me to venture out on my own, immediately on graduating.

For those not familiar with multi-spectral imaging allow me to digress for just a moment. The light that shines down on the earth from the sun does so in a spectrum of frequencies that constitutes radiation from the far microwaves, through the infrared, visible light, and on out to the ultraviolet. That radiation, when it hits a surface, will be partly absorbed by that object with the remaining portion reflected back. What we see is the reflected light in the visible portion of that spectrum. In other words a surface that appears red has absorbed all the other visible colours and reflects only the red part of the spectrum. However, the same is true of the rest of the spectrum not visible to the naked eye, particularly in the infrared and to a lesser extent in the ultraviolet. There will be reflectance in these portions of the spectrum as well; it's just that the human eye doesn't perceive it. Simplistically speaking, in multi-spectral imaging, a device, similar to a camera, collects data, generally from a satellite or an aeroplane, across the entire spectrum allowing us, on the processing of that data to see the reflected values, not only in the visible but also in the infrared and in some cases the ultraviolet. It is information in these spectra, combined with the visible, that allow us to see things in plants, water and earth that are not visible to the naked eye. This analysis can show disease, stress, vigorous growth, mineral absorption and other such issues in plants, extract mineral composition of bare earth, and see phytoplankton in water, to mention but a few of the

possibilities of this technology. This explanation is far from comprehensive and glosses over a multitude of technical issues, so for those in the know, please allow the need for brevity and forgive the liberties taken in this interpretation.

Eco-Logical (my company) had a client base even before it had a legal standing so I experienced no grief in start-up and from the first day the business progressed rapidly, gaining favour with key clients of US Aid. By the end of the first year I found myself globetrotting, tending to projects in Indonesia, the Philippines, India and Egypt. By the end of the second year I maintained a full time staff of some 50 people with another 150 on contract. My plate was full and soon to be overloaded.

Early Surveys

I remember the early days, in 2006, when Eton was just getting his feet wet in the aeroplane business and had to attend a conference in London. Something to do with aircraft supplies and security. He was booked into the Hilton just across from the Olympia fair grounds where the conference was being held when I got a call from him at four o'clock in the morning. Not an hour at which I usually get up, nor one I would normally want to. Shaking my head to push my mind awake while Eton led in without a hello or introduction of any sort, as he was often want to do.

“Paul, Paul, get the lead out! You need to get to London. Right now. I’m sitting here with a fellow from Brazil and he’s got a problem. A problem only you can solve and he’s leaving here late tomorrow. So catch a morning plane and get your ass to the Olympia Hilton in London, the one just across from the fair grounds. If you can get out of DC by nine this morning you should be here by ten this evening. So call me and let me know when you’re getting in and we’ll meet you in the bar on the second floor. Happy trails friend, see you soon,” and he hung up.

Shaking my head in incredulity, as well as to continue the wake up process, I cursed the demise of the SST and headed to the shower. I then checked flights out of Washington DC to London that morning and found that United had a flight out at 8:20 that would get me in to London by 8:55 the same evening. I immediately booked a seat on the flight, at a rather sizable premium, as the only available options were in first class. I then called Eton and let him know that I was on my way. No simple feat as I had to get my poor soul to Dulles International by 6:20 to be sure of catching my plane. So between 4:00 and 5:15 I showered, shaved, went through the grief of finding and booking a flight, packed my bag, grabbed my passport and other documents and rushed out to grab my cab to the airport. By 8:30 I was sitting in my seat on the runway with a mimosa in my hand and just starting to catch my breath.

When you're starting out, every business opportunity is a godsend and you don't turn any away. At least not before you investigate, and this was a lead from Eton, not a man prone to frivolity - at least not on the business front. So leaning back in my seat I reviewed our conversation. The one item that stood out was his comment "....A problem only you can solve...." That seemed pretty specific and not just a bit telling as there was only one area where I believed that I had some unique answers and that was in the analysis of multi-spectral airborne imagery. If that was the case, then this problem involved a resource survey of some sort and I was guessing that it was funded and was a serious problem, given Eton's emphasis.

If I was correct, then Eton was also correct. I did have a unique advantage over all other resource management survey companies, in that my Ph.D. thesis was in the area of multi-spectral analysis of just such data and, without bragging, I had stumbled upon a unique process of analyzing data that allowed me to extract information that others could not. As my work was not yet published I was still alone in this capability. My previous employer understood this and that is the reason he was eager to support my company. He knew he would get the overflow work if I was getting the analytical work and he'd rather see me on my own than to lose me, or my overflow, to a competitor.

Getting back to the conversation, Eton had said the client was from Brazil. If the work was in Brazil then I was likely on to one of the best prospects I could hope for. Brazil was an immense country and much of it was in need of one type of survey or another. For my business it was unquestionably the largest potential market in the world and this could be my opportunity to break in. My spirits were rapidly rising, and not just because I was on my third mimosa.

The plane arrived twenty minutes early. A good thing, as London's Heathrow can be a bear to get out of. However, this day I breezed through customs and was ensconced in a cab on its way to the Olympia Hilton within 20 minutes of landing - something of a record I expect. What with the plane being early and exiting being fast I was in the bar by 9:30, ahead of Eton, whom I had to call to say that I had arrived. He and Xavier were with me 10 minutes later.

Xavier Prieto was in his 40's, a good 6' 2" (1.88 m), blond and apparently in very good shape. But for the name, I would not have taken him for a Brazilian, as he looked more Germanic or Scandinavian than Latin. After introductions, he led into the topic of concern without preamble.

"Paul, we have a serious problem in the state of Parana. Actually, more specifically, in and along the Parana River and three of the bordering states, Parana, Mato Grosso and Sao Paulo. We have been experiencing a form of pollution not seen before and we cannot pinpoint where it's coming

from. Not only that, we cannot, specifically, identify the contaminant. We know it's there because we are seeing its effects - vegetation is dying, fish are dying and the animals that drink out of the Parana River are getting sick."

"We need someone to track, identify and trace the source of this contaminant. Eton tells me you are that man," he concluded looking at me expectantly.

I replied; "Off the top of my head I would suggest that this is a tall order. I have some background on exactly that area, as this was a study I participated in during my university years. So, in full disclosure, I must tell you that our experience in this region did not, at that time, reach any concrete conclusions. The conclusions that we did arrive at were that the Parana was suffering from massive pollution from many sources, the worst being industry in and around Sao Paulo which was being discharged into the Tiete River which eventually empties into the Parana. On its course to the Parana, in addition to the industrial waste, it was picking up agricultural runoff in the form of fertilizers, herbicides, animal waste and other chemicals. Furthermore, human waste in the form of cleaning chemicals, household scraps and other such grunge, not to mention sewage, was also getting into the water. The massive number of chemicals entering the river flow was capable of creating unknown interactions and the resulting mix was an indeterminate conglomerate of chemicals that could no longer, in many cases, be traced back to a single source. Finally, many of the effects of pollution in and around Sao Paulo were relatively easy to trace and fix, however as these chemicals flowed downstream and mixed with other contaminants their relative volumes became so small that tracing individual elements became almost impossible. While we were able to analyze many of the effects of the pollution, there were quite a few interactions that escaped us and for which we had no clues and no starting points."

"Having said that, this was some six or more years ago and my techniques have improved considerably, as have the sensors we use today. As a bottom line, if anyone can find or analyze your problem, I am your best bet. However, I want you to understand that I make no promises. Given my previous experience I am hesitant to make any firm commitments as to the results I may come up with. Oh, and by the way, should you be looking for a specific survey result, I don't do that kind of work. The results that I come up with are the ones that stand, regardless of their popularity," I concluded.

Xavier looked at Eton and after a few moments said "You were right. This is the man for the job. I should never have doubted you." Turning to me, "you have the job my friend. We are looking for the truth of the matter and if you can come any closer to finding answers, or even just provide

additional pertinent information to the existing material, that will at least be a step forward, and that is all we expect. I work out of Curitiba, about an hour south-west of Rio by air, half that from Sao Paulo. Meet me there a week from today and we'll put an agreement together. Meantime let's have a couple of drinks and get to know each other." This is exactly what we did. We stayed on for another hour after which the party broke up and we all repaired to our rooms. On the way out Eton suggested that he and I get together for breakfast and Xavier said that he would make a reservation for me a week from today at the Bourbon Hotel in Curitiba for a full week (six nights), that being how long he expected the contract negotiations to take. On that note I thanked him and we all parted ways.

A week later I found myself ensconced in the Bourbon Hotel reading through some 200 pages of legalese. A week after that I was homeward bound with a contract in hand that mapped out the major portion of my next year's work and in fact turned into steady work for the following five years.

This was a personal milestone for me as it was the first significant contract that I had generated through my own contacts and not through the political mechanisms available in the DC area. Prior to setting up my own company the majority of the jobs I had worked on were based on contracts garnered through US AID and so after heading out on my own I followed the path of least resistance and continued feeding from the US AID trough. These contracts covered a lot of geographical territory from Indonesia, to India and the Philippines. Other than my University work, some six years previously, this was my first job in Brazil. However, it was not my only job. I still maintained a steady stream of work out of the Philippines and a few small contracts in Indonesia, not to mention a scattering of work around the US and one or two jobs in Canada. By this time my plate was full and the last thing I needed were any hiccups in the work flow so I had been careful, in negotiating the contract with Xavier, to allow a little wiggle room if the surveys did not proceed precisely to plan.

As it turned out that was not an issue. The first set of surveys, covering two years, were positive and set a baseline on which to continue, although I must admit, we had found nothing new or revolutionary, just a more detailed analysis of the existing data and the filling in of a few blanks. The following three years, on the other hand, started to expose some very curious issues and generated more questions than it answered. By 2013 we were knee deep in curiosities and beleaguered on all sides with new issues. I had, during this period, linked up with Ken Neuman, a long-time friend and associate; I had seen my best friend, Eton, plummet from the top of the world to obscurity and despair; and watched my girlfriend and confidante, Katherine, become

entangled with people of low character, all issues, had I but known, which led to the catastrophe of 2016.

ETON'S BOOK

University Days

Eton came from family and money. In his lifetime he would not want. But for Eton, that was not enough. Eton thrived on activity, on challenges and competition. A man with a facility for oration, a cultured and quick mind with a thirst for knowledge he was lettered both academically and as quarterback for the Harvard Crimson.

Elected president of his fraternity (DKE) in only his second year he held on to it throughout his tenure at Harvard. He was the recipient of numerous awards during his student days and he was politically active outside of the University. While at Harvard Eton was the 'golden boy.' When deciding on student issues, no one would make a move without consulting Eton. When the elite were deciding on spring break they relied on Eton for a decision and when it came to extracurricular activities it was Eton who led the way.

Political Ambitions during University

That the masses looked to Eton for direction was only fitting, being that it was politics that captured his interest and was the driving force within him. He knew he was going to be President one day. Nothing could stop that.

Ironically he couldn't make up his mind as to whether he should go Republican or Democrat. In the end he opted to start as a Democrat (probably because mom and dad were Republicans) and see where it led him. One of the topics he tackled in the early days was arguing the benefits of solar power. The Republicans, largely supporting big oil, of course denied the viability of solar power on the basis that it required more energy to construct a solar panel than the power that the solar panel would produce in its lifetime. Using a curious potpourri of mixed metaphors and illogical comparisons they felt that they had proven their point, using these arguments and inserting them into mainstream folklore as 'reality.'

Eton took it upon himself to see where the actual truth might lie and found that the facts were quite different from the supposed 'reality.' Virtually all serious scientific studies concluded that solar panels produced considerably more energy than it took to manufacture them. In fact a division within the US Department of Energy had done extensive studies on just this subject and determined that the sum total of the energy used in the creation of a given panel would be returned by that panel in a maximum of four years, often less. This included not only the energy used in the manufacture of the panel but also the energy consumed in the mining and shipping of the various materials as well as the energy consumption in the installation of the panel.

Furthermore the lifetime of the panel was approximately 30 years providing 26 years of 'free' energy or, minimally, something approaching a 700% return on energy investment. All of this excluding the very sizable and significant side benefit of a pollution free energy source. As an aside, the study further concluded that the typical solar panel paid back its carbon footprint in approximately 1 year.

Having compiled the numbers, defined the extensive and all inclusive parameters, and set out the unimpeachable references, Eton approached his first panel on this matter with a sense of pride and confidence.

What a letdown! The panel he faced consisted of six dyed in the wool ostriches with their collective heads buried in the sand. They dismissed all arguments as fatuous, denied the references as not having any expertise and touted their own distorted perspectives loud and long. One particular argument that stuck in Eton's mind was when the ostriches assigned all of an amortized portion of a mining truck and its operating costs against a single solar panel. No consideration was given to the fact that the truck would, in a single trip, haul enough material to manufacture many hundred thousand panels. And their arguments continued in this vein. It was a losing battle even before Eton approached the dais.

However, Eton was not one to trifle with. He took a recording of the meeting and proceeded to document each and every one of the ostriches' distorted arguments and laid bare the misinterpretation and misdirection applied in each case. He then took this document to the Democratic Party chief in his district, suggesting that they might use this as they saw fit in any upcoming challenges, the ostriches being, for the most part, Republican.

Not only did this engagement not deter Eton in his goal toward politics, it in fact caused him to double down on his efforts, being affronted by the arrogance and evil agenda hidden behind political doors.

In an ironic twist of fate, Eton found himself working for the Republican's toward the end of his university days. Not out of any particular ideology but in an attempt to round out his understanding of the political landscape. An understanding that was to serve him well in the future.

Eton Imports

Eton was thinking 'My chance introduction to Paul Anderson, by Katherine during the Harvard years had shaped the next seventeen years of my life. The man was incredibly smart. Not just smart but sharp, he didn't miss anything. As if that wasn't enough, he was also good looking with

personality to spare. Had I not been an equal in all those categories myself, I might well have been jealous. Of course I also had the added advantages of family and money. Nonetheless I had to admit to a twinge of jealousy, especially when it came to Katherine. In retrospect, maybe I should have been jealous, as it was Paul who ended up with her heart. Not married to her, but it was clear that Paul was her go to guy, she living half the year in Toronto and maintaining a key to Paul's flat. If I chose to believe it, I was still in the running since she did spend the other half the year here in Washington (although she didn't keep my house key on her fob). At any rate none of us had wed as we were all married to our work. The primary reason Katherine was still in our lives was the fact that she, as an architect of some note, had business with each of us from time to time.

Thinking of Katherine brought me back to my university days. To quote a well-known TV show, "Those were the days my friend". We studied hard and partied harder. The trips to Aspen, Taos, Alta, Cape Cod, North Hatley and other sundry places were filled with memories. Mostly good, some bittersweet and a few, very few, not so good. Like the time Katherine broke her leg in a boating accident in North Hatley and nearly drowned. Had it not been for Paul's quick reflexes she most likely would have.

We took three boats out that day, Katherine alone in hers, Paul and I each in separate boats with two passengers apiece. Emerging from a small cove, a 40 foot cruiser sped past at full throttle almost colliding with Katherine's boat. Swerving to miss the cruiser, her boat was hit by the wash from the larger yacht, tipping her into the lake. Her boat, continuing its course, came full circle and hit Katherine as it passed. We all saw it happen and were equidistant from her when she went overboard but it was Paul who reacted, speeding toward the oncoming craft on its second circuit, matching speed with it and, coming broadside, pushing it off course before it could hit Katherine again. Concurrent with diverting the other craft he turned the wheel over to one of the passengers and dove in to save Katherine, who, by this time was unconscious and sinking into the inky depths.

By any standard, it was a close call and had it not been for Paul's presence of mind we must surely have lost Katherine that afternoon. And that was Paul. Always a man with the answers, the ability to size up a situation in an instant and act on it without hesitation. I admired him for this ability and simultaneously envied him his talent. It was his talents and abilities that saved me some seven years later and for which I will be eternally indebted to him.

We all graduated in the same calendar year, I with a law degree and a Ph.D. in political science, Katherine with a Masters in architecture supplemented with a BSc in structural engineering, and

Paul with a Ph.D. in environmental sciences and an MBA to boot. I remember thinking at the time that I was the least experienced of the three, for while I was politically involved throughout my education, the other two had worked first hand in the trenches of their industries while garnering their degrees. When I entered law and political science, I knew exactly what I wanted, and where I was going. Ironically, after graduating, I found I was far less sure of my direction and goals. I strongly suspect that this sense of ambiguity was influenced by my association with Katherine and Paul. While their activities produced immediate and tangible results, my goals, by contrast, seemed more ethereal and, somehow, less satisfying. In the end I decided that a short stint in business might provide an improved sense of direction as well as valuable experience and a platform on which to launch my political ambitions. So I started up an import business dealing in aircraft parts and accessories - Eton Imports. In deference to Eton collage in England, lest you be confused about that.

Being in Washington DC provided access to most of the major commercial and military aerospace corporations (Lockheed Martin, General Dynamics, Northrop Grumman, Boeing, Airbus, Bombardier) so the business fit the town and, as it was an industry steeped in political affiliations, the town fit the business; not to mention being home to my long term goals.

Getting into the business proved easier than I had originally anticipated. My family contacts and my DKE brothers proved to be invaluable, opening doors that would otherwise have been unattainable. The business grew at a substantial rate as did my contacts. Within two years Washington was my oyster. I was living in 2,500 sq. ft. (232 sq. m) of luxury space in Washington Harbour (on my own nickel - not family money) and driving the latest Bentley (Rolls were passé and not sporty enough) and entertaining the right people in all the right places. I had become a force to be reckoned with, albeit I will confess I had a little help.

There was Clayton Dace a frat brother whose family connections got me deep into Lockheed Martin, one of my best clients. It was also his financial advice that saw my earnings grow at double the rate of those around me, not to mention that he had me paying a nominal tax rate of about 10%, both personal and corporate. Clayton was a wizard when it came to high finance. He knew all the dodges and was able to direct investments with an accuracy that defied logic. His help and advice put me at least five years ahead of where I might have been otherwise.

And there was Archibald Ellison. He was a few years ahead of me at Harvard and was a driven man. While he came from money he was determined to prove that he was better, sharper and more successful than his predecessors. His business, for lack of a better word, was wheeling and

dealing. He had a knack for finding undervalued properties (not just real estate but corporate and tangibles) buying them up and moving them at margins from 25% to 500%. In a few short years he had amassed a fortune measured in the hundreds of millions. It was through his contacts that I was able to develop product sourcing that provided me the edge in dealing with Washington's aerospace industry and scale the ladder of success at the rate that I had.

That's not to say that I didn't contribute to my own success in many ways. I worked long hours, never missed an appointment, hired the right people and made sure that nothing ever fell through the cracks. I also took advantage of some of the history of the aircraft industry in encouraging my clients to try new sources of supply based on the fear of some of the errors made by the traditional suppliers in years past.

Consider Boeing, who in April of 2006, were found to be assembling 737 airliners from fuselage skins made from parts of the wrong size and shape and with pre-drilled holes in the wrong place. In reports to the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), whistle blowers told stories of workers drilling new holes by hand to put the planes together. The FAA did not pursue the three whistle-blowers' tips because the parts in question would not present a safety risk even if they failed in flight, such failures having never caused a crash, according to the FAA. That would, of course ignore Aloha Airlines 737-200 catastrophic fuselage failure at 24,000 feet (7,300 m) near Maui in 1988 where a skin crease cracked along lap joints under the forces of pressurization and blew out a panel creating a hole in the aircraft through which a senior flight attendant was sucked out and vanished; 65 of the 89 passengers were injured - 8 seriously. But I suppose, since the aircraft actually landed, it was, technically, not a crash.

There are also stories of Western Titanium and others found falsifying QA (Quality Assurance) documents on parts supplied to the military for their fighter jet program, potentially resulting in stress related problems with critical components at critical moments. Not to mention counterfeit parts showing up on Air Force One in 1995.

Issues like these allowed me to argue that, given the propensity for such supply problems, it was important that my clients have alternate sources of product, if for no other reason than to keep their current suppliers on their toes. These tactics often got me in the front door where it was simply a case of expanding my business until it was the initial suppliers who were the ones keeping me on my toes.

And so it was that I had finally reached a point in my career where I was ready to attack my political ambitions. I had amassed the necessary money; I had, through my business success, gained

the reputation and respect to satisfy both financial backers and voter support; and my business had developed the necessary in-house management, financial and marketing talent that it could continue on its own. In other words I was free to pursue my political goals. Until tragedy struck, and Paul came to my rescue. So mused Eton.

The Good Years

It was 2006 and I was struggling to keep Eton Imports at the top of the heap. Success had come early and handling the ever escalating requirements of my enterprise was taking its toll. Financially we were riding high. The competition was starting to fear us; my client base was solid and the crème de la crème of the industry. I had no real worries, just an impossible work load. Yesterday I met with my long-time friend, Paul Anderson, to introduce him to a contact that I had just met, who could undoubtedly use his services. Paul was in the environmental monitoring business, a world away from my aeronautical supply company, but Xavier, my contact, was in the business of surveying, and using aircraft was a part of his operation, hence the connection. It was now early morning and I was sitting in the cafe, watching Paul still struggling with the time difference, stagger in for breakfast at the promised 9:00 am. I started in without preamble.

“Paul, I’ve got a problem and I know you’ve been around. Maybe you can help me with this. I recently picked up a new supplier. This supplier has an outstanding product and is just breaking into the market so he doesn’t have the background or credibility that his competitors have but he has a significantly better product. Lower price, longer life span with about one third of the maintenance. Now I don’t represent any of his competitors so that’s not a problem, however when I’ve broached the possibility of representing them I’ve been getting subtle push back from a number of my clients. They aren’t being specific and when I ask questions they back right off. It’s only a few of my clients but I get the impression that there is a hidden threat, or at least a hidden agenda. Any ideas?”

“Wow, that’s a tough one Eton. What’s the downside if those clients drop you? Is there an offsetting upside to representing this firm?”

“The upside could be huge - triple my business overnight. The downside could kill me.”

“Any idea why you’re getting the push back on this? Are the clients that are pushing back in bed with a competitor? Are there bad feelings between the new company and its owners and your clients? Is there history that might explain it?”

Eton let out a long sigh. “Not that I am aware of, on any of those fronts. The real killer is that the clients pushing back are the ones who stand to gain the most from the product. It would reduce

overall maintenance on their entire fleet by up to 30%. The pass through savings to their clients would give them an immense advantage over the competition. I mean the cost of an aircraft is nominal compared to the lifetime maintenance and operation of the plane. It just makes no sense.”

“Does it reduce maintenance costs in any other areas where it might impact ongoing sales of other components? Even then, if you don’t supply the product someone else will, so stopping you doesn’t wash, unless they want to buy through someone else. Might they want to do that? Would it give them a price break to buy two or more components from a single supplier, for example?”

“Both are certainly possibilities. But if that’s the case why not just tell me? These are clients that I have a very close relationship with. They would tell me if it was something like that.”

“Well Eton, I don’t know what to tell you. It sounds to me like this product is, in its field, the wave of the future. If that’s the case, it never hurts to be riding the crest of the wave. On the other hand, if the wave is going to crush you, then maybe not such a good idea. The real question is just how badly can those clients hurt you? That seems to me to be the main issue.”

“I’ll take it under advisement. Thanks for hearing me out. I know it’s out of your field but you always have a good take on things. I appreciate the comments.”

With that we concluded our breakfast. I let Paul know that I was tied up until six o’clock that evening. If he was staying over we could get together for dinner and drinks.

Paul gave it some thought, and while he could have made a return reservation for that evening he decided to stay. Having taken the time and expense to come to London he felt he might as well get some pleasure out of it and so told Eton he would still be around suggesting they meet in the hotel lobby about eight that evening. Eton agreed.

Having a free day Paul thought to see the sights of London. Albeit, not being his first trip to the city, he took the opportunity to scour parts that he had missed in the past. Grabbing the tube near his hotel he got off at the Barbican Centre, walking over to East London Tech City, London’s attempt at a Silicon Valley. He stopped by to see PavGen, a company that was developing paving slabs that could turn people’s footsteps into energy. A clever idea whose time was, hopefully, just around the corner. The energy generated in the prototypes was small, but consider what it might mean if the idea could be adapted to roads. Might be the next great energy source :). Paul then moved on to Avoiding Mass Extinctions Engine (AMEE) a company that ‘provides a free public

database of companies' environmental and financial performances. It also offers a paid analytic service to help businesses identify risk in their supply chains.' A pretty cool idea in this era of concern over carbon emissions. From Paul's perspective, a pity it only covered UK companies. As a free service it was impressive and one could only hope it would be copied in other major countries around the world.

By this time the sun was over the yardarm and Paul went looking for a typical British Pub where he might get a bite to eat and a wee dram or stout to wash it down with. Having read that The Seven Stars was an old 17th century ale house of some note he grabbed a cab and headed over there. On arriving he found the place was already filling up and with the bar crowded he opted for a table, ended up within ear shot of what sounded like a couple of lawyers. The two were discussing, not a case, but a legal position involving three companies. Company one was a buyer of product from company two and company three was a supplier to company two. Exactly like Eton's situation. The focus of the discussion was company three, the supplier.

Lawyer A: "It's bloody frustrating. Charles has worked his arse off for fifteen years developing a product that clearly outshines anything in the market today but he can't seem to find a decent distributor. He goes to the shows and the conferences but he seems to run into roadblocks at every corner."

Lawyer B: "Has he given you any reasons why he thinks he is running into so much trouble."

A: "The usual. He's too small, no credibility in the market, undercapitalized and the competition are multinationals for the most part."

B: "Seems to me that he needs to partner with someone that can fill in the gaps. As I understand it, this is a market that cares about MTBF (Mean Time Between Failure) and MTTR (Mean Time To Repair) and that means long term testing on multiple units to develop the necessary statistics. Has he got that behind him? If not, then I suspect it's too early for him to be going to market."

A: "No, he has that. He's been testing for the past five years and has well controlled and documented studies supporting the appropriate MTBF's and MTTR's so that's not an issue. The irony is that the figures for time to failure are about three to five times longer than the best of the competition and the repair time is a third of the competitions', and, at a third of the cost. The product out performs the competition by almost an order of magnitude."

B: "Well, there's your first and biggest problem. No one, speaking of the competition, wants this product to enter the market. They'll fight tooth and nail to keep this from happening. I come

back to my earlier comment. You need to find him a player that can hold off the slings and arrows that will be thrown at him and help him bully his way into the market.”

A: “And just who might that be, pray tell?”

B: “Didn’t you say he had an American representative on the line with inroads into all of the major commercial and military markets?”

A: “That’s the funny thing about this whole deal. His potential American representative is running into roadblocks at the client end with three of his major players. His words were ‘veiled threats’. Damn shame, ‘cause Charles really wanted to close this rep. said he was honest and, bar none, had the best contacts into the US market.”

B: “What about tying in with some major manufacturer who has the clout to overcome, or stand up to, such responses?”

A: “Thought about that also, but couldn’t find one that didn’t have a bias toward one of the competitors or was so soulless that my poor client would be buried within nine months and they’d walk off with the entire basket of goods.”

B: “What about Earl’s company?”

A: “Are you joking? Within six months they’d have poor Charles stripped of everything he owned and be sitting in their high offices laughing at ‘the poor sucker. Never knew what hit him.’ They are truly evil people. No not them.”

B: “Are you sure?”

A: “Quite sure. I handled a case against them about two months ago. I won, but only got about a third of what I should have, and even worse, they actually laughed in my face when the decision came down. No, there’s no scenario where I would ever deal with those thieves - full stop.”

B: “Well I guess the final option would be to sell out to a competitor and take whatever he can get. I mean if the product is that good, and that close to market, a bidding war should get Charles a reasonable price.”

A: “I won’t disagree with you. Charles might though. He’s got a fixation on Trent Avionics that he just won’t let go of. It doesn’t seem to be about the money. It’s more about his pride. And to be completely honest with you I have prodded and poked a few of the competitors and without fail I have been summarily turned down, in every case. Something is afoot. Just can’t get a handle on it.”

B: "Well I'd love to spend the afternoon speculating but I have a 2:30 that won't wait. If I were you I'd bring it up with Sedgewick. He's got spies everywhere. Bailey, Sedgewick & Sedgewick don't have the reputation we do for no reason. Remember that. We can draw on their breadth and depth of contacts and experience. Good luck with it and let me know how it turns out."

And with that they arose and departed from the Seven Stars none the wiser that a stranger had just glommed a great deal of information from their lunch conversation. Not that it was likely to make a difference to anyone, but it was, nonetheless, a bit indiscreet. In fact Paul was thinking that this sounded exactly like Eton's problem. A pity they hadn't come up with a solution thought Paul, I could have passed it on. At any rate a far more interesting lunch than Paul could have hoped for. He decided to spend the rest of the afternoon touring on the hop on, hop off, busses, finally grabbing one that passed the Olympia grounds on its rounds, arriving at his hotel about six. Time to shave, shower and change for the evening.

Eton arrived, on time, looking the worse for wear and tear.

"Tough afternoon Eton?" Paul asked.

"Worse than tough. This supplier problem is heating up. If I don't sign with them before I leave they're dumping my options."

"Sounds like you need a drink. Why don't we find ourselves a respectable restaurant and get settled in for the evening with a bottle or two of fine wine and something to eat?"

"Any suggestions?"

They ended up at L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon in Covent Garden. Ensnared at a table well away from the bar and asking that, if possible, the table beside them be kept vacant. Ordering a bottle of Pinot they resumed their conversation.

"So what happens if you lose your options? Does that mean that someone is waiting in the wings to pick it up or is he just trying to move you forward?" I asked.

"I honestly don't know. I mean the product is a world beater, but if all reps get the same response as my clients are giving me then I lose nothing. But if it's just my clients then I'm bugged."

"Have you asked him why he thinks you're getting the push back from your clients?"

"Yes. His only significant comment is that he has noticed a general lack of interest in his product, industry wide, which he can't explain."

“Has he made any enemies in the business that you are aware of?”

“No. The man is clean. Comes up honestly, on his own. No previous affiliation so there is no reason for anyone to begrudge him his brilliance, or any opportunity for him to cross swords with anyone. Hell, Charlie is one of the most innocuous people you ever want to meet. Honest as the day is long, not a mean bone in his body and seems to completely lack a temper. Always calm and accommodating.”

“Where does his money come from to get where he is if he’s never worked elsewhere in the industry?”

“His business started out in the auto industry. He patented some gizmo for emissions control that he licenses to the auto industry in general. The annual royalties are more than a little significant. It’s allowed him a very comfortable lifestyle and funded all of his research to date. Nobody’s ever heard of Trent Auto but that sucker makes Charlie many tens of millions or more each year, after taxes, and after his research funding.”

“Wait, wait, wait. You said Trent Auto and a Charles owns it?”

“Yes. Why?”

“Is the company you’re dealing with called Trent Avionics?”

“Yes it is.” A slight hesitation then, “I don’t recall telling you the name.”

“You didn’t. I heard it over lunch today. Two lawyers from Bailey, Sedgewick & Sedgewick were discussing it. Charles really wants to do business with you if the lawyer I heard knew what he was talking about, and he was the one representing Trent Avionics. If I were you, I’d sign the deal, keep it under wraps for a few months while you subtly test the market, moving into those corporations that have no objections and steering clear of those that do.”

“I’d have to get Charlie to keep the news of the signing to himself until I had time to set up my market. If word got out I suspect I would become a pariah in the industry pretty quick.”

“Well, talk to him. See what you can work out. Also might not hurt to touch base with Bailey, Sedgewick & Sedgewick. They might be able to add something you haven’t unearthed yet. But do this through Charles - don’t want the lawyers to know that they were indiscreet.”

The conversation broke up a couple of hours and a couple of bottles later. Both headed back to the hotel where Paul made reservations to fly home in the morning; Eton returning to his room to plan for the next day’s activities.

On the advice of Paul I met with Charlie of Trent Avionics today. The meeting went well. I got my contract. Charlie was pleased and agreed to keep it under wraps for two months while I did my investigating. He then introduced me to his lawyers (necessary to sign the contracts). We all went out for lunch at a place called the Seven Stars. Cool old pub with lots of atmosphere. Paul would like this place.

So Percy, Charlie's lawyer, Charlie and I grabbed a table and spent the next two hours celebrating and planning strategy. On the way back I suggested that I might like a word with Percy in private, so after dropping Charlie off, Percy and I proceeded to his offices where I brought up my concerns about the push back from my clients and asked if he had any suggestions. He asked that I give him a couple of hours to make some calls and offered to meet me at the Old Bank of England Pub just around the corner about five o'clock. Since I had nowhere else to go I proceeded to the pub where I grabbed a cosy spot upstairs at the end of the corridor. A spot designed for parties of four. A quiet conversation and a hundred pounds turned it into a corner for two. I used the time, waiting for Percy, to catch up on my e-mail and phone calls. About five thirty Percy joined me, not looking too pleased.

"Percy, you seem to have lost some of your effervescence since I saw you last. You have news?"

"I do Eton. Not particularly good news. I spoke earlier to one of my associates who keeps his ear to the ground and the word on the street is that someone has it out for our friend Charlie. There is no known source. No reasoning behind it. It's just a rumour floating in the ether and no one can seem to get hold of it. Nonetheless, it's like a ghost. Everyone fears it, even if they can't see it or explain it; no one wants to touch it."

"Let me be blunt. Will this affect our arrangement?"

"Well Eton, if you have no fear of ghosts then I don't see how it can actually affect our agreement."

"Then let's put this behind us, have a pint, and turn this into something to be proud of," I said, raising my glass. Percy's mood picked up noticeably and the next few hours flew by, both parting on a high and encouraged about the future.

As the years progressed so did the Trent sales. In fact life had never been so good. I was riding high on a tsunami of cash and it looked like my future was a lock. The only issue that was a bit out of line were a couple of my best customers, those who had originally voiced an objection to the Trent product. These customers sacked us almost immediately after I started representing Trent,

and I had never been able to recover them. It bothered me, not for the loss of the business so much, but more for the loss of the friendship. I quite enjoyed the companionship of these associates and it hurt that it was lost to me. The financial loss was also significant but the Trent sales more than made up for the losses, at least three times over. This was the only flaw in the pearl that was my oyster.

ARCHIBALD ELLISON'S BOOK

Archibald Ellison (no one ever called him Archie) grew up on the right side of the tracks. His family was old money, banking money, quiet money. The estates were large, but not so large as to attract attention. The toys (cars, boats and the like) were top drawer but not so top drawer as to garner more than a passing glance. The yachts were all under 200 feet, the Pullman was in a corporate name far removed from the family, Bentleys were chosen over Rolls and vacation spots were remote and isolated from the main stream, not part of the Gstaad, Monaco crowds but small exclusive spots in the Maldives, Fiji, British Columbia and the like. It wasn't about money it was about isolation. Always Alta over Park City or Snowbird, Turks and Caicos over Grand Cayman and Baglioni instead of the Dorchester when in London.

Archibald grew up in this rarefied environment, wanting for nothing, accustomed to the best of everything, yet expecting little of anything. Archibald was his own man and not one to rest on others laurels. If he was to be recognized he wanted it to be for himself, not for what someone else had provided him. Where others in his crowd would parade their exotic goods in front of him it inspired no envy as he knew that these were toys from the parents, not ones they earned themselves. So Archibald passed through his university years with an air of aloofness feeling inferior to no one. Except maybe Paul. Paul Anderson. In his case there was a twinge of jealousy. Paul didn't know him, but he knew of Paul. Archibald was two years ahead of him and working hard to make a name for himself. Well before graduating Archibald was wheeling and dealing, accumulating a strong financial base for when he was to burst forth from university. What he envied in Paul was how, coming from nothing, he had managed to run with the crowd he did and do it without support from friends or family. That was a talent he admired but not one he could afford, mentally, to be second to. Hence the envy.

Fortunately for Paul, Archibald was two years ahead of him and left before Paul started to really make his mark. I say this because there was a dark side to Archibald. He was competitive in the extreme and could not stand to lose, to be second, and to be anything but the premier person in a room, in his field or in a competition. He was arrogant, intolerant, and quite frankly, mean. This side of his personality rarely showed as those around him didn't care if they were numero uno, they were comfortable with their inherited wealth and being part of the elite. For most that was enough. They would show off their recent acquisitions, brag about their latest stunts and tell stories of their families' money, but that didn't faze Archibald because he knew that they were lesser than he by dint of their need for family support. But Paul was different. He didn't flaunt what he had or what he had accomplished, but everyone knew and everyone respected him for it

in a way that they did not respect Archibald. Partly because he came from money and Paul did not and partly because Archibald did not have the charisma that Paul had.

Now Eton, that was a different story. There was a lad who was going places, who was going to be an influence on the world. Who was going to be someone, but who, unlike Paul, could be manipulated, and so Archibald set his sights on Eton, he being the lower lying fruit in Archibald's mind. When Eton set up his company Archibald was waiting for him. By this time Archibald had amassed a small fortune and had a list of contacts that would have filled a small phone directory. Aside from his contacts, Archibald's unique talent was finding undervalued products, whatever they might be, and reselling them at great profit. He found real estate that was waiting to be reinvented, bought it up and then put it back on the market under a new, and attractive plan. For example; he discovered that the city had a plan to divert a certain canal, that the diversion would lower the water level on an adjacent stream and that, in turn, would render a certain marshland solid terrain, enabling it to be developed for commercial properties. Before the plan was brought before council to be voted on he purchased the marshland at marshland prices. Since the land in question was simply noted as marshland within a commercially zoned territory there would be no rezoning approval process needed once it dried up. This, of course, is exactly what happened and Archibald resold at \$150 for every \$1 invested. No development involved, just a flip. That was his secret. He was famous for his recycling of cars and trucks. He had an eye for repairable vs. un-repairable vehicles that had been in an accident. After a collision, he estimated that some 70% of the vehicles declared un-repairable by the insurance companies were actually salvageable for restoration or significant parts resale so he financed an auto repair and recovery shop that was turning \$10 profit for every \$1 in cost. Archibald's end was 50% for identifying the accidents and negotiating a price for the un-repairable vehicles. The auto team took over from there picking up the vehicles, restoring them or salvaging the parts and, when completed, Archibald had a network waiting for the finished goods. He also had an eye for art and was a constant participant at estate sales and auctions, having a prodigious memory for, and understanding of, art, jewellery and antiquities. He owned at least ten outlets across the US and in Europe where he acquired and sold these goods. Finally, but far from leastly, he dabbled in corporate acquisitions. He was an expert at flipping, stripping and marrying companies. His great depth and breadth of contacts made him the grand master at all these activities.

Where other businessmen were grubbing for 5% to 15% gross profit margins Archibald was averaging 300%. His rise from comfortable wealth to stratospheric wealth was accomplished in less than six years. Not without questions in some quarters. There were those who believed that many

of his transactions were of a dubious nature and others who claimed malfeasance in his transactions with them. Archibald's answer was that no one attained his level of success without skirting the edges of legality and ethics, but that he had never breached either. To date he had never been sued, so maybe he was right. Nonetheless he left a string of unhappy buyers and sellers behind him and had a reputation for being sharp in business by those who spoke kindly of him and a ruthless shark by those who spoke less kindly of him. Archibald didn't care, for he knew that greed would overcome any reticence brought on by his reputation, and anyway he was, at least in his mind, number one shark and that satisfied his ego.

Then there was Eton, skirting the political circles while making his mark in the aircraft business, both commercial and military. Areas where Archibald's expertise and contacts were thin but where great opportunities lay for a man with his talents. Archibald had been watching Eton's climb from his first year at Harvard and it was now time to move in. Archibald had contacts with a number of European auto suppliers who were also supplying the aircraft industry; companies like Saab, Rolls Royce, Honda and Piaggio. Using these contacts he squirrelled his way into a number of young aircraft suppliers who carried new and innovative products and were looking for access to the US market. With these in hand he set up a meeting with Eton using his fraternity contacts. As he predicted, Eton snapped up three of the opportunities and started making hay with them. In fact these sources quickly became the mainstay of Eton's business. Within two years he was wallowing in money and prestige. The plan was working. Over those two years Archibald had managed to make contact with Eton's clients through his association with Eton's suppliers. Archibald now had a foothold into the political, military and commercial airline industries, just as planned. He no longer needed Eton, except to say that Eton clearly owed him, as it was his contacts that had escalated Eton's business, and Archibald had asked nothing in return.

One of the contacts that Archibald had turned over to Eton was Trent Avionics. At the time it was a small innocuous company with little to offer, but Archibald was playing the numbers and threw everything he had at Eton hoping that something would stick. Trent had not stuck and so it passed from his mind until 2010 when he got a call from one of Eton's major clients. They asked for a meeting and Archibald took it not knowing what it was about.

Roger Bastian, representing Caldwell Aircraft Maintenance, was at the table with another fellow when Archibald arrived.

Roger opened with "Archibald Ellison meet Sal Wheezle," pointing to an associate at the table.

Wheezle holds out his hand "Good to meet ya Archie."

“Archibald” he replies taking Wheezle’s hand.

“Sure.”

“So Archibald, I called this meeting as we have an issue that needs taking care of and it would seem you are best situated to handle it,” said Roger.

“Without rancour and before we proceed may I know just who Sal is?” asked Archibald.

“He’s an associate, Archibald, and he’s good. You can talk in front of him,” replied Roger.

“He work for you?”

“Indirectly. Can we proceed now?”

“Okay,” replied Archibald giving Sal a long look.

“So it seems your friend Eton is looking to pick up representation for a product produced by Trent Avionics. You should discourage him from doing so,” said Roger.

“Might I ask why?”

“Let’s just say that it would be detrimental to his business. We know you’re good friends and we’re doing you a favour here,” answered Sal, jumping in to the conversation.

“And why would that be?” asked Archibald.

“The favour? Because we like you and we don’t want to see you or your associates get hurt. We look out for our own,” again from Sal.

“No Sal, why should Eton not rep the product?” replied Archibald giving Sal a long stare.

“We can’t tell you. That’s classified. Suffice it to say that no good will come of representing the product. That’s all we can say. Trust me on this Archibald. I like Eton and I don’t want to see him get hurt. We’ve being doing business for six years now and I respect and admire the man. Believe me this would be a mistake and I can’t really tell him directly,” answered Roger.

“All right. Roger, as you know, I’m new to this game so I’ll take your word for it and I’ll speak to Eton. What do I tell him when he asks questions?”

“You’ve known him longer than us. I’ll leave that to you,” replied Roger indicating that the meeting was coming to an end.

Archibald stood up ahead of the other two, and wagging a finger at Sal said: "I'd really like to know where you fit in." At which point he turned and left.

Not being the kind of person who took orders blindly Archibald researched Trent Avionics and much to his chagrin found that the company produced a truly excellent and revolutionary product that would be a real boon to Eton's business, and concomitantly to Eton's clients. It didn't make sense that he would drop the representation without good reason. Which opened up the bigger question: why would Caldwell Aircraft Maintenance, one of Eton's oldest and best clients want him to drop the product, especially when it was a product that would significantly benefit their business?

The only answers he could come up with were that Caldwell had a direct tie to Trent and wanted to avoid the middleman or else they themselves wanted to pick up the representation or had a friend that they wanted to give the business to. So he investigated all of those possibilities without coming to any conclusion, although none of those options appeared to be viable after his due diligence. In the end he decided he had little option but to approach Eton and see where the cards might fall.

Archibald met Eton on a cold spring morning at Founding Farmers on Pennsylvania Avenue.

"Eton. Good to see you. It's been too long. All going well?" opened Archibald

"Pretty good Archibald. Have to thank you for that, the references you provided are working out even better than I had hoped. You need to let me do something for you to pay you back," replied Eton.

"No worries. My pleasure. You don't owe me anything. Just glad to help out a Deke brother."

"Well, just know that I'm in your debt. What can I do for you today? You sounded serious on the phone."

"Well Eton, I'm not sure how to approach this. As you know, I'm well connected through many different sources and in the course of a day I hear many things. Most are of little import and even more just goes in one ear and out the other. However, yesterday I heard a rumour about Trent Avionics and it occurred to me that that was one of the companies I referred to you. Is that the case? If not, then I have wasted your time, for which I apologize in advance."

"No Archibald, no. You're right you did refer them to me and I must confess I originally turned them down. I have, however, since reversed myself and am proud to say that I have signed a rep

agreement with them. I thank you again for that as they have a really exciting product. Although, I have been getting some resistance in surprising corners. But enough about me, you have news.”

“Yeah. I don’t quite know how to put this. I’ve been hearing rumours that there might be some funny business going on with Trent Avionics. Nothing specific yet, but you might be wise to distance yourself from them. People in some very high places are casting aspersions on Trent and their associates. I wouldn’t want to see you get burned.”

“I really appreciate your concern Archibald and I must confess I have been getting some very strange reactions from certain sectors of the market. But I have to tell you, this is an incredibly exciting product and the market sectors that are accepting the product are so large it makes it impossible to back out. I’ve tripled my business overnight. If I weigh the losses against the gains I have to stay in. If you hear something more concrete I’d certainly like to know, if that’s not asking too much.”

“I’m sure you know your business better than I. I can only suggest that security in the form of known solid clients can’t be overlooked and I heard rumblings from that arena a few days back. Nothing specific, but worrisome. In any event, I thought you should know. Shall we dig in?” he concluded pointing to the food. And so ended the meeting with Eton.

Later that evening, at The Big Hunt, Archibald met with Roger and Sal - at their suggestion.

“So Archie, how’d it go?” from Sal.

“Archibald, please. I don’t know. He understood and in fact admitted that he had been getting some negative feedback from some of his clients. At the same time he tells me that the sales to his other clients more than offsets the losses from his existing customers. My guess is that he won’t give it up.”

“Archie, Archie, we wasn’t asking. He needs to drop Trent, period. If you can’t do it we’ll have to sever this relationship and cut your ties to General Prendial. We haven’t asked anything of you in the past and as I understand it you’ve done rather well by us. Make this happen!”

“You can find your own way out,” concluded Sal with Roger in the background, mute.

Archibald was thunder struck. He had no idea that they were this serious nor had he expected such a virulent reaction. He certainly didn’t want to mess up this contact. He had been making a fortune on flipping military gear. Picking up vehicles and aircraft and getting them reconfigured for the public market. Jet aircraft stripped, repainted with a new interior brought good bucks as

did military jeeps and other vehicles. He certainly didn't want to lose this connection, and the fact was that he had gleaned most of what he wanted from Eton anyway. He had, indirectly, gained access to most of Eton's contacts and, as far as he could tell, he had skimmed the cream of the crop by this point. Furthermore, if Roger and Sal were right, Eton's future wasn't looking too bright. Best to be done with Eton and move on.

The question now was how to apply pressure to get him to back out. Words weren't going to do it. He needed to set some events in motion that would turn Eton's mind around. Initially he thought to discredit Eton in Trent's eyes, which he did by having a spy dig up Eton's appointments and travel plans then phone ahead to the appropriate authorities to get Eton stopped, searched or arrested, insuring that he would miss critical meetings. Subsequent to that he resorted to hijacking shipments to Eton Imports and destroying large portions of the products. When even that failed he tried embedding cocaine in one of Trent's shipments to Eton. But customs failed to detect it so he then set fire to Eton's warehouse before the product was shipped on, feeling sure that the cocaine would be discovered in the ensuing investigation. When even that failed to happen he had to drop a hint to the authorities that there might be something fishy at Eton Imports. That eventually worked. Both Trent's and Eton's empires started to collapse much to the delight of Sal. Not so much for Roger who seemed to have real feelings for Eton. In any event it was over and he had salvaged his connection to general Prendial.

ETON'S DEMISE

It was a few years after signing the Trent agreement and I was once again back in London. After another meeting with Percy and a pint at the Old Bank of England Pub I grabbed a cab about ten pm and headed back to my hotel to pack, as I was leaving the following morning.

On entering in my room I had a sense that someone had been there. I couldn't put a finger on it. But I definitely had an ominous feeling so I carefully checked everything. Nothing was out of place. In the end I chalked it up to my earlier conversation with Percy, packed and went to bed.

The morning didn't improve my mood. If anything, I felt even more strongly that someone had been here. Something was definitely out of kilter. A shower and shave improved my mood, but not enough to abandon my room to whatever might be out there, so I ordered breakfast up to the room. Finishing breakfast the phone jarred me out of my contemplation, advising me that my cab had arrived and that the bellboy would be up shortly to get my luggage. I was told to leave my luggage inside the room by the door and the bellhop would pick it up. I could proceed directly to the checkout counter.

Arriving at the airport I had a redcap grab my bags as I was travelling with convention material and it was more than I cared to lug around by myself. Flying first class, check-in was quick and painless and I proceeded to the lounge to await departure. It was only eleven, but being the end of a long and arduous show, I grabbed a drink and sank into one of the lounge chairs to finally relax. Half way through my drink there was a commotion at the check in desk for the lounge and shortly thereafter two rather large gentlemen, reeking secret service or some such entity, strode quickly in my direction. Turning to see who might be behind me I heard:

"Mr. Bradbury, Mr. Eton Bradbury, may we have a word!"

Dear God, they were here for me. What could possibly have happened? "Yes, that's me" I replied, turning to face them.

One of the men grabbed my elbow enticing me to stand up while the second deftly removed my drink saying "Come with us please," moving me forward.

I resisted, saying "Might I grab my carry-on?!" which they consented to, but not particularly amicably. They then marched me out of the lounge grasping my elbow and pushing me ahead of them.

About ten minutes later I was sitting alone in a stark room with a table and three chairs, a one way window and a CCTV camera in the corner. I'd been there, without any explanation, for about five minutes when a man in a suit and a police woman entered. Both looking rather grim. The suit spoke first "So, have you had time to contemplate your actions. You want to tell us about it?"

"What actions? Tell you about what? I checked in, went to the lounge, got myself a drink and was waiting for my departure when your goons showed up and brought me here, without explanation. Period. So best you tell me why I'm here because I haven't a clue, thank you.

The two looked at each other before answering. The suit again.

"OK. Let's start from the beginning, as you wish. Did you pack your own bags?"

"Yes."

"When did you pack them?"

"Last night."

"Were they out of your possession since you packed them?"

"No."

"You didn't leave your room after they were packed?"

"No."

"And this morning?"

"No. Oh wait, they were in my room while I went down to check out, but the bellboy was already on his way up to get them. After that the bellboy put them in the taxi just as I finished checking out. From the time I left my room until the luggage was deposited in the cab would have been less than 15 minutes."

"Then that is the only time the bags were out of your sight?"

"Yes."

"Including after you arrived at the airport and before you checked your bags?"

"Yes. I called a redcap at the departures gate and went directly to check-in,"

"And do you always travel with explosives in your luggage?"

"What? Do I travel with what in my luggage?"

“Explosives Mr. Bradbury. Very volatile and dangerous explosives.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Your luggage, Mr. Bradbury, was detected containing a form of nitroglycerin, in capsules, in a bottle, inside your luggage. An explosive Mr. Bradbury, which if jostled too severely, would have blown the side of the plane off. An explosive, Mr. Bradbury, which could be set off by the jostling of severe weather in flight,” his voice raising. “Do you understand now Mr. Bradbury? Is it all clear to you now?” the suit’s face going a shade or two redder during this short exchange.

“I’m sorry but I know of no explosive. I don’t handle explosives and if I did I certainly wouldn’t carry them in my luggage. I’m not a fool. Aside from which, why would I do that? I would be risking my own life. If there are explosives in my luggage then someone put them there. Most likely, I would think, after check-in and before being discovered. You should be checking the baggage handling staff. Not me!”

“Well Mr. Bradbury, it’s your luggage, not the baggage handlers’ so we are talking to you. Your luggage is your responsibility, not ours.”

“Oh, come on! You know full well I wouldn’t do it. I’m not a suicide bomber! What’s the protocol for something like this? You must have some sort of procedure for this type of thing. I need to get home. I have to catch my plane. I run a business. Please. What do I need to do?”

“Your antics, Mr. Bradbury, have caused the flight you were booked on to be two hours late leaving. You won’t be on it. The procedure, as you call it, is for us to bring you and your luggage to the local police for processing after which time you will be released or jailed, pending trial.”

“Surely you jest. I haven’t done anything. There must be some way to handle this without resorting to such drastic measures. Really.”

At this point the suit turned to the police woman and said “Charlotte, ask Ed how he’s coming on the explosives and the bottle,” turning toward me “you, sit tight.” Charlotte left and the suit went mute.

Twenty minutes later Charlotte returned. “There were plenty of prints on the bottle. None were his. Ed says let him go.” Which is precisely what they did. I had been well documented. The ‘case’ had been equally well documented and I was handed copies of both and escorted to my plane. We took off two and a half hours late. I none the wiser about what had just transpired and the

rest of the passengers completely in the dark. I must confess I drank more than usual on my way home.

Like the opening of Pandora's Box, this incident proved to be the first of many that led to the decline of Eton Imports. Over the next few years I was stopped at least eight times entering or leaving different countries for a variety of infractions ranging from improper documentation to attempted smuggling. No charges were ever laid but in every case it happened at times where the delays were particularly critical and cost me dearly - missing meetings, speaking engagements and trade shows.

Subsequent to taking on Trent's product I lost the two key clients who had threatened reprisals if I did so. Initially, I more than covered the losses with the increased sales of Trent product, however, given the misfortunes that followed, and a series of coincident problems encountered by Trent, those gains were eventually wiped out.

In that same time frame I lost three clients for late delivery of product. In two of the three cases the delays occurred between Trent and my warehouse and in the third between my warehouse and the client's. In every case the product was not only late but severely damaged which meant that the product was unusable and needed to be replaced. The time delays for replacements were unacceptable to the clients and the business vanished.

By this time I was sure that there was serious sabotage afoot and we made arrangements for shipments to be sent under the radar. We did this by preparing false shipping documents and loading scrap metal into appropriately sized boxes and shipping them off to their destination. At the same time the actual products were labelled parts and shipped to a warehouse that we used for parts. We then forwarded those shipments, as scrap, to an abandoned warehouse (or so it appeared from the outside) and then trans-shipped to the client. Over two years we opened a series of false warehouses to keep our plot hidden. This worked and worked well. During those two years, when we had the operation in place, we did not lose a single shipment.

Then it happened. I got a call at four o'clock in the morning from the fire department advising that our warehouse and office space was aflame. The resulting fire was devastating, destroying 70% of the inventory along with a myriad of irreplaceable documents and my Bentley, which happened to be parked in the warehouse at the time. The structural damage was such, not to mention the smell of the fire, that we decided to knock the offices down and rebuild.

Subsequent investigation determined that the fire was arson. I and my team were, of course, the prime suspects and it took all of three months to clear my name and get on with the insurance claim so that we could rebuild.

I might have survived all of this except that six months after the initial investigation into the fire, officials returned to investigate the remaining inventory, that was not destroyed in the fire, and found some twenty pounds of cocaine hidden in one of boxes of parts. This but a few days before the insurance settlement.

While I survived the inspection without being charged, my reputation was severely damaged and, in an ironic twist of fate, it was Trent that was charged with drug smuggling. The case was never proven and Trent was eventually acquitted. Unfortunately, too late to save their reputation which had been destroyed during the proceedings, not to mention the moratorium on production during the trial. Charlie gave it up and closed the Aviation division of the company. Needless to say I went down with the ship.

Meanwhile, Clayton Dace was mystified. Eton was one of his best friends. Well best friend might be a bit of an exaggeration, but something between an associate and a best friend. Certainly good friends. They were in the same fraternity and got along well but travelled in different circles. Clayton's crowd were more related to industry while Eton's were closer to politics. Nonetheless their circles did mix and he knew Eton quite well by the time that they graduated. Eton was bound for success and Clayton did not want to miss out on his upward mobility. So he made sure that he and Eton did business together. In fact there was little question that Eton needed his financial expertise. Eton was hopeless when it came to money but he was majestic when it came to charisma and politicking. If you were attached to his star you wouldn't fail and so Clayton made sure he was attached. From the moment he left Harvard Clayton was his financial adviser and his go to man for contacts in the aerospace industry. Along the way Eton had made great financial gains and Clayton had handled his money, minimized his taxes and leveraged his gains by combining them with the assets of others whose finances he was also handling. Given the combined size of the funds he was investing he was able to garner an extra 5% above and beyond the normal returns for souls limited to investing in the \$500,000 to \$5 million dollar range. Needless to say he piggybacked his own investments on these, insuring greater financial rewards for himself. In fact it was Eton's business that made the biggest difference. Eton's contracts typically ran from \$50 million to \$300 million with gross earnings in the range of 20%. And Eton was rolling over a couple of contracts a month. What that meant was that for a certain period before having to submit the appropriate taxes on the gross, Clayton would have between \$10 million and \$120

million a month to invest. Furthermore down payments, running between 5% to 15% on Eton's contracts, provided additional money available for investment. Not that there weren't expenses against those funds but after accumulating a reasonable backlog in revenue those expenses were handled out of the operating reserves.

Clayton made sure that the suppliers gave Eton 60 day terms and that his clients were tied to 30 day terms, giving him 30 days to leverage most funds. For shorter term funds he played the derivatives markets, a field at which he was the grand master. Topped off with a certain brilliance in tax avoidance he was a sought after commodity by those in the know. Albeit those in the know were a very select group as a high profile in his industry attracted the IRS and that was not a good thing. Clayton had fifteen clients and no more. All wealthy, all successful, and most under the radar. In fact Eton was his highest profile account. Also his most profitable client. That is until events started unravelling Eton's empire.

Clayton came from money. Industrial money. His family was connected in industry, in particular in the aerospace and automotive industries and the associated peripheral support entities. While Clayton enjoyed his family wealth he was not about to rely on it and so with his aptitude for things financial he made his own way in the banking and investment sectors, forgoing a pursuit of the family businesses. What he lacked, however, was the clout that came with running large industrial complexes. He controlled a large investment fund but it wasn't his and so he couldn't leverage those assets to intimidate others. Which, quite frankly, suited Clayton just fine as he did not have ambitions of power and control. He was a service provider and he was happy to be just that. So when Eton's empire started to unravel, he called to discuss the situation with Eton, not so much to provide support (as that would have required intimidating others) as to offer whatever advice he could under the circumstances.

"So Eton, what the hell is happening? Your gross revenues are way down and cash flow has fallen through the floor. If this keeps up we are going to have to adopt a new strategy. Is this thing short term or the beginning of something worse?" asked Clayton.

"I don't know what to tell you Clayton. Recently my world has collapsed. Everything that can go wrong is going wrong and more besides. It's like someone is out to get me. If I was paranoid, I'd be sure that was the case, and I am paranoid," replied Eton.

"Let me ask you. If this continues where will you be a year from now?"

"Out of business Clayton. Broke."

“What’s the probability that it will continue?”

“Seventy percent, maybe worse.”

“Then Eton we need to start planning for your collapse. There are things we can do to protect a certain portion of your money so you won’t be destitute, and to minimize the backlash of shutting down, but we need to start now.”

“And what if the business doesn’t fail?”

“If we start down the path I have suggested there is no option but to close shop. Even if things turn around you will have to get out.”

“And if I wait?”

“I can’t help you if you don’t move now. You will lose everything. No reserves, nothing to fall back on, nothing to start up again with.”

Eton sat staring for a few minutes, sighed and said “Okay, work on shutting me down. How bad will it be?”

“Your creditors will take the brunt of it. We will likely be able to negotiate twenty five to thirty cents on the dollar avoiding bankruptcy. Your staff will be taken care of with slightly better than minimum severance and we should be able to give them 30 days’ notice. You’ll have to sell the condo as the carrying costs on that will be out of your range once you shut down. I can probably get you two to two point five million after tax but that’s about it. Your lifestyle will take a big hit,” concluded Clayton.

“Jeez! That bad?”

“Yes.”

“Well. It is what it is. Proceed my friend. I’m sorry it’s come to this and thanks for the ride. It’s been a good one.”

“It’s my pleasure. I take care of my friends and I know you’ll be back. I’m not worried,” said Clayton.

And so ended the first chapter of Eton and Clayton’s relationship. Good to his word Clayton managed to live up to his promises, barring the legal expenses incurred after the fire and ensuing drug charges. Events which occurred shortly after their conversation. Bottom line, after disposing

of the condo and acquiring new and vastly more moderate digs, Eton was left with a million and a half after taxes and expenses. Not poor but a long way south of where he had been.

Clayton also took a big hit as it was Eton's cash flow that had bolstered all of his investments. Without it, the returns for his clients dropped by a good 3%. The only thing that kept them on was his tax advice which, if anything, got even sharper.

Eton's Resurrection

During the process of shutting down Eton stopped by one of his university haunts for a pity drink and ran into Paul. It seems he had just arrived from the Philippines and a two month tour of Oceania. Some resource management project involving agricultural productivity, if I recall, thought Eton. As was inevitable, the conversation turned to Eton's fall from grace.

"So Eton, you are the last person I would have expected to run into the kind of grief that you find yourself in today. Tell me, what happened?" asked Paul.

"The short version? I ran into Trent Avionics. Ever since I signed the rep agreement with them my life and business entered a never ending downward spiral culminating in the situation you see me in today."

"Trent Avionics? I remember that name. Weren't they involved in some drug running scandal not too long ago? If I recall the details from our previous discussions they manufactured some product that was supposed to revolutionize the aircraft industry. First rate product that ran into delivery and durability problems. I gather they are up for sale but having a hard time, given the drugs and the product's durability reputation," Paul said.

"That's the company. Although virtually all of the bad reputation is manufactured. The product was, is, revolutionary. That part is true. That it had delivery problems is true but the delays were manufactured. Nothing to do with Trent. It was all third party generated. Furthermore the durability issues simply did not exist. A large percentage of the shipments that came through suffered damage, but let me tell you that that had to be artificial. The product was extremely robust. In fact it was at least three times more durable than any of its competitors. That it could be damaged in normal shipping is totally impossible. You would have to physically attack each unit, individually, with a sledge hammer, to damage the product beyond use. There was a concerted effort by someone, or some group, to keep this product out of the market."

"Let me ask you Eton: is the product that good? I've heard conflicting reports."

“The product is better than that good. It is exceptional in every way. It’s a gold mine waiting to be excavated. That I can guarantee,” concluded Eton.

“OK. So let me tell you. This meeting was not a fortuitous accident. I’ve been waiting here for you. When I was in Australia I ran into an old associate Ken Neuman. He’s involved in surveys around the world but primarily in Brazil. When I ran into him he was looking to buy up the remnants of Trent Avionics. It seems he was not the only bidder. Curiously, according to Trent’s owner, Charles Henderson, there was only one other bidder and that bidder was hiding behind a ‘conglomerate wall’, as Charles described it.” Eton broke in at this point.

“What did he mean ‘conglomerate wall?’”

“Well, Charles, as you most likely know, is very much a people person. He likes to know who he’s dealing with so when Island Inc., the other bidder, approached him to acquire the company he naturally wanted to know who was behind the company. It seems that it was another company that was behind Island Inc. and the only people employed by Island Inc. were the secretary and a ‘VP’ by the name of Bullard Strong. It seems that Island Inc. was owned by Wayward Wind PLC which in turn was an asset of High Seas Associates who were wholly owned by Global Inc. By that point Charles stopped looking; realizing that whoever was behind that bid wanted to remain anonymous. It gave him a very uncomfortable feeling so he started dragging his heels. Additionally, Charles’ suspicions were further prodded by the fact that there had been no other bids for his product. Even given the history of its demise the wolves should have started gathering as soon as word got out that there was trouble in paradise. That’s when Ken showed up.”

“Now, Charles likes Ken but does not know him. I know Ken and would bet my life on him. While Ken deals with the criminal element in Brazil, and likely other places, he is an honest and an honourable person. I would recommend him without reservation. Unfortunately Charles doesn’t really know me, so my word has little value. The reason I mention this is that Ken would like to acquire the company and put it back on track. He’s even willing to keep Charles on and to leave him equity in the company. However, he has to get Charles to agree. Ken is pretty sure that if he can provide Charles a proper reference, Charles will do the deal through him before going to Island Inc. It occurred to me that you, Eton, might be that reference.”

“God, Paul. Considering everything that’s happened I don’t know if Charles is even speaking to me. After all, everything started to fall apart just after we signed our agreement. I suspect that he might well blame me for the demise of his company. Anyway, even if your friend Ken acquires

the company what's to stop the same things from happening to him as happened to Charles and me?"

"Ken thought of that and claims he has that problem licked. He wouldn't tell me how, but he's not worried about it. What do you think? You want to give it a try? I mean I realize that it doesn't do anything for you, directly, but it could provide contacts that might help you get back in the business."

"At this stage, Paul, I have nothing to lose. Sure. I'll give Charles a call."

"No Eton, we're doing this in person. No calls, No letters. No e-mails. I have reservations for Australia leaving in two days. That should give you time to sort out any appointments and the like. Charles is flying down to meet with Ken at the same time. Don't say anything to anyone. This is on the QT."

"Gee Paul, why all the secrecy?"

"Because Eton, I have a very uncomfortable feeling about Island Inc. This is an operation that smells to high heaven. There are too many layers between them and any real person. To me, it has CIA written all over it. Not necessarily CIA owned, but at least CIA supported. If that's the case then there are likely some very powerful and unscrupulous people behind this. And if that's the case, there will be a lot of surveillance surrounding this sale. One can't be too careful."

"Why would the CIA be behind this? That just doesn't wash," said Eton.

"Of course it does. This is a revolutionary product for the aircraft industry and it's currently owned and manufactured in Europe. If Island Inc. prevails then pretty soon it will be owned, manufactured and controlled by Americans. And I say controlled advisedly. If it's as good as you say the US will want to control who has access to it and who doesn't. This house of mirrors fronted by Island Inc. isn't coincidental, it's very much intentional. Come on Eton, surely you've given that some thought. How long have you been in the industry? An industry, at the military level, that feeds on subterfuge, secrets and hidden agendas and at the commercial level thrives on political intrigue."

"I guess. I just didn't want to believe it. Okay, let's go."

"I'll pick you up at your place at seven am two days from now."

And so it was that two days hence Paul and I were winging our way halfway around the world to Perth, Australia. We checked in to the Duxton Hotel on St. George Terrace staying away from the

Crown Perth complex to minimize any casino distractions, but keeping to a hotel that had a pool, in deference to those moments when conversations might dictate cooling off a bit.

Charles arrived direct from Heathrow London the following day and checked in at noon. Having flown for the better part of 10 hours and having crossed five time zones we felt it appropriate to give him a few hours to rest and suggested that we catch up about 5 p.m. in the dining room, the Duxton's pub being a bit on the gaudy side.

So by five we were all together, Charles eyeing myself and Paul with a bit of scepticism. It was Charles who opened the conversation.

"Eton, let me start by saying that I am sure that our disasters are linked. I also realize that it's not your fault, so let's get that out of the way right up front. I've always admired you and I am sorry that your business collapsed. That our disasters are linked I don't believe to be coincidental. You told me right up front there was push back from your clients. I believe that the interests that were pushing back are the same ones that oversaw both of our demises. I also strongly suspect that those same interests are behind the only offers I've had so far for the remnants of my company. Excuse me, I should say that one of them most surely is, that being Island Inc. I'm not sure about this fellow Ken Neuman. He's an unknown to me. But given the history of events to date I don't trust anyone I don't know and can't vet. I understand that that is why you're here," Charles concluded, giving a nod toward Eton.

"Yes" I said "Paul here knows Ken quite well and can vouch for him. I in turn can vouch for Paul. He and I went through university together and have been close ever since. I would trust my life to him."

"So Paul. What's your take on Ken?" asked Charles.

"I want to be really clear on this. I have worked with Ken on numerous jobs. Jobs that were politically difficult, criminally difficult and technically challenging. I have never, I mean never, had any reason to question or doubt his honesty, his sincerity or his integrity. The man is a rock. He deals with the criminal element as if he was one of them, but never succumbs to their enticements. The same with the politicians. He is a bridge that spans both shores but never concedes anything to either side. If you want a person who will support you through thick and thin, without crumbling, he is your man. If you ask him a straight question he will give you a straight answer and he will never lie. Bottom line. If he wants to do business with you, you would be a fool to refuse. He won't fail you as long as you live up to your side of the bargain."

“A glowing recommendation. But I don’t know you. And while Eton may trust you with his life I don’t know you well enough to trust my life to you. What other assurances can you give me?”

“Well Charles, none. However, if I were in your shoes, I’d take the least repugnant offer as there are only two on the table, and as I understand it, time is running out. Look at it this way. You suspect that Island Inc. is out to scam you out of your due rewards and given the offer they’ve put on the table there isn’t any question about that. On the other hand, Ken is offering more up front, he’s willing to keep you on and he is offering you an equity position. I can’t see how there is any choice. One is a gold mine; the other is a garbage can.”

“But what if Ken’s offer is a scam? After we sign the deal I find that I end up with nothing through some clever manipulation. You yourself admit that Ken deals in the seedier side of the world. What then?”

“Well Charles, get the money up front. If after that, everything goes to hell, you’re still better off than you would be with Island Inc.”

“I’ll concede that, however, now that I have a second bidder I expect that Island Inc. will raise their offer. Then what?”

“Then you’re in a bidding war and will ultimately have to decide which the better offer is for you. Do you want to keep working? Do you want to walk away from 15 years of hard work? Is it only about the upfront money or is there a longer term satisfaction? All good questions that only you can answer and most importantly, if there is a relationship beyond the initial cash offer, who do you trust? Charles, I can’t make your decision for you. I don’t know your criteria. I do know that if I was looking beyond the initial cash payment I would put my trust in Ken, certainly not Island Inc.”

“Okay. I’ve heard enough. When will Ken get here?”

“He’s here now. At the Brisbane Hotel, about five minutes by cab. He’s waiting for my call. If you’d rather wait for morning, given your travels. That’s fine,” replied Paul.

“No let’s get on with it,” answered Charles. And so Paul phoned Ken and told him to come on over. Ken arrived within ten minutes. Ken was a good 6’ 2”, well built, no fat, blond, blue eyed with an engaging smile. When he entered a room, he was a presence. In our case he slipped up beside us unseen and slid into a vacant chair with a “G’day mates.”

After introductions and a few minutes of chat Ken took the bull by the horns.

“So Charles, I hear you have some reservations. What can I do to alleviate your fears?”

“To be honest, Paul has done about all that can be done. I’m convinced that your offer is the better of the two currently on the table, but to be completely transparent I’m going to tell Island Inc. that I have a better offer. Quite frankly in the hopes of getting them to boost their cash offer.”

“I understand the logic and appreciate your honesty. However, I think that would be a mistake. Don’t get me wrong. If I were in your shoes that would be my first instinct. Here’s the problem. My cash offer is the limit of my liquid resources for this acquisition so if they outbid me I won’t be able to counter offer. Worse yet, Island Inc. will know who is at the table. To be more precise, they will know that there is another bid, which I suspect they are not aware of at the moment. As soon as they find out, the hunt for me and my associates will be on and we will lose the element of surprise, which I was counting on to advance our market. Appreciate that all of the things that went wrong with you and Eton will happen to us as soon as they twig to our operation. Of course, if you go with them, then that’s not an issue but I sense that is not your first choice.”

“No, it’s not.”

“So let me reiterate what you get with me. You get a cash buy out that is superior to the other offer you have on the table. Admittedly Island Inc. will outbid me in a competition and you will get more immediate cash. On the other hand the cash offer is all you get from them. In my case, in addition to the cash, I am offering you a full time job as head of R&D and production at a commensurate salary plus 20% equity in the new firm. I realize it’s a bit of a comedown from where you were, but it is head and shoulders above the alternative. But I need you to make the decision now, without advising Island Inc. I know it’s a lot to ask but it’s essential to the short term success of the company.”

“I understand from Paul that you are not that concerned about them repeating what happened to Eton and me. So where’s the harm in letting them know, and why aren’t you concerned?”

“I anticipate that they will use similar tactics once we start operating. What I want is a three month to one year period under the radar to get some clients lined up, some product into the market and to put in place my long term protection scheme. The protection scheme involves getting the product incorporated in aircraft at source and into the market such that if your aircraft does not have this device it will no longer be competitive. It’s a scheme no different than the one Island Inc. was planning except it circumvents the US and leaves us holding the product and the

concomitant revenues. But If I don't get at least the three months it will likely set the plan back a good two years."

"You're hijacking me."

"No, I'm saving you from being hijacked."

Paul and I had been watching the exchange without comment. At this point Charles and Ken stopped talking and Charles went into deep thought. A few moments later he sat up, signalled the waitress and ordered a round of beer. I should point out that we had been teetotalling up to that point. When the beer arrived Charles turned to Ken, held up his glass, and said "Then I'm saved. Cheers. Draw up the papers and I'll sign. Can you have it done by tomorrow?"

"No worries mate. Cheers! Noon tomorrow, pub at my place? Your pub is a bit gaudy for me."

And so we spent another hour commiserating and all retired to our rooms.

Charles, Paul and I met Ken at noon at the Brisbane hotel as requested. Being a typical October day in Perth we assembled outside the bar on the terrace; under the trees and umbrellas which kept us shaded from the sun, enjoying a balmy 22 C (72 F). After ordering drinks and a light lunch we prepared to settle down to business. Charles, speaking first, took us a bit by surprise.

"Ken I know that I agreed to proceed yesterday and I still want to, but first I'd like to get to know a little bit more about you."

"Well Charles, what can I tell you? My initial proposal laid out all my past and current businesses and provided you with my personal resume. I'm happy to give you anything you need but I'm not sure I know what you're looking for?"

"I've read the paper, and on that you look good, but I need to know the real Ken Neuman. Ken the individual, not Ken the businessman. What are your hobbies, interests, your politics? What do you do with your spare time? What are your likes, your dislikes? That sort of thing."

"Okay. Not an unreasonable request. A couple of things though. One, I don't discuss politics unless I'm really drunk. I don't believe that it has any place, as an ideology, in business relationships, and in personal relationships it can frequently destroy what might otherwise be a lasting friendship. Don't misunderstand, politics, as part of a business equation is, of course, frequently essential, and in your business virtually always a factor, but not as a philosophical discussion. Two, I don't really have much, if any, spare time. My business is my life, I'm not

married, I have no children and any vacation time I take is usually just an extension of my business travels. So, how to begin. Let's begin by providing you with some history."

"I started in the airborne exploration industry about twenty five years ago. It was a winter job during my second year of university. I had no real training and worked as a support hand, installing equipment, lugging machinery about, organizing travel and shipping, that sort of thing. During this process I found I had a real knack for understanding things mechanical and electronic and fixing them. I was also rapidly picking up on the techniques and processes involved in exploration. More importantly, I loved the business, so I dropped out of university and stayed on full time. Over the years, between on the job learning and correspondence courses, I picked up the necessary knowledge to start and run my own outfit. Five years in and I was financially solid, had assembled a truly fine crew and was winning multi-million dollar contracts. Then I solicited some offshore business."

"That opened up a whole new world. My first offshore venture was in Brazil. Allow me to digress here. Up until that point in my career I had worked on government jobs in Australia and a couple of odd jobs in the New Caledonia islands and Vanuatu. All of my work under my own ownership had been solely in Australia, so my venture into Brazil was a totally new experience. I signed a contract issued under Australian Aid, a division of Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The contract involved support for a larger initiative being undertaken in the state of Acre in Brazil. My portion of the contract was relatively small at a few hundred thousand dollars, but it gave me an in to a new market so I jumped on the band wagon with wild abandon."

"Imagine my surprise when the details started to pour in. One: I couldn't take my own aircraft. I had to hire the necessary aeroplanes in Brazil as the Brazilian government wasn't about to issue a fly permit to any non-Brazilian registered entity or aircraft. Two: it was my responsibility to get all the necessary permits to execute my portion of the contract (I hadn't thought much about that initially, until I started to look into the complexity of doing so in Brazil). In the end I had to contract this out to a Brazilian firm. In fact, the same company whose aircraft I hired. Three: While my portion of the contract in Acre was an independent contract, it was part of a much larger initiative and I quickly found that I was a minor player in an ocean of sharks, and that my tasks were dependant on others completing theirs first or alternately theirs were dependant on me completing mine first and frequently I was the man in the middle where both dependencies were true. And finally, four: when I eventually arrived in-country I discovered just how really remote Acre was. Most surveys are remote. But there is remote and there is remote. Acre was remote. The weather was abysmal, hot, sticky and rainy. The ground was constantly... mush. And access to

anything remotely resembling civilization was many hours away by plane and days away by boat. Roads? They were generally not an option.”

“The few hundred thousand dollars that was originally so appealing was starting to look a bit thin. I won’t bore you with the details, suffice it to say it was a real learning experience and we made no money on that first contract, but it did get us into the country and I began to realize the importance of contacts and the importance of understanding the real nature of your contacts. I evolved a process of categorizing my contacts into four classes: a) the sociopath; they are your best friend and they can be very effective but will sell you down the river for a grub worm. b) The blowhard; they will talk a good line and will try to help but their contacts are thin and not as close as they represent. c) The agent; this is a contact who represents themselves fairly, is generally trustworthy, has good access and will, if they promise, deliver. And finally d) the friend; this is a very rare contact and, by far, the most valuable. They are contacts with whom you have a special bond. One who is always there for you (and expects the same in return), who has impeccable reach into their sphere of influence and always delivers, regardless.”

“All have their uses. The sociopath I use to spread disinformation, the blowhard to get the word out on the street, the agent to locate a needed contact or develop influence and the friend when that special deal comes around and you can afford to spread the wealth or when you’re in trouble.”

“By my third off shore contract I came to realize that, in many countries, most bids are won by those with little or no moral background and that the clients are frequently of the same ilk. My quandary was how to continue in this business and still maintain my moral compass. For me, the answer lay in developing my contacts at all four levels. Through this mechanism I could distance myself from the seedier side of the business while still continuing to provide valuable service to the client who might otherwise end up with a sloppy or incompetent contractor. I also realized that there was no way I would succeed if I didn’t learn how to deal with, and handle, the seamier side of the business. It goes without saying that that involves working and associating with crooks, criminals and in some, thankfully rare, cases, murders. I want you to know this, as that is who I am.”

“That is not to say that I don’t have boundaries. I do. I believe that I am a moral man, a man with ethics and a sense of honour. I pick my employees and associates with great care, almost as much care as I use choosing my closest friends, of whom I have very few. I demand that my employees

be loyal, that they maintain an upstanding moral character and approach to the business, and that they don't exceed ethical boundaries in the execution of their jobs."

"On the personal side, I am forgiving, I make mistakes and I know that others will also. I don't forgive the same mistake twice. I care about my people first and everyone else second. I practise two sports, skiing and swimming, at both of which I am quite capable. I am reasonably well read - thanks to my extensive travel - and I have learned to be a quite competent card player. I enjoy women, when I have the time, but have no steady squeeze - again because of my travels, and I enjoy my drink, especially my wine with a good meal and my beer on a hot day. And that about sums me up my friend. Do you have any questions?" said Ken picking up his beer and draining it.

"Just one" replied Charles. "Knowing Eton's and my history what would you have done in our shoes?"

"An excellent question, to which I don't really have an answer since I was not involved day to day and can't know enough to make an informed opinion. In fact, based on what I now know, about your other bidder, I suspect that there might not have been anything you could have done. By the time you knew or suspected that there was external collusion against you it would have been too late. The only possible action you might have taken, the instant you suspected, would have been to fold the operation, go underground and find a new partner with which to re-launch the product. However that would only be a logical action if you suspected CIA involvement and I don't see how either one of you would have arrived at that conclusion, at that time."

"Are you saying the CIA was involved?" asked Charles.

"I suspect that they were, in fact, likely still are, as the stink on Island Inc. smells like one of their operations," said Ken.

"Just one more. Is Paul a friend or associate?"

"A very good friend, and we do, do business together."

At that point Charles rolled over and the deal was done. Ken had the papers ready and Charles signed without resorting to his lawyers, even though Ken encouraged him to do so. Charles replied that if Ken was out to screw him he'd find a way regardless of the wording of a contract. Charles was taking Ken at his word. Albeit, he really had little choice. The new company was called Baal Inc. We all felt it was aptly named, what with Baal being the Prince of Hell, the Lord and Master of fertility and the storm God. Fertility in bringing new product to market, a storm God in raining product down on the marketplace and the Prince of Hell heaping misery on the

competition and those that might have tried to destroy Trent Avionics. I won't bore you with the balance of the trip as nothing out of the ordinary occurred. Just friends passing the time. One final comment; in concluding the deal all agreed that when Baal was up and running I, Eton, (in whatever guise I was operating under at that time) would be given the rights to representing the product in North America.

And so a door was opened for my slow climb back to financial stability and the regaining of my name. The process would move forward much more slowly than had the original venture as I had to stay under the radar and remote from the operation until such time as Baal was ready to go public. However it provided a solid foundation for the future and was an avenue back into the game. I was secure, had a future, and politics was still a looming carrot not more than a few years out. All thanks to Paul and his insight into bringing Ken into the fold (not to mention a million dollar interest free loan). The only thing missing was Katherine.

ETON'S PATH TO POLITICS

After Eton's demise in 2010 his resurrection was neither simple nor smooth. While Trent Avionics resurfaced as Baal Inc. it was Ken and Charles who benefited from that transaction. Eton was still at loose ends. His reputation had suffered considerably and while Eton Imports managed to avoid bankruptcy it was only by the skin of its teeth. The client base had been eroded, the suppliers had fled and all that was left was a shell with an odour to it. Albeit, Eton was secure in the knowledge that once Baal Inc. surfaced publicly he had a future there. It only required some patience until Ken and Charles established the base. In the meantime Eton was to maintain a low profile but continue his business at a vastly reduced capacity, while maintaining as many of his contacts as possible. To that end Paul had advanced Eton something in the vicinity of a million dollars to keep him afloat.

It was shortly after that that Archibald approached Eton, suggesting a joint venture - something Archibald never, ever did. Eton was surprised and flattered that Archibald should even consider him after his recent failure, especially after Archibald had warned him of the potential for disaster. The new venture was called Phoenix Avionics and leveraged Eton's experience in the industry, especially the military, while avoiding the stench of Eton Imports. Eton slipped into the new business like a hand in a glove. Within a year he had resurfaced and was operating at about 70% of his previous sales. All the while Eton recognized that he would be a hero to Archibald once he started representing Baal Inc. He did, nonetheless, keep this tidbit hidden, awaiting approval from Charles before tipping his hat to Archibald. Then Archibald, after some two years of being a silent partner, called Eton in.

"Eton my friend. Take a seat. All seems to be going rather well I would say," opened Archibald.

"Yes, Archibald, progress is more rapid than I could have hoped for and the future is looking quite rosy."

"You're probably wondering why I called you in."

"A bit curious, yes."

"You might have questioned why I did a joint venture with you. As I know you know, that that is not how I normally conduct my business." Holding up a hand to stop any interruption, he continued "I made an exception in your case as I saw something in you that, quite frankly, I need. I know you have political ambitions and, to be straight up, I need to strengthen my ties to the

political world. I expect you to be that conduit. So now that we have your financial base secured let's talk about your entry into the realm of politics," concluded Archibald.

"You don't waste any words do you?"

"No, Eton, I don't. I don't have time, and cat and mouse isn't my style. So...?"

"Well, aside from the obvious questions such as what riding, what venue - municipal, state, federal, what party - there is the issue of funding. While the business is profitable, it is taking all of my time, so if I fund it from my work I'll have no time to campaign, and if I back off work to campaign there won't be sufficient funds to finance it."

"I've thought of that. First, you are going to go federal. There is no point pussyfooting around with municipal or state elections. Second, let me worry about the financing. You can ease up on work because I've got a man in the wings to pick up the slack for you. Third, you only need to come up with about a quarter of the financing, or less, as I have sources for the balance. So no worries. And you'll be running for the senate here in the Washington area. Tentatively Maryland. Republican as I understand it at the moment."

"So you have my future all planned out for me," answered Eton with a smile.

"Yes we do Eton."

And so began Eton's entry into the world of politics..... and Sal Wheezle's entry into Phoenix Avionics.

Eton & Archibald in Politics

About a month after Archibald had called Eton in to advance his entry into the fray of political ambitions, they were sitting upstairs in a dark corner of Provision No 14 in downtown DC.

"So Eton, it looks like we have an opening in the senate in Maryland."

"Really, is Davidson leaving?" asks Eton.

"Well, he was planning on another term, but finances and family issues overcame his ambition to run again. I mean the man has held his seat for some 18 years already. You get tired, and the constant battle to raise money for the next election is stressful. It's a young man's game these days," replied Archibald.

"How do we proceed from here?" asked Eton.

“We’ve taken care of your registration. All the papers are ready. You’re good to go. We just need you to sign off on them tomorrow. We have arranged a private party at the Hay Adams tomorrow night for you to meet some of your supporters and campaigners. That should get the ball rolling. You’ll need a speech of course. I have a draft here for you,” said Archibald passing over an envelope. “You can modify it as you like but this should give you a good head start and some direction. We’ve also rented campaign headquarters for you on North Charles Street near East Pleasant in Baltimore. It’s the best we could do on short notice. It’s not a big space but it’ll give you a place to rest your hat and meet your people. Most of your work will be on the road so location wasn’t all that important.”

“And, again, what about the financing?” asked Eton.

“Don’t worry about that. That’s my end. You have supporters who are coughing up about 30% of the funds, we have super PACs that will cover about 40% and the balance will have to come from Phoenix Avionics. Don’t worry about that side as I’ve got it covered. Finally don’t worry about the day to day running of the company as I’ve got a fellow, Sal Wheezle, to cover for you. Oh, here’s a list of your campaign workers and some of the key supporters. Try to remember as many names as you can. I’ve included backgrounds on the key players so you’ll know who you’re dealing with. Any questions you can call me any time.”

“We haven’t discussed my platform. Don’t you think that might be wise before we meet these people? I mean, I have some very specific issues I’d like to address,” commented Eton.

“Eton, Eton, Eton, wake up. Your platform is the one that will get you elected. Politicians can’t afford the luxury of ideals. You pick a side, Republican or Democrat, and then you follow the party line as best you can within your given constituency, supporting only those ideals that are going to win you votes. Your life, from this day forward, will be based solely on image. What you are, is irrelevant, what you appear to be, is the only guiding principal, regardless of how it may conflict with your personal beliefs,” admonished Archibald.

“Seriously, Archibald. I need to stand for something. I need to have a rallying cry that people will get behind. I need to be honest. The people can tell. It’ll be refreshing to see a politician telling the truth, not evading and hiding behind double meanings.”

“No Eton. You’ve got it backwards. Once you get elected you can afford a conscience and speak the truth. Before you get elected you are at the whim of popular public opinion. At best, after you are elected you have two maybe three years where you can follow your ideals, but then you have to revert to image making to get ready for the next election. The population needs at least

three years to forget any indiscretions you may have committed or unpopular decisions you may have supported during the first three years of your tenure.”

“I can’t lie to the public Archibald.”

“You don’t lie, you obfuscate, for the greater good.”

“My reputation, to this point in my life, has been based on my honour and integrity. I can’t afford to lose that.”

“You won’t Eton. Trust me. Our image makers will take care of that.”

“Well, they better.”

And so after another few hours of discussion they parted ways with Eton returning home to study up for the following evening.

The introduction of Eton into the political milieu was a grand affair. The Hay Adams had pulled out all the stops and the two hundred or so who turned out for the evening (cocktails only) were treated as royalty. Eton’s speech was brief and revealed nothing, but was delivered with sufficient flair that it sounded impressive. From that point forward it was a matter of being handed around to meet all the important people. Schmoozing, for lack of a better word.

“Eton I’d like you to meet Senator Williams.”

“A pleasure senator Williams. You must pardon my ignorance, but I’m new at this. Which district do you cover?”

“Florida, son - ‘The Sunshine State’. You’ll have to come down and visit us. Especially during the winter. Weather’s better than up here. All kidding aside, we have more in common than you might think. There are issues that are languishing in the cellar that need to see the light of day. Here’s my card. Give us a call,” concluded senator Williams.

The rest of the evening was a flurry of discordant and unconnected words, phrases, platitudes and backslapping.

“Your state, being the Spirit of America, along with your proximity to DC, puts you in an enviable position.” - “We need to talk.” - “Can you get away next week.” - “I can see great things for your future.” - “Stick with us sonny and you’ll ride the rainbow to the presidency.” - “Support my issue and you’re a shoe in.” - “Let me tell you how I can help.” - “Have you” And so it went

until 2 am. when Katherine pulled Eton from the fray, making their excuses and cabbing it back to her apartment.

Stumbling into the apartment, exhausted and exhilarated the two flopped onto the sofa and kicked off their shoes. Leaning back Katherine opened the conversation. "Well Eton, it looks like you're on your way. Congratulations! It's been a long time coming but worth the wait. Archibald has you on the expressway to senator-ship and beyond."

"Easy, Katherine. I'm not there yet. And anyway, one step at a time."

"Come on Eton. You know that you have to plan ahead. With Archibald behind you, you'll get in. Don't worry about this phase, worry about the next step. Make sure you don't jeopardize that by making a wrong step here. Keep your options open. In this town you know how easy it is to screw up a future with a single misspoken word in the wrong ear at the wrong time."

"You're starting to sound like a wife."

"Would that be so bad?"

"Look who's planning ahead now," said Eton with a laugh.

"Just showing you the way," replied Katherine with a grin.

"Okay, now I'm getting uncomfortable. Let's change the subject shall we? We both know you're Paul's girl," said Eton, squirming just a bit.

"Well now Eton, do I sense a twinge of jealousy in that comment?"

"Ah, Katherine you know how I feel about you. Always have. But I also know how you feel about Paul and I don't want to ruin two great friendships over something that is just not going to work out."

"Okay, I'll admit that Paul and I have been close for quite a few years now but that doesn't mean that I don't still harbour feelings for you. Different time, different place, different circumstances even, and maybe it could be you and me."

"Now I know you're just teasing. That's cruel!"

"If that's all it takes to get you elected then I'll keep it up." Replied Katherine with a grin.

"Oh I'm going to get elected. Just you wait Katherine Carlisle. Maybe then circumstances will be different and it'll be you by my side." He rejoined with a poke to her ribs.

“On a more serious note. Have you seen or heard from Paul recently? He seems to have disappeared. Thought he’d be here for you, for the coming out.”

“Pretty sure he’s in Brazil and I don’t think he’s aware that I’ve decided to go into politics. I’ll let him know as soon as I hear from him again.”

With that conversation ambled on hitting on numerous topics until they both succumbed to their weariness.

The Race is on

With the senate race in full swing Eton had his hands full and his mind divided between the race and Katherine. If he would ever have allowed himself to admit it, he loved Katherine. And had it not been that Paul seemed to have captured her heart he would have pursued her with great diligence, but he didn’t want to damage his friendship with Paul. Paul had been a dear friend and had come through for him in his darkest hours. But Katherine ... damn she was a great girl.

Sitting in campaign headquarters he was brought back to reality with the entrance of Archibald and his latest demands.

“Eton my man, we need to talk.”

Yeessss ... Archibald?”

“I hear that you were out there supporting the tree huggers. You can’t do that.”

“Oh, come on. I thought that caring for the environment was a popular thing. Not a bad thing. By what standard can you possibly call supporting a clean environment a bad thing?”

“Well Eton we need to care where the money comes from to get you elected, not just the environment, and if you insist on pissing on your supporters, those funds will dry up and you won’t get yourself elected. And if you don’t get elected what can you possibly do for your precious environment then?”

“Who are you talking about? All I did was support a group of farmers who were complaining about GM (Genetically Modified) seeds contaminating their crops. Why shouldn’t I support them? They have a valid argument.”

“That’s why you need to talk to me before you go making any promises. The department of agriculture and the Food and Drug administration both support GM seeds, and crops, so you have no support within government and to top it off the chemical companies behind the GMO’s

(Genetically Modified Organisms) have tremendous clout in government and government circles. Not to mention that they provide very substantial backing for something approaching a majority of elected officials. Not just you but those already elected who might otherwise support you in your drive to get elected ... or not. The topic is a loser. Leave it alone and if it comes up again side-step it."

"What about those votes? What about the issue? It seems important."

"Eton, don't you get it? The number of votes it represents is insignificant. Worse yet, there is nothing you can do about it. There is no support in this country's government for your issue. It's stillborn, it's a loser, there is no support for it anywhere in the House or the Senate, so even if you do get elected and bring this up you're going to get shot down and look like a loser to your constituents. It'll die a quick, painful and public death. Learn to accept which side your bread is buttered on and stick to it."

"Hear me out. The farmers that are complaining are being sued by the seed producers for not paying royalties on the crops being produced from their errant seeds that blow onto the farmer's properties! The reality is that the seeds blowing onto their properties are in fact contaminating their non-GMO crops. It is the farmers who need to be suing the seed manufacturers, not the other way round. And anyway, who ever heard of paying royalties on seeds produced from the plants themselves. The whole scenario is ludicrous. Something needs to be done."

"Eton, LEAVE IT ALONE, you don't know who you are going up against. You are taking on Monsanto, DuPont, Syngenta and others who control some 70% of the world's seed market, who move their executives in and out of key positions in the department of Agriculture, in the Food and Drug administration and the Environmental Protection agency as well as the White House. What chance do you think you have in combating what is essentially a fait accompli at this point? What is especially dangerous is the fact that you will make enemies across the political spectrum, and you don't want to be on the wrong side of this argument. If you are lucky enough to get elected these people can make sure that you don't get re-elected. So listen to someone with the experience and background and save yourself."

A Senator Crows in Maryland

After all was said and done, Archibald got Eton to toe the line, and he garnered the Maryland Senatorial seat in a landslide. His talks were drivel but delivered with such panache that no one cared. The man and his personality took the day.

Back at campaign headquarters, after the win, Eton slumped into a sofa and, looking at Archibald, asked, with a hint of humour, “What now my master?”

To which Archibald answered, sans humour, “Now you do whatever you want. You have the helm. Steer this ship into a storm or slip quietly down the coast. It’s up to you now. Just remember how you got elected.” Archibald concluded with just a hint of a threat.

“No worries, Archibald. You taught me well.”

At this point Katherine walked in and approached Eton. “You did it my friend, congratulations! Who are you going to take on first?” with a hint of humour.

“Well you, my dear. Now that I have prestige, Paul won’t have a chance,” replied Eton with a large grin.

“You are incorrigible Eton, completely incorrigible. Paul may be away but he still controls my heart strings. Sorry.”

“Speaking of which, where is Paul anyway? I thought he’d be here for me, especially on this day.”

“The last I heard he was in Brazil,” said Katherine, concurrent with a bit of confusion near the entranceway. And then Paul appeared through the crowd.

“Eton, my man, I knew you would prevail. Congratulations!” said Paul approaching Eton with his hand out. Eton stood and embraced Paul.

“I knew you couldn’t stay away. The lure of power brought you running, did it?” replied Eton with a grin spreading across his face.

“Nooo. I came to make sure you didn’t stumble taking the next step up. How have you been my friend? It’s been over six months.”

Spreading his arms and opening his hands Eton replied “As you can see, all is good. To paraphrase The Jeffersons, ‘I’m moving on up’.”

“And the business? Phoenix Inc.?”

“Ah. It’s been a while. Archibald has a fellow running it for me and I must confess I haven’t spent much time at the office over the past nine months. ... On the plus side, it continues to fund my run for senator so it must be doing reasonably well,” said Eton with a bit of a sheepish smile.