

TEMPLE BOONE

I.

“Todd here.”

“What up, honkey?”

“Well, if it isn’t my number one negro, Freshie Stuggs.”

“Todd, what’s shakin’, baby?”

“Just watching some Jai Lai on Univision.”

“High what? Yo, you got any weed, brotha?”

“Freshie, you know I don’t pay for drugs.”

“Since when?”

“It’s kind of a New Year’s resolution thing.”

“Too bad, man. All of H-Town is bone dry. You could make some quick cash.”

“Really?”

“Shit, brotha. The whole Fifth Ward’s been scrapin’ pipes since Friday.”

“What kind of numbers are we talking, Freshie?”

“Coupla pounds, I could throw you five large.”

“Five large? Freshie, I have bar tabs bigger than that.”

“Tell you what, I think I can supersize this deal. But we gotta meet. No phone.”

“Let’s meet up tonight. I’ve got something going on early, but I’ll be done by 11.”

“Parking garage. Piggly Wiggly. Midnight.”

“See you there, Freshie. Don’t fuck me on this.”

“Shit, nigga.”

Freshie Stuggs was a hustler, scam artist, stay-at-home dad and my liason to Houston’s Fifth Ward. I had helped him out of a few scrapes with Child Protective Services over the years, mostly for my own protection. Some of my nocturnal activities took me to the more dangerous parts of town and a man driving around in a candy apple red DeLorean was an obvious target. I made sure the judges didn’t go after Freshie and Freshie made sure the streets didn’t come after me.

My early evening appointment was with one Charlotte Exxon—you guessed it, heiress to the Exxon petroleum empire. We had been having these secret trysts for going on two months. The protocol was always the same: At 8 p.m. I would drive to the Houston Botanical Gardens and park the DeLorean by the peonies. She kept a private mansion deep in the gardens and I’d quietly make my way past the palm trees and dozing Mexican gardeners to her ornate love shack. Up the trellis I would climb and into her bedroom. She’d be waiting with a magnum of Krug and smelling hotter than a half-fuck fox. I would then take her into the Barrel pleasure dome for a few Todd-soaked hours.

“I love these post-coital moments, Todd.”

“I like smoking in bed.”

“You seemed nervous tonight. What’s wrong?”

“Freshie Stuggs called me up and I agreed to organize a massive drug deal.”

“So?”

“So, he wants marijuana and all my pot contacts are now either exiled or in the clink.”

“Why didn’t you say so, Todd?”

“Say what?”

“Go see Temple Boone.”

“Temple Boone?”

“Remember Temple Boone? He’s an old pal of my father’s. We all went alligator hunting together a few years back. You liked Temple’s elephant ear boots.”

“Oh, that guy. He’s a pot smuggler?”

“Used to be. Now mostly works in the movie business. Kind of retired.”

“You have his number?”

“Here, I’ll write it in lipstick on the inside of your thigh, just like in those spy movies.”

“Charlotte?”

“Yes, Todd?”

“You mind giving me a blow job while you’re down there?”

## II.

I rolled up to the Piggly Wiggly parking garage a few minutes past midnight. Freshie was waiting next to his pink Escalade and smoking a cherry flavored cigar. It smelled like ass.

“Todd.”

“Freshie.”

“One hundred kilos of chronic.”

“How much?”

“I’ll pay you five million dollars.”

“Freshie, skimming off cockfights pays well, but not that well. Since when could you come up with five million dollars?”

“Shit, Barrel. I gots myself a private backer. A Daddy Warbucks.”

“Sounds sketchy, Freshie. I like it.”

“Three days.”

“Three days! Freshie, I’m not a fucking magician.”

“Daddy Warbucks wants it then and you best have it then.”

“Or what?”

“Or Daddy Warbucks will fuck you up.”

Fucking great. I was not only involved in a drug deal that was out of my league but if I didn’t come through, Daddy Warbucks was going to “fuck me up.” The fact that I needed weed was equally as un-fortuitous. I could have turned around a coke deal in my sleep but marijuana wasn’t my specialty. Sure, I liked smoking reefer like any red-blooded American but the commerce side of it stank of patchouli. Hippies piss me off and it’s hard to stomach those Jimmy Buffett-loving pilot types that will talk your ear off about Key West and getting the smugglers blues. Bush-league punters is what

they are. I’ll take a trigger-happy Colombian over a bong-loading Parrothead any day.

I dropped my pants and started dialing. The red eye out of Houston would land me in L.A. just after breakfast. I just hoped that Temple Boone could help me.

III.

He was wearing a khaki hunting uniform and standing next to a sparkling gold 1974 Rolls Royce Corniche convertible. Sweet fucking ride. The barrel-chested Texan sported elegantly coiffed long grey hair and an abundance of gold jewelry. I walked over and introduced myself.

“Todd Barrel.”

“Temple Boone. Pleasure to meet you, man. Let me get your bags.”

“Thanks.”

“This briefcase is heavy, son. Gold in here?”

“Ivory Uzis, Temple.”

“Cool, man.”

We drove from LAX to Beverly Hills, listening to Steely Dan, honking at California trim and smoking some incredibly dank weed. I got a little paranoid and noticed a black Crown Vic with two mustachioed men following us.

“Temple, those your men in the Crown Vic?”

“Hell no, Todd. Mustaches are for bullfighters and faggots.”

“Looks like we’ve got company then.”

The mustache man on the passenger side rolled down his window and pointed an Uzi at the Rolls. He unleashed a full spray into us that ripped across the luxury vehicle. Temple put the pedal to the metal and we started hauling ass down Rodeo Drive.

“Bulletproof Rolls, Todd! Bought it from Johnny Carson.”

“Who are these guys, Temple?”

“No idea, man. Hand me my gun. It’s in the glove box.”

I pulled out a sawed-off elephant gun and handed it to Temple. The Crown Vic was still in hot pursuit and shooting at us. I popped open my case and fingered my Uzis. It was time for some hot ivory action.

Ahead of us were Cameron Diaz and Drew Barrymore in a Prius, handing out PETA flyers to fellow protestors outside the Louis Vuitton store. They were gathered around a cow and chanting something about leather and cheese. Two shots from my guns sent the Prius exploding ten feet into the air and cleared the way. The Crown Vic was getting closer.

Temple swerved hard and threw the Rolls onto two wheels while I climbed out on the door and surfed the outside, shooting back at the Vic. We barely squeezed between the flaming Prius and crying protestors. The Vic came after us but hit the cow head-on. Cow guts splattered everywhere and the

car flipped over eight times. Temple hit the breaks and we skidded into a 180, looking back at the carnage. He then got out of the car and aimed his elephant gun down Rodeo Drive. One shot and the Crown Vic was toast.

“You hungry, Todd?”

“Fucking starved.”

“Let’s get some lunch.”

#### IV.

The valets at the Beverly Hills Hotel looked frightened when we rolled up smelling like burnt rubber and gunpowder. Temple tipped them a nickel bag and told them to give the Rolls a bath. As we strolled through the Polo Lounge, Hollywood stars were power lunching everywhere. I saw Elton John having bananas flambé with Tom Cruise. There was Tara Reid sharing a milkshake with Colin Powell, and Kirk Douglas was being spoon fed caviar by six Asian hookers in string bikinis. Fucking guy. Temple and I walked past this freak show to meet one of the most gorgeous women I’ve ever laid eyes on. Imagine a 19-year old Pan-Asian Jennifer Beals in a rubber miniskirt and you’ll start getting the same butterflies in your crotch that I had.

“Todd Barrel. I’d like you meet Chandra Beals.”

I exchanged pleasantries with this incredible creature. It turned out that she was Jennifer Beals’ daughter. She was also Temple’s right hand woman, Goddaughter and eyes and ears to L.A.’s seamy underbelly.

“Chandra, I’m surprised you’re not an actress, considering your astonishing beauty and mother’s influence in the business.”

“Well, Todd, I actually grew up in Thailand with my father, General Pak, who is a very successful poppy farmer. That’s how I know Temple.”

“Oh, I know General Pak.”

“I know you do. Daddy respects you.”

“I didn’t know your father was married to Jennifer Beals.”

“It was one of those ‘crazy nights in Bangkok’ type of things. My father had it annulled after he saw Flashdance.”

“But Chandra, that was the seminal dance movie of the 80’s.”

Temple was beginning to get annoyed with our banter and turned to Chandra.

“Enough of the name game, kids. Flirt on your own time. Let’s get down to business.”

“OK. What do you need, Temple?”

“It’s Todd. He needs 100 kilos of Acapulco gold ASAP. Houston’s short on jazz cigarettes.”

“That shouldn’t be a problem. The Vasquez brothers have been expecting a big shipment that’s probably here. I’ll give them a call.”

“That’s cool. You got the money on you, Todd?”

“Actually, Temple, I was wondering if you could front me a couple of mil and I’ll pay you back on

Tuesday.”

“No problem, man. We’ll just take it out of petty cash. Chandra, Todd and I got into a gun battle with two squares out on Rodeo Drive. See if you can shake down some info from the streets.”

“Will do, Temple. Meanwhile, I’ll help Todd get checked in.”

“Rubber up, Chandra. Barrel’s been in more holes than a rusty Georgia shovel.”

V.

Fucking and sucking—the Thais practically invented it. Chandra did more things to my twig and berries than I thought was humanly possible. Her knowledge of sexual positions and maneuvers bordered on encyclopedic. Readers of any persuasion can appreciate the great prowess she showered upon me. The fruit of my loins now lay within Chandra.

“Todd?”

“Yes, Chandra?”

“You make it so good.”

“Goddamn, girl. You’re the one who makes it so good.”

“I think I’m falling for you.”

“Don’t fall too hard, baby. A rambler likes to cuddle, but a cuddler never rambles.”

“What does that mean?”

“Read it in a fortune biscuit.”

“Let’s go buy some weed.”

“I like the way you roll, Chandra.”

Chandra and I hopped in her dune buggy and set out for the Vasquez brothers’ taqueria in East L.A. We CB’d Temple on the way and told him where to meet us. Years back, I was an adjunct professor of sorts to the West Side Tré Ball Gang and led seminars on how to cook killer tweak. Needless to say, the WSTBG’s sworn enemies, the East Side Homies, didn’t like me improving the competition’s product and put a price on my head. I challenged their leader, Domingo, to a winner-take-all kickboxing match. I won but was instructed never to come back to L.A. unless I had a death wish. And here I was, back in L.A. trying to buy weed from the Homies.

We got to the Taqueria and met Temple outside. The three of us walked in to find Tito and Benji Vasquez sitting around a table playing dominos, drinking Tecate and looking like two derelict, thugged-out cholos. Their elderly mother sat in the corner peeling a pile of potatoes.

“Chandra. Wasshappening?”

“Shit, homies. Just fucking chillin’.”

“Want some tacos, chica? We got tripa, chicharones—”

“Not today, Benji. My associate here is interested in 100 pillows of Angola.”

“Hold on, Chandra. Who the fuck is this guy?”

“Todd Barrel, heir to the Cracker Barrel fortune.”

“Todd Barrel!”

The Vasquez boys pulled their steel and I pulled my ivory. Temple whipped out his elephant gun but Grandma Vasquez had a Desert Eagle under the potatoes. It was your traditional Mexican standoff and nobody was making tacos. The mood was tense.

“You killed my brother, Todd Barrel.”

“Did no such thing, Benj. Domingo was breathing fine after I kicked his ass.”

“He came home in a body bag.”

“And who brought him home, Benj?”

“LAPD—a meter maid named Stacy.”

“That’s right. Domingo was double parked and Stacy capped him.”

“You’re lying, Todd!”

“Bro, I’m not lying. Those meter maids think they’re above the law. Your brother was an honorable man. Don’t dishonor him. Put your weapons down!”

Everybody slowly lowered their guns.

“Sorry, bro. I’ve been all stressed out at work lately.”

“It’s cool, Benji. We just want to buy some weed.”

“Shipment doesn’t come till Thursday.”

“Thursday! That’s too late. Where’s the reefer now?”

“It’s down in Cabo with my little brother, Pepe.”

Temple stepped in politely.

“Man, we need that Panama cut.”

“Temple, you could go pick it up if it’s that important, bro.”

Temple got a wild look in his eyes and turned to us.

“Fire up the jet, Chandra. We’re going to Baja.”

VI.

Texans are called many things—loud, ostentatious, disrespectful and completely lacking in any refined taste. As luck would have it, Temple Boone and his modes of transport embodied all of the above. His Gulfstream V was matte black with gold racing stripes and had a horse saddle disco ball that turned when George Jones came through the stereo. He had just loaned it to Bono and Phyllis Diller for a USO tour of Amsterdam. The plane was still littered with fetish magazines, empty bottles of Kronenberg and silk panties the size of Russia.

Chandra and I sat back and listened to Temple tell war stories about introducing the peyote enema to Ken Kesey and selling dope to G. Gordon Liddy. Out the window a cargo jet with the letters DEA came up on our wing. Mustachioed men peaked at us through the clouds.

“Temple, it’s those fuckin’ faggots!”

“You don’t know, Todd. They could be bullfighters.”

“Looks like the DEA.”

Over the intercom came their warning—land the plane or they would start shooting missiles.

“Temple, what’s going on? We don’t even have the drugs yet!”

“The DEA are outlaws, Todd. Animals who operate outside the law.”

“I thought that was us.”

“Pack your bags, everyone. It’s time to jump ship.”

We gathered the ammo, guns, money, and requisite lawyer and headed to the back of the plane. Two jet skis painted like killer whales were parked side by side. (Pacific camouflage, I suppose.) Chandra and I mounted one while Temple and his lawyer got on the other. Temple hit a switch and the bay doors opened.

“Hold onto your jockstrap!”

We all dropped into the sky, Chandra gripping me close as we free fell towards the ocean. The lawyer quickly lost hold and flew off the back. So much the better. A lawyer in Mexico is about as useful as tits on a cabana boy. Six DEA agents dropped from above and were skydiving toward us in perfect formation. Time to turn and burn.

“Chandra, I need a read on those bogeys.”

“Todd, we’ve got three mustachioed agents at three o’clock.”

“I’m gonna hit the brakes and they’ll fly right by.”

We slowed as the agents bolted in front. I hit the guns and made bloody government Swiss cheese out of two. Connoisseurs of action movies will notice that much of my flying instruction comes from watching *Top Gun* and *Iron Eagle 2*. Never underestimate the educational value of Louis Gosset Jr.

“Todd, he’s got missile lock on us!”

“Let’s get inverted.”

“Todd, we can’t hold a 4g inverted dive with a flying DEA agent!”

“Trust the Barrel, baby.”

We were upside down and directly over the agent. Chandra grabbed a grenade, pulled the pin and stuck it in the man’s pants. Kablammo! Ashes to ashes, nuts to dust. I looked over and saw Temple getting brass-knuckled by the last remaining agent.

“Todd, we’ve got to hit the shoot.”

“I’ll never leave my wingman.”

“Ten seconds, Todd, and we’re shark bait.”

I grabbed a machete from the survival kit and pointed our jet ski in Temple’s direction. If I wasn’t precise, we’d all end up in a fiery grave. My life flashed before me—sex, drugs, more sex and the Peruvian “election” of ’97. All of a sudden they were upon me and I lowered the machete to the agent’s neck. His head tumbled out into the heavens to wherever DEA agents’ heads go to die.

“Hit the shoots!”

Both jet skis’ parachutes opened up, snapping us back from death and delivering us gently into the sparkling blue water of the Pacific Ocean.

“Todd, you can be my wingman anytime.”

“No, Temple. You can be my wingman.”

“Chandra, you alright?”

“Take me to bed or lose me forever, Todd.”

“Requesting permission for fellatio.”

“Affirmative, Ghost rider.”

Chandra and I made floating whoopee while Temple fixed the engine on his busted jet ski. Then we all motored toward the Baja coast in search of Pepe. It had only just begun.

## VII.

Our hotel was a flea-bag, Mexican flophouse that smelled like rusty needles and homeless dogs. It was comforting. The Boutros and I had first met at a similar outpost in Chiapas many years back. He was an up-and-coming bandito who had no idea of the energy markets he’d one day manipulate. I was still vigorously trust-funded and spent accordingly.

The Boutros and I got ripped on Mezcal and found ourselves in the Zapatista camp of Commandante Marcos. Marcos quoted Mao and shot his rifle into the air. I quoted Swayze and shot a sniper out of a tree. A bond was formed that night. But this memory soon faded as reality set in. We were in Cabo and needed the dope.

Temple picked up the hotel room phone and started dialing.

“Hola, Pepe?...Temple Boone...no, Chicklets, no...amigo de Benji....si, si, si...esta noche?...si... donde?...Cabo Wabo. Perfecto, man.”

“Pepe wants us to meet him tonight at Cabo Wabo, Sammy Hagar’s joint.”

“You ever been there, Temple?”

“Hell no, Todd. I’m a David Lee Roth man.”

“Sounds like a trap. Only Canadians and Californians dig Van Hagar.”

“Who knows with these Mexicans, Todd. They eat up Bon Jovi albums like they was the last tortilla on earth.”

“Fuck it. Let’s wash this DEA blood off our hands and go drinking.”

Cabo Wabo smelled like whore’s mouth. It was filled with old, fanny-pack-wearing men from San Diego looking to roofie drunk USC girls for nonconsensual sex. It was a game I had played too many times — played and won.

Pepe was sitting in a booth with two big Mexican bodyguards over in the corner. He wore a red Cabo

Wabo tank top and was drinking an electric blue daiquiri with straws for the whole group. If you’ve ever been south of the border you’d know that this behavior wasn’t so Mexican. Hell, it didn’t befit any self-respecting dope pusher. A goateed Sammy Hagar playing onstage didn’t help my nerves either. These omens were to bode poorly for old Todd.

“Pepe?”

“Senor Barrel?”

“Much gusto. This here is Temple Boone and Chandra Beals.”

“You are much more beautiful in person, Señor Barrel.”

“White Russians and Dutch Ovens. Keeps my complexion light.”

“Come. Sit down next to me. I’ll give you a back rub.”

I was really fucking reluctant to let Pepe get Swedish on my lats but Temple gave me a look that said, “This is the nature of the business, kiddo. Now sit your ass down and let that Mexican man massage you.”

“Now, Pepe. Damn that feels good. I’d like to get 100 keys of laughing grass.”

“And what can you do for me?”

“I can give you a shit load of cash is what I can do.”

“I want something...extra.”

“If you think I’m gonna blow you, you’re out of your mind!”

“Calm down, Todd. You’re soooo tense. I don’t want felación.”

“Let’s just do the deal, Pepe.”

“You Americans are always in a hurry. You’re in Me-heeco now. Relax.”

“I’m trying.”

“Come dance the night away with me.”

“Foxtrot?”

“Salsa!”

“First, where’s the wacky tobacky?”

“Outside. There’s a truck filled with pool equipment and a pile of Zacateca Purple.”

“Here’s the cash.”

Temple opened a Puma gym bag stuffed with money and flashed the Mexicans the loot. Not two seconds passed when DEA agents dropped from the rafters and began shouting.

“DEA! Freeze!”

Everyone at our table pulled out firearms and shrouded Cabo Wabo in a flurry of gunfire. My ivory Uzis were quick like lightning and dropped agent after agent. Chandra hit the stage and set up shop behind the drum kit. Sammy Hagar got caught in the crossfire and took a bullet to the face. Temple was drinking a bottle of tequila with one hand and blowing away the DEA with the other. The patrons were screaming bloody murder and looting the Cuervo Gold. Pure fucking chaos.

When the smoke cleared, I saw that we had righteously fucked up the joint. I cackled to myself and called out to Chandra.

“Chandra, you alright?”

“Todd! Help!

A fat, bloated DEA agent stood with mirrored sunglasses and the biggest fucking moustache I’ve ever seen. He had Chandra in a choke hold and pointed his little police pistol at her head.

“Barrel! I’m agent Gary Quigley. We’ve got the place surrounded. Come out with your hands up.”  
“Fucking tits!”

VIII.

The DEA put all of us in separate interrogation rooms. Gary Quigly and his boys had been working me over good for a solid three hours, making my face look like a meat pie. What the fuck did I care? The Barrel good looks can survive a beating of any measure. Anybody who’s seen the family portrait at any Cracker Barrel store can attest.

“We know you know, Barrel.”  
“Go fuck yourself, pig.”

Boot to the head. Papercut to the nose.

“General Pak is about to make a huge heroin shipment. Where is it going?”  
“I’m into weed, man. I don’t fuck with brown sugar.”

2 x 4 to the knees.

“Jesus, fuck!”  
“Todd Barrel. You’re not cooperating.”  
“Gary, I don’t know about Pak’s operations. I’m just fucking his daughter.”

Gary took a pair of pliers and pulled out one of my fingernails. Holy shit, it hurt.

“Maybe he is telling the truth, Gary.”

DEA agents walked in with a battered Temple and a crying Chandra. Our reunion was short and bittersweet. Group hug. Quigley got back in my face.

“Listen up!”  
“Gary, can we get a drink?”  
“You’ll get nothing and like it! I don’t have to tell you that General Pak is the biggest shipper of raw heroin in the world. We estimate that he makes close to a billion dollars a year from illegal trafficking of narcotics. He’s well guarded and never leaves Thailand. The DEA has been trying to bust him for years but he always slips away. We’re gonna get him this time and you’re gonna help us.”  
“Like hell, Gary.”  
“Oh, yeah? A hundred keys of marijuana and 20 dead agents will get each of you about 600 years in prison. That’s a long time.”  
“Not in dog years!”

“This ain’t a pet store, pal!”

The three of us huddled for a conference. Temple said it was best to play along. We’d escape at some point. Chandra was nervously biting her nails. I was jealously watching.

“Alright, Gary. You had us at ‘heroin.’”

“This is how we’re gonna do it. The three of you are going to Thailand to buy horse from General Pak. The deal will go down in a public place. He trusts his daughter, so he won’t be on guard. We nab him. You walk. And don’t try any funny stuff. Each of you will be wearing a wire and a homing device. We’ll be right behind you...every step of the way.”

IX.

Getting my nails ripped out by Gary was nothing compared to the discomfort and shame of flying coach. The DEA wouldn’t even spring for business class, so we were all corralled like common pack animals. I do have to say that the bathrooms on Thai Airlines are sizable. The baby changing station is a perfect place to fondle a naked Thai woman and join the mile high club in a pumping, alternating motion. Chandra’s a real nympho and I wasn’t complaining.

With the constant surveillance from the DEA, we needed a man on the outside. I slipped the stewardess a twenty spot and a note: “+41 68 55 1700, Kumite, 8 pm.” That was A.Q. Chiachfeld’s home number in Geneva. If the stewardess got the note to him, I knew that he would come through and meet us in Bangkok. The Kumite is an underground martial arts tournament where the toughest international fighters come to duke it out—sometimes to the death. It is highly illegal and incredibly fun. Chiachfeld and Marc Rich got an executive box last year, so he knew the drill.

Gary and the DEA boys went the distance and had us holed up in the Peninsula Bangkok, the most luxurious hotel in the city. Nobody would believe our cover if we stayed anywhere below 5 stars. Gary had his command room rigged like Centcom—microphones, listening devices, binoculars and a Mr. Coffee machine. We all sat and listened as Chandra made the call to her father.

“Sa-wat-dee.”

“Daddy, it’s Chandra.”

“Chandra, my love. It warms my heart to hear your voice.”

“How’s everything, Daddy?”

“Same old, same old. I hosted some Russian generals for a week and you know what that means—vodka, vodka and underage hookers. But, I did get those anti-aircraft guns and nobody caught the clap. What about you? How is my little Lemongrass?”

“Great. I’m in Bangkok with Temple Boone and Todd Barrel.”

“We’ll all have to get together for tea and snake. How is old Temple?”

“He’s doing fine. We’re actually doing a consulting job for Todd. He’s interested in procuring some Aunt Hazel.”

“Aunt Hazel, huh? I think she’s back from her vacation in Disneyland. She’d love to see Todd. Let’s meet to hammer out the details. Phones are so impersonal.”

“How about this evening? The Kumite? 8 pm.?”

“That’s perfect, I’ll see you there.”

“Bye, daddy.”

Chandra hung up the phone and Gary flashed a shit-eating grin. I wanted to slit his throat.

“Very good, Chandra. No monkey business tonight, understand? Undercover agents will be on the Kumite like stink on shit.”

“Gary, that’s disgusting.”

X.

The Kumite was packed with fans, fighters, gamblers, and vendors selling everything from pickled snake ovaries to boiled Panda feet. The place itself was deep underground and only accessible through a series of maze-like passages. Perfect navigation landed you in the main fight chamber, a cavernous room with bleachers for the hoi polloi and wooden sky boxes for the Sony execs and Thai mafia. The thumping techno music, flashing lights and cage dancers were enough to send any normal man into life-threatening seizures. Chandra, Temple and I made our way up to General Pak’s box. I scanned the crowd for Chiachfeld.

General Pak entered with an entourage of Versace-draped hookers and machine-gun-toting bodyguards. Everybody from the doorman to shoe shine boys were being tipped twenty dollar bills. It’s no wonder those little Thai people love this man.

Chandra ran to her father.

“Daddy!”

“Lemongrass!”

“I’m so glad to see you!”

“Chandra, it is nice to see you, too. Are you ready to watch some blood sport?”

“Just like old times—father/daughter day at the Kumite.”

“My money’s on Teddy Wainscott, UFC Champion and King of the Octagon.”

“Daddy, he’s just a pretty boy. He’s gonna get his nuts handed to him by Chong To.”

“Well, Chong did kill five people in the ring last year.”

“And he’s hunky.”

“Chandra!”

The father-daughter banter was very heartwarming. I could tell that it hurt Chandra to be wearing a wire and hiding it from her father. The Kumite was crawling with DEA agents and all eyes were fixed on us. Even though Quigley said that he’d send us to the big house if we didn’t co-operate, we all knew the real truth—agents would put a bullet in our brains and leave us six feet under in Thailand. I could feel the sniper’s crosshairs on my forehead and it didn’t feel good.

Temple was obviously distraught with the whole situation. He was drinking Texas Chardonnay by the gulp and filing his nails with an antler-handled buck knife. Being a tool to the DEA was not in his nature and his pouting, pensive, dejected behavior reflected that. My eyes focused on the screaming fans below. One figure stood out—a tall, remarkably light-skinned Chinaman with a skullcap, quietly reading the Financial Times. It was undercover Chiachfeld. I excused myself and said that I was going

down for some scorpion whiskey.

The Asians have no sense of personal space. I had to push, pull and fight my way through the bleachers toward Chiachfeld. Chickens and money were changing hands as the matches quickly began and ended. Fighters with broken bones and massive hemorrhaging were being carted off like sick racehorses for the glue factory. One tough guy stood in my way and wouldn't let me through so I elbowed the back of his neck. Without a flinch, he turned around, spit in my eye, grabbed my neck and threw me into the ring. It was famed Cambodian bruiser, Chong To. Oooh shit.

“Mr. To, I'm really sorry, dude. Thought you were someone else—smaller.”

Chong To was a man of few words. No words, in fact, since his tongue had been cut out by the Khmer Rouge. He was one big ball of deadly muscle that was about to flex itself upon my entrails. The crowd was going wild and cheering Chong to rip my arms off. Chong approached the ring slowly, bit the head off a chicken and doused himself in the poor fowl's blood. Not much scares old Barrel but this psycho move genuinely intimidated my skinny white ass.

I tried to get the jump on Chong and gave him my signature jump kick. It's a hybrid Kevin Bacon/Chuck Norris roundhouse that's reminiscent of a funky, young Bruce Lee. Chong caught my size twelve Luccheses in one hand and threw me to the ground as one would a half-smoked cigarette. Before he could snuff me, I rolled out from under his stomp.

I got up and walked straight into a huge Cambodian fist. Blood shot from my nose like a fire hydrant and I wailed like a schoolgirl. Body blows followed that cracked my spirit as well as every bone in my chest. I was the rag doll to his problem child.

Chong then grabbed my pants and gave me a Hiroshima-like atomic wedgie. I screamed for God but not before he threw me up into the air, slamming me into the bottom of the hanging cages with the dancing girls. It took all of my strength to hold onto the steel bars, prolonging the inevitable fall back into Chong's madness. I looked up and saw that the dancers were not wearing any underwear. In situations like these, some people get a shot of adrenaline and some see Jesus. For me, the sight of two lovely pieces of young, Thai poon filled me with the strength of ten men. I had things to fight for. Pat Pong Road needed me.

I dropped back into the ring and raised my fist, yelling.

“Todd, Todd, bumbaye! Todd, Todd, bumbaye!”

Soon the whole crowd was chanting and the entire Kumite became filled with the sounds of the ecstatic mob.

“Todd, Todd, bumbaye! Todd, Todd, bumbaye! Todd, Todd, bumbaye!”

I started spinning, faster and faster, like the Tasmanian Devil on three hits of Angel Dust. I came closer to the Cambodian Carnivore who was being hypnotized by my extreme lateral speed. The sheer velocity of my spins lifted me off the ground where I put my hand out and delivered an earth-shattering karate chop to Chong To's ear. Later accounts describe brains shooting out of his nose. The

not so gentle giant fell to the floor with a resounding thud as I became earthbound once again.

The crowd cheered wildly and flooded the ring. They put me on their shoulders, throwing garlands of dried seahorse and pouring scorpion whiskey down my parched throat. I passed out.

XI.

When I came to, Chandra was sponging my wounds.

“I set up the deal with daddy, Todd.”

“Be a doll and hand me that scotch.”

“What’s the plan? This is getting way too King Lear.”

“Be a sweetheart and turn up that marching band music. Ahh, Souza...”

“Damn it, Barrel! I’m talking to you.”

“Baby, I’m listening and so is the D-E-A.”

“What are we going to do, Todd?”

“Just trust me.”

It broke my heart to see Chandra in such a tizzy. There’s nothing worse than being complicit in your own father’s incarceration. (Although catching siph in an Arizona State dormitory comes close.)

The deal was going to go down at The Royal Bangkok Sports Club, whose membership, according to Elite magazine, includes “entrepreneurs, industrialists, business tycoons, top corporate executives, senior government officials and members of parliament—decision makers with the purchasing power to afford the finer things in life.” Unscrupulous and filthy rich—my kind of folk. Mother calls them DLU—Decadent Like Us.

Chandra, Temple and I were chauffeured to the club in one of the hotel’s fleet of green Rolls Royce limousines. This mode of transportation put Temple in a more chipper mood and had him joking about the time he made out with Linda McCartney on Phil Spector’s speedboat. Chandra looked gorgeous in her traditional Thai sarong, crown and matching scepter.

Pak’s bodyguards led us up to the glass-enclosed dining room overlooking the racetrack. The members were eating on gold plates and looked bored. I spied a few powerful faces—Jacques Chirac, Terry Gilliam, and lo and behold, Colin Powell with Tara Reid, canoodling in the corner banquet! What the fuck? We all walked over to meet the General who was munching on some shark fin.

“Temple Boone!”

“Hey, man. Thanks for the Kumite sky box last night. That was some cool shit, General.”

“It was my pleasure. And did Ani Bok give you pleasure as well?”

“Does a cat poop in a shoe?”

“It does.”

“Todd, thank you for coming to see me again.”

“It’s been a long time since that fateful polo match, General.”

“Prime Minister Belushi still has six pins in his shoulder.”

“Ha. What a silly man. When one snoops in Todd Barrel’s Land Rover, one must watch for the mallet.”

“Please sit down. Everyone, sit down.”

“My little Lemongrass. How lovely you look today.”

“Thank you, daddy.”

“May I take your scepter, darling?”

“Thank you, but no. I like it close.”

“Very well.”

“Now, down to business, gentlemen.”

“Let’s do it to it, General.”

“Todd, to the left you see my valet, Clarence, holding the badminton case?”

“I see Clarence.”

“In it are six kilograms of uncut, primo Hell Dust.”

“I trust you implicitly, General.”

“Good. And do you have the money?”

Temple leaned forward with the Puma bag, still bulging with banknotes. This was all too much for Chandra to take. She stood up and ripped open her sarong, exposing the wires taped to her supple, brown hooters.

“Daddy, the DEA—it’s a trap! Run!”

Sixty DEA agents in riot gear sprung out from under the tables. Red beams of light from their laser sights turned the room into a Pink Floyd concert. Everybody froze except Chandra, who grabbed her gold scepter and started shooting. It turns out the scepter was a converted shotgun. That’s cute.

“I’ll cover you, Daddy!”

“Chandra, it’s too dangerous! No!”

Chandra managed to pop off a few shots before she was quickly subdued by a number of well-armed agents. The wrestled her to the ground while the General’s bodyguards were relieved of their firearms.

Strutting like a puffed-up cock, Agent Gary Quigley walked in and surveyed his handiwork.

“Well, well, well. General Pak. We meet at last.”

“Gary Quigley, I presume.”

“You presume right, you old Thai motherfucker. Where’s my fuckin’ smack?”

“With Clarence, my valet.”

“Your valet? Your valet? Not anymore, peaches.”

Quigley pulled out his .38 pop gun and shot Clarence. The valet was out of service—permanently.

“You’ve made your point, Mr. Quigley.”

“Oh yeah, you tired sack of shit? Well, here’s another point: I’m takin’ over operations in Thailand, General. Your business is now my business and it’s time for you to retire.”

“The DEA will be losing an extraordinary talent, Gary.”

“Fuck the suits back in Washington! I’ve spent my life busting drug pushers like you who are back on the streets before I can clear the paperwork—all the while I get paid jack. Now I’m the big asshole around here! What do you have to say to that?”

“I cannot make a counter argument, Mr. Quigley.”

“Fuckin’ A, you can’t! Alright boys, let’s haul them up to the roof and see if they can fly.”

The roof of the club was a manicured grass helipad with a sparkling new Sikorsky S-92 tricked out for executive transport and cocktailing. Three corrupt DEA agents had their rifles fixed on us. It seemed like the end was nigh.

Times like these make most men want to curl up and die. You’ve felt it. I’ve seen it. But when you have a name like Todd Barrel, danger don’t mean a damn thing. Plus, I had an ace up my sleeve.

Out of the sky came the screaming sounds of jet engines. Everyone looked off in the horizon and saw two F-16’s, the pride and entirety of Thailand’s little-decorated Air Force. Their guns fired in rapid succession at the gallery below, ripping up DEA agents and patrons alike. One of the three DEA agents with us turned to the other two and shot them on the spot. Quigley was apoplectic.

“What the fuck are you doing?”

The DEA agent pulled off his visored helmet to reveal his true identity—A.Q. Chiachfeld.

“Hello, Gary. A.Q. Chiachfeld, Third Viscount of Danderlion.”

“What the hell is going on here?”

General Pak stepped up to Gary.

“The tables have turned, Agent Quigley. It is you who has been flimflammed.”

“Whatchoo talkin’ bout, Pak?”

“Agent Quigley, you have been a thorn in my side for years now. Shipments confiscated. My own heroin being sold by your men in our target markets. That does not please me. I, however, cannot realistically come to America to erase you. It is diplomatically unsavory. So the only option was to lure you here.”

“This was a trap? What about Chandra, Temple and Todd?”

Temple walked over to Gary and delivered the loudest open-handed bitch slap I’ve ever heard. Hookers in Pat Pong felt the echo miles away.

“We were in it from the beginning, ya stupid flatfoot. Sorry, we couldn’t tell you, Chandra. Quigley would’ve known.”

Chandra was in shock.

“Todd, you knew too?”

“I did, Chandra. But falling into sex with you wasn’t part of the plan.”

The fighter jets made a second pass and shot missiles into the dining room and grandstands, sending flames upward and shaking the foundation of the whole building. We all lost our balance and fell down for a moment. When we regained our bearings, Gary Quigley was holding a pistol to Chandra’s neck—again.

“Nobody make a move or this bitch gets it!”

“Don’t be stupid, Gary!”

“Fuck you, Barrel. I’m gonna fly away quietly and nobody’s gonna follow. Then, maybe I’ll get some of your sloppy seconds from Little Miss Lemongrass.”

“Quigley, if you do—“

“If I do what? I’m gone, Barrel. And I think I’ll take this heroin and money with me.”

Quigley threw Chandra in the chopper and followed, starting up the bird and lifting off over Bangkok. The foundation of the building was beginning to crumble.

“Chiachfeld! You know a way outta this dump?”

“There’s a cable over there going down to the ground. We could make a zip line with our belts.”

Pak, Temple, Chiachfeld and I all ran over while removing our belts. It’s a good fucking thing none of us buy off the rack. Pak, of course, had a solid gold number from God knows where. Temple whipped off his double-ply Marlin strap, Chiachfeld was in Kevlar and I was luckily still under contract with Hermès. One by one, we slid down the 200-foot drop; Temple hit the ground just as the grandstand folded into fiery rubble. I took control.

“General, we have to go after Chandra.”

“There’s a homing device in the badminton bag.”

“With the heroin?”

“There was never any heroin in that bag. The big shipment is already safely on the streets of Seattle, Detroit, New York, Cleveland—”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah. We get the point. Where’s the tracking device?”

“Here.”

“Fuck, no choppers around here. We’ll have to drive.”

“Todd, it’s Buddhist Lent Day. The streets will be packed with parades.”

I looked over at the racehorse stables and had an idea.

“Regulators...mount up!”

## XII.

Our mighty steeds flew like the wind through the crowded streets of Bangkok. Temple rode “Barbarino,” Chiachfeld, “Monarch Testus” and myself, “Lemongrass Ass.” General Pak was too old for this stuntman shit and went in search of more air support.

“Temple, you got a read on their location?”

“Take a left on Ploenchit Way, man. Past the snake emporium!”

Steeplechase doesn't have shit on us. We jumped over food vendors, sallied around parade goers and ran roughshod over street hustlers selling postcards of bearded ladies. Three furlongs into the red light district, Temple screamed out.

“If anyone needs to buy a baby, now's the time!”

“Later, dude.”

We neared the harbor and spotted the Sikorsky sitting next to a tugboat. Chiachfeld threw me my ivory Uzis and I locked and loaded. As we came upon the chopper, shots rang out. “Monarch Testus” took a bullet to the chest and Chiachfeld hit the pavement. Temple and I soldiered through, dismounting in full stride behind a dumpster.

“Let the girl go, Gary! Keep the money and drugs. We won't follow you.”

“Money and drugs? There isn't shit in here, Barrel. These bills have pictures of Temple Boone surrounded by marijuana leaves. If I'm going down, everybody's going down.”

“The hell we are!”

I ran toward the two, dodging Gary's bullets with my advanced Capoeira moves. A head spin turned into a back spin and on into an inverted one-armed handstand. I had my shot. Pow! My single bullet sailed through the air, hitting his upper lip and ripping his moustache clear off. Chandra broke free and delivered a stiff uppercut, disarming the fat fuck. We all stood, guns on Gary.

A futuristic helicopter quietly hovered above us before making its way down. It was a mirrored, pod-like chopper that looked like Airwolf and Swarovski's illegitimate child. A hatch opened and steam poured out from the belly. A gang plank descended and through the smoke walked Donald Rumsfeld, creepier and bonier than I had imagined. He was wearing a Yankees jacket and carrying some sort of Terminator rifle.

“Agent Gary Quigley.”

“Rummy. Thank God you're here. These smugglers were about to murder me.”

“Silence! Gary, you've been a very bad boy.”

“How do you mean? You always got your cut. Always on time.”

“I mean that you have caused some very serious international problems. You've upset General Pak.”

The General then descended the gang plank and met us on the dock. Gary began to twitch.

“Gary, General Pak is a very important ally to the United States. We have good relations with him. It is important to us that General Pak and his family are well taken care of.”

“Where does that leave me, Rummy?”

“I'm going to have to vaporize your head.”

“Rum Dog, no! No!!!!!!”

Rumsfeld then shot Quigley with an extremely powerful, and I'm sure extremely classified, laser gun. No blood. Just ashes. He then addressed the group.

“I'm really sorry, guys, for all this trouble. Is there anything I can do, pardon me, the United States

Government, can do, to make this up to you?”

“Sir, I’m Temple Boone and I was wondering if I could get a new jet. Quigley really fucked mine, man.”

“Done. Next?”

“Rummy. Pleasure. A.Q. Chiachfeld here. I would very much appreciate it if my dear friend, Marc Rich, could be given assurances that the authorities would not pursue him if he should return to America for some vacationing.”

“Cold day in hell, son. Next?”

“Mr. Rumsfeld, Todd Barrel. All I ask is for the U.S. government to pay for a two-week vacation for Chandra and myself. Four Seasons, Bali. Presidential Cabana, plus incidentals.”

“You drive a hard bargain, Barrel, but alright. And tell your uncle we’re still on for golf Thursday.”

“Will do, Rummy.”

Rumsfeld got back in his alien chopper and flew off to Pakistan to resolve a similar issue. Chandra and I smooched the kind of deep tongue kiss only interracial lovers can know.

“There’s one thing I don’t understand, Todd.”

“What’s that?”

“When did you know that my father was behind all this?”

“I knew it right away, when Freshie Stuggs mentioned Daddy Warbucks.”

“Huh?”

“That’s what I used to call him at the craps table in Manila—Daddy Warbucks. He was murder on those dice.”

“What about the Vasquez brothers?”

“We had to make everything look real. It would have been nice to have scored but unnecessary.”

“And Temple? You could have gone to someone else for the weed.”

“Baby, when Texas needs weed...it turns to Temple Boone.”