

**BOO HOO FLANAGAN**

**A Novella (31,013 words)**

**By Robert Gately**

## PREFACE

One of my favorite movies is ‘The Longest Yard’, with Burt Reynolds. I started this screenplay not long after I saw that movie for the umpteenth time. It was a long time ago in the year 2000. This novella is being written in the year 2021. In fact, the pandemic is still going on and today is New Year’s day, 2021. I have just finished the first draft and I’m now attempting to write the preface.

There is really not much to say except I did have a difficult time determining what, or who, the main character was. I know that’s a big deal as far as my motivation is concerned. Nevertheless, I’m determining now, 20 years after I started this, that this story is not just about Boo Hoo Flanagan. I had to come to some resolution on the main character’s character arc – CW – and don’t ask me what the initials stand for because he’s not saying.

In any event, I hope I did some kind of justice in this story. If football has it ‘Longest Yard’, then basketball should have its own storyline. Maybe this flick should be called ‘The Three Point Throws’. But I’m more enamored with “Boo Hoo Flanagan” just because of the exhilarating feeling I had one day throwing five 3-point baskets in a row, in fast succession, including a hook shot. What an exhilarating feeling that was! It was one of those things where you look around hoping someone saw what you just did and said, “I want that man on my team”. But, there was no such witness, and I had to be satisfied with my own feelings of satisfaction.

It’s interesting, as I think of it now for the first time, that I have three storylines about sports: football (Hat Trick), hockey (Living Proof), and Basketball (Boo Hoo Flanagan). The only sports story I haven’t tackled is baseball. Hmm. I guess I’ll have to leave that for another day.

In any event, I have to give a special thanks to my wife not only for being there for me in times of need, but also for her editing help in editing this story and all the others in my arsenal.

## CHAPTER ONE

CW Gavin was sitting in the front row of a packed viewing room of a funeral parlor watching people pay their final respects to his father who was laid out in a coffin in front of him. Even though they were both African American, people of all colors were coming up to pay their respects.

CW gained a few pounds since the last time he wore a suit and tie. His wife, Renee, thought he looked 'polished' wearing the suit, but it was obvious to the casual observer that he was uncomfortable by the way he fidgeted with his collar. Being a correctional officer for over twenty years, one would think he would be used to wearing a tie, but it was years ago that he wore one, and that was to a dinner party. Back then he was twenty pounds lighter: today he felt fat.

A woman appeared in front of CW all of a sudden, and offered condolences without speaking the words. She hugged CW, then moved to Renee.

"I'm so sorry," she said, not knowing what else to say, and left.

After a few moments of silence, Renee turned to CW and told him not to blame himself.

"I don't," he assured her. "I blame the Governor because my dad would've never committed suicide if the governor didn't step in and force him back on the beat. He was a detective for twenty years, for crying out loud. Contrary to what others believe, it wasn't my dad's fault that Cusack sued the city for false whatever."

"He never should've said, 'they all looked alike'," Renee said. "That reporter made some political hay on that faux pas."

"Yeah, that's for sure," CW agreed. "But it was the Governor, who was the DA at the time of Cusack's arrest, who used my father as a political pawn. He pressured my father to finger Cusack as the person leaving the apartment at the time of the rape, which turned into a murder. It was a feather in the DA's cap when he was running for Governor. Some people say it was because he was tough on crime that he won the election, and this case got him over the top."

"Yeah. So?" Renee whispered

“So, I'm pissed, alright? When my father said they all looked alike, he was just being a smart ass, but after pointing Cusack out, and even after my dad said what he said, everyone thought that Cusack was guilty.”

“Yeah, So?”

“So, what’s the matter with you, Renee? Cusack was convicted in 1986. DNA couldn't be used as evidence yet, so he got convicted solely on my dad's testimony. For twenty years Cusack tried to get a retrial based on the DNA evidence that was left behind, and every year he was denied. Now who do you suppose was responsible for that?

“Obviously, the Governor,” Renee said.

“Yes, and finally Cusack got his chance to prove his innocence by squawking loud enough and got the State Supreme Court to allow another trial and he finally proved his innocence last year. And when he was proven innocent, he was released from prison and now he's suing the city for being in prison for however many years it was. And they’re blaming my father because Cusack was convicted on the false evidence given by my father who knew the perpetrator could’ve been someone else.”

“Yeah. So?”

“So, stop saying ‘so’. That’s why my father committed suicide, is what I’m telling you. Cusack would've never been convicted if my dad didn't point him out. My father gave false testimony knowing it was false testimony because the Governor pressured him into doing it. End of story. I can’t see it any other way.”

Renee got up and said she was going to get some fresh air. As she left, she plowed into Warden Smith, CW’s previous boss before he went on sick leave.

“Do something,” she said to the Warden. “He's a nervous wreck. He's going to have a heart attack, or a nervous breakdown, or something.”

The Warden nodded and said that he’d take care of it, and then walked over to CW and took a seat. They both appeared to be comfortable with quiet, but the Warden was first to break the silence by telling CW to take the next couple of weeks off.

“You’re not my boss, any more.” CW reached into his pocket and handed Warden Smith two photos. The Warden studied them, smiled and handed the photos back.

“Hard to tell who’s more beautiful: your wife or your daughter.”

“I received these in the mail,” CW said. “Just these. No note. Nothing else.”

“I don't ... understand,” the Warden said.

“Warden, don't do that,” CW warned. “You may not be my boss any more, but don't pretend you don't know what's going on. You know my father was a good cop. And now I'm being targeted. They, whoever ‘they’ are, are telling me to shut up or else my family will be targeted. Apparently, I ask too many questions and I found out my dad was also asking too many questions as well. That's why he was targeted, and that's why I'm being targeted.”

“I hoped I didn't have to say this,” the Warden said, “but your father committed suicide because he lost his good name due to nothing he did. Who knew Connie Cusack was innocent? And who knew he was going to sue the city? Nobody! Not even the Governor.”

“Well, the way I see it is I received these in the mail because I asked too many questions to the right people, or the wrong people, as it turned out.”

“Are they threatening your family?”

As CW waved the picture, he said, “Yes, yes they are. Can't you see that?”

The Warden got up to leave. “I don't know what to tell you, CW,” he said. “If you love your family, then stop asking questions. Take a couple of weeks off. You need it.”

A woman came up to CW and offered her hand and said, “I'm so sorry, Mr. Gavin. Mr. Gavin ... are you okay.”

CW was teetering, then finally fell over and collapsed.

## CHAPTER TWO

William Pringle walked up to the check-in counter of a ritzy hotel somewhere in Philadelphia. “Hello”, William said to the check-in person. “I'm William Pringle, the Warden for Longhorne Correctional Institution, and I'm here to see the Governor.”

A Governor's Security Man appeared from behind. “He's been waiting for you, Mr. Pringle,” he said. “Please. Right this way.”

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In the Governor's hotel room, The Philadelphia Inquirer occupied a predominate spot on the table. The Governor was reading the paper while eating breakfast.

The Security Man knocked and walked in all in one motion, and then escorted the Warden to the table. The Governor pointed to a chair opposite him, and the Security Man pulled the chair out and left.

“Thanks for coming on such short notice, Warden. Coffee?”

“Glad to oblige, Governor. Black.”

The Governor poured the Warden a cup of coffee and then continued eating his breakfast. “I have a meeting with the Mayor of this fine city this morning. Don't want to keep him waiting too long. Do you know why I'm seeing him?”

The Warden eyed the newspaper and saw the headline that read:

“GOVERNOR/MAYOR MEET ON POLICE CORRUPTION”.

“You're going to help him set up a commission on police corruption,” the Warden said.

“I lost allegiance of important people over this issue, William. They said I dragged my feet with the Mayor. Should've pressured him into doing this six months ago.”

“What do you want from me, Governor?”

“I need a favor,” the Governor said. “I got a lot of heat from my constituents from what Jake Gavin did. His son, a correctional officer, had a nervous breakdown over

his father's suicide. He's okay now. He's back from medical leave and will work in your prison as an Activity Specialist.”

The Warden's face indicated he was not a happy camper with that decision, and he wasn't. However, he offered no resistance.

“Aren't you having the annual basketball game between your guards and Philly's 'finest' pretty soon?”

“Yes, but ...”

“But nothing,” the Governor said. “I got an experiment I'd like to try. Before you play our 'men in blue', your guards will play the inmates. Sort of like 'The Longest Yard' event, but it's basketball. Of course, you'll win, unlike the movie version. We don't want people thinking we're running a country club here, do we? We'll invite the public. The media, too. And if it works like I think it will, we might make it a yearly thing. Next year is the election, you know?”

“Yes, I know,” the Warden concurred.

“I want the heat off, and I think this will help. I told Warden Smith, CW's previous boss, that Gavin will report to you instead of him. His new assignment will be to coach the inmates. Understood?”

“I don't see any good coming from this,” the Warden said. “From what I understand, Gavin's got a chip on his shoulder on account of what happened to his father. Come on. We all know what happened.”

“It's a done deal, William. He's one of your Activity Specialists, and that's that. People need to see Gavin is treated kindly, so do that, and I'll do the rest. He was an All-American at Temple, and that makes him a natural for this job. Capisce?”

The Governor waited to see if the Warden had anything else to say. He didn't. “Now, out,” the Governor said. “Go process him in. He's probably in your office right now.”

The Warden got up to leave, but before he got to door, the Governor told the Warden that as good PR as this process was, he'd hate to see the image tarnished if the inmates won. “My constituents might think we're running a sports club if the inmates won,” he said, “so make sure the guards win.”

The Warden assured him they would have some 'new' guards coming in who were very athletic and would cement the win if he got them. "I'll keep you posted on that," the Warden said.

The Governor thought for a second and then said, "That might help you beat the inmates, but Longhorne has lost five years in a row to the police department. Good luck on that one."

The Warden chuckled and assured him this year would be different and if he had any extra money lying around, that he should bet on the guards.

"First, the inmates," the Governor said.

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Later, at the Longhorne Correctional recreation yard, two Inmates shoved each other in a minor dispute, while other Inmates played basketball as can be seen through the Administrative Office window. In the office Henry, a black guard with an attitude, and Philip, a white guard chewing tobacco, and with an attitude, sat at desks next to each other. Their work stations had a clear view of the yard from the window.

Philip spat tobacco juice into a cup just as Longhorne's Warden Pringle walked in.

"That's repulsive, Philip," the Warden said. "It's contraband anyway. Get rid of it."

Philip appeared to spit the tobacco in the cup. He knew enough to at least make an effort to get right of the tobacco instead of arguing, which he had done in the past and lost.

CW, dressed in a uniform, waited right outside the Warden's office for his name to be called. Being new to the place, he looked around like a tourist might look around, but remained seated until called upon.

Jeremy, a rather large white man in uniform, walked in behind the Warden. Jokingly, he made a face at the Warden behind his back.

Ramsy, a small, fidgety inmate in an orange jumper suit, sauntered in and began sweeping the floor, which was his job as a trustee inmate who kept the Administrative Office clean.

The Warden walked past Judith, his secretary, and then walked into his office without acknowledging CW at all.

In the office, the Warden sat down at his desk. A signed photograph of the Governor fishing with the Warden hung notably on the wall.

Judith walked in and tossed CW's folder on the desk. "Mr. Gavin is here to see you," she said, and then looked around and saw CW. "Oh, he's right here. Mr. Gavin, this is your new Warden." After that introduction she turned to leave, but Henry burst into the office and almost collided with Judith as she left. He stood at attention in front of the Warden's desk. Normally he would've waited for the Warden to speak first, but this day was a little different.

"What the hell is HE doing here?" Henry said.

"HE is going to coach the inmates in basketball. And the team YOU are coaching will play them in a public relations game in six weeks."

"Says who?" Henry asked

"The Governor," the Warden said. "And you have to be dainty with him, because he's coming off a nervous breakdown."

Henry stopped at the door and leaned back inside and ratcheted up his voice an octave for CW's benefit. "Oh, that's just great. Now we got two Boo Hoos in this hell hole."

Henry tossed CW a cold glance as he walked by, establishing tension between the two. Judith waved to CW to go in.

In his office, the Warden was reading CW's folder when CW walked in and took a seat by the Warden's desk.

"What does CW stand for, Gavin?" the Warden asked.

"They're my initials. CW is what most people call me."

"But what does it stand for? C for Chip, what? Your folder doesn't say. It just says CW." The Warden waited for an answer but didn't get one. "I know. C for Clarence, right?"

"No. Just CW. Like BB King, CW Gavin."

"I see. Okay. Listen. You're here to coach the inmates in basketball ..."

"Yes, I know. Warden Smith told me."

“Then Warden Smith probably told you he is not your boss anymore. From now on you take your orders from me. And Jeremy maybe if he’s around and I’m not. It says here you know your basketball and the inmates at Bucks County respect you. What are you, a liberal or something?”

The Warden laughs thinking that was funny, but CW just smiles, politely. “I know this is your first job back since ... you know. Are you okay? Fit for work, I mean? The doctor's statement here says you're okay.”

CW assures the Warden that he is fine just as Jeremy pokes his head in the Warden’s office.

“Hey, Bill,” Jeremy said, “There’s a squabble in the rec room. I'll be back shortly.”

“Okay, let's go over some things,” the Warden said. “You're a Specialist for now. That means the personnel files are off limits to you, except for the inmates who you coach. No contraband allowed. I suggest you familiarize yourself with the list of what contraband is. It seems to grow everyday; no smoking anywhere in here; no fraternizing with the inmates, and be on time for work every day. Any questions?”

CW had no questions and just shook his head.

“The officers here are playing the Philly police pretty soon. We've gotten our asses kicked the past few years, but I’m assured that this year will be different. Anyway, the Governor likes the idea of having the inmates scrimmage the guards beforehand. Good publicity, I guess. And he specifically asked for you to coach the inmates.

“Ok.” CW said. “I can do that.”

“Yes. I believe you can. But can you teach them to win?”

The Warden chuckled then retrieved the fishing picture off the wall and handed the photo to CW. “That's the Governor and me. We've been buddies for a long time, you know, and he told me this morning he doesn't want the score to be too close, if you know what I mean?”

CW shrugged and shook his head in one motion.

“Look. It's nice to have growth opportunities for the inmates, and all that happy horseshit, but it’s another thing to win by twenty points.”

The Warden didn't know if he was poking a giant and would pay the price later, but he decided that CW and the inmates were going to be pushovers, so he continued. "That's what rehabilitation is all about. But at the same time this place is where we punish people for doing bad things. If the inmates play good, if the score's close, I mean, the Governor's constituents might think we're running a country club here. Catch my drift?"

"Not exactly. Are you saying you want me to shave points?"

"Oh, good-heavens, no. NOOOOO!" The Warden lets out with a hearty laugh. "I'm just saying that even though the guards will be impossible to beat, we don't want the inmates to let the score be too close. We don't want to build up the inmates' hope up so they come crashing down and become more unmanageable than they already are." The Warden points up. "If, through some abnormality of the stars, the inmate score ... You know what? Forget I said anything. You coach the inmates the best you can. Okay? Forget I said anything."

The Warden grabs the picture from CW, puts it back on the wall, gets up, and walks to the door. He opens it and waves for someone to come in.

Philip walks into the room chewing tobacco and holding a cup. The Warden throws an icy look at him and Philip quickly spits the wad in the cup, and hides the cup behind his back.

"This is CW Gavin. Don't ask him what CW stands for 'cause he won't tell you, and CW, Philip here will show you around until Jeremy, your supervisor, gets back.

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Judith, Henry, and DARRIN, an unassuming guard, are sitting at their desks while Philip walked CW into the office. "You met Judith already," Philip said. "That's Darrin over there, our office administrator. Henry here is our basketball coach."

Henry stood and attached his billy club to his belt and then walked over to CW very cowboy-like. They shook hands.

"What does CW stand for?" Henry asked. CW just stared at Henry who stared back for a bit, sizing each other up.

Not willing to wait for an answer, Henry said, "We'll talk later, Bro."

"Don't call me 'bro'. I'm not your Brother."

Needless to say, Henry left a bit angry. Philip guided CW to an empty desk suggesting this was his station.

CW checked the drawers of his desk, as if he were checking for hidden listening devices. As CW was doing this, Jeremy returned, walked right over to CW and introduced himself. They shook hands and Jeremy said, "I'm sorry, but we had a tiny skirmish down in the rec room. No big deal. Come. I'll show you around."

As they walked to the gymnasium, Jeremy welcomed CW to Longhorne and wanted to know the same thing the Warden wanted to know. "What shall I call you," Jeremy asked.

"CW's fine," CW said. "Tell me, who's Boo Hoo?"

"Where did you hear about him?"

"From Henry," CW said. "He compared me to this Boo Hoo character."

"Well," Jeremy began, "Boo Hoo is one of the more sedate characters around here. We'll see him in the gym."

As they turned corner Jeremy told CW that he knew his Dad. In fact, their fathers' were partners for a while and he remembers when Gavin Sr. came to the house a few times.

They paused at a gate that was manned by a guard. Jeremy rattled the door and the guard hit a button, which opened the gate allowing Jeremy and CW to continue walking. Then, suddenly, Jeremy stopped. "My father wasn't one of the cops that turned on your dad," he said as earnest as he could. "And I heard what happened to you. I'm so ... disgusted with the whole thing."

Jeremy was sincere when he said that, but CW didn't want to talk about it and he told Jeremy that.

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In the gymnasium, at the near end of the court, some inmates were shooting from the perimeter, while other inmates were engaged in a half-court game.

CW and Jeremy watched a handicapped inmate shooting three-point shots at the near end of the court. He had a walking cane on the floor next to him.

Jeremy pointed and said, "That's Boo Hoo shooting baskets by himself. The one and only, Brendon H. Flanagan."

"Why do they call him Boo Hoo," CW asked.

"Well, it's a short story, really. You'll find out on your own. Let's just say, he entered the prison and didn't like it here at first.

They both watched Boo Hoo sink one 3-point shot after the other. He picked up another ball and sunk that one in the net effortlessly as well. Then another. Boo Hoo looked at CW and stopped and they just stared at each other. CW nodded and Boo Hoo nodded back. That was their moment of introduction, albeit from far away.

Boo Hoo shot another ball from the 3-point line, and swished that one as if he was showing off for the new coach.

"Does he ever miss?" CW asked rhetorically, but Jeremy answered anyway.

"Rarely," he said.

Boo Hoo retrieved his own ball, and shot and 'swished' another one. He retrieved three more balls in quick succession, and just as quickly he tossed them at the hoop, and all three were rimless scores.

This impressed CW very much. He never saw such accuracy in shooting a basketball before.

"Holy smokes!" CW said after Boo Hoo sunk three more balls. "Did you see that? Gees ... what the hell's his story?"

"Well, according to his records, he killed his wife. Got twenty years for first-degree murder. He came here about ten years ago. All he did was cry for the first few days."

"Ah! Now it makes sense. That's why they call him Boo Hoo, right?"

"Yup. Then, one day he turned the spigot off and just clammed up. Stopped talking altogether. Actually, he opens up once and a while, right now he only talks to an inmate in the cell next to him. Occasionally, he mumbles when he misses a shot. He doesn't bother anyone. No

one bothers him. I wish it was that way with everyone in here. You should catch his cell when you get a chance."

“Why?”

“Just check it out. You’ll see why.”

CW’s attention was diverted by Sach, an inmate playing in the half-court scrimmage. He did a lot of trash talking. He was tall, athletic and his desire and self-promotion seemed to be head-and-shoulders above the others.

“Wow,” CW said, quite amazed at Sach’s skillful display at playing basketball. “Who’s the guy with the braids?” CW asked.

“Sach Brewster,” Jeremy said. “All-American at St. John’s. Could’ve been a pro, but his sister was being abused by a boyfriend. Sach confronted him. One thing led to another, and ...”

“Yes,” CW said. “Manslaughter, if I remember right.”

They watched a little while longer in silence. Before long they took a seat at courtside in the bottom seat of the bleacher, but CW’s attention was kept on Boo Hoo who continued to impress CW by sinking one three-point-shot one after the other. In fact, CW didn’t think he saw Boo Hoo miss one shot while he was watching.

### CHAPTER THREE

Boo Hoo's cell had an elaborate setup of three makeshift hoops and ten small basketballs. A funnel under each hoop caught the ball and guided it back to where Boo Hoo was sitting. He had access to the balls for continuous shooting.

Boo Hoo sat on the floor with his back leaning against the steel bars of the cell door, and with a bandanna pulled over his eyes. While he was blindfolded, he tossed the balls into the hoop one after the other.

While he was shooting, Boo Hoo heard CW's pitch for the inmates to come to the gymnasium tomorrow because basketball tryouts were starting then. CW's voice gets louder and louder as he travels from one cell to the next.

He finally reached the cell block next to Boo Hoo. Lester was a black man in his 40s and held a mirror between the steel bars, trying to catch a glimpse of CW.

Philip suddenly appeared and smacked Lester's hand with his billy club. Lester howled in pain as the mirror skidded away, spinning out of Lester's reach.

Boo Hoo pulled his bandanna up. He looked out of the cell and spotted the mirror spinning in the hallway.

"Keep your hands in the cell," Philip advised.

And as the sound of Philip's footsteps faded down the hall, Boo Hoo caught a glimpse of CW's arm picking up the mirror and handing it through the bars to Lester.

"Thanks," Lester said.

"We're having tryouts tomorrow," was all CW said.

"I heard," Lester said. "The whole freaking pen heard you."

Lester saw a wounded look on CW's face and succumbed to his needs.

"I'll be there," Lester said softly.

Boo Hoo felt CW's presence over him.

"Basketball tryouts tomorrow," CW said to Boo Hoo. "We're forming a team to play the guards. Wow! Nice setup."

There was a long sound of silence, and then Boo Hoo heard the hollow, retreating sound of CW's footsteps. He took a shot. Swish.

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CW picked up a medal from the fireplace mantle in his living room of his house. An inscription on the medal read: 'MEDAL OF VALOR, Clarence W. Gavin, Sr.'

He put the medal back, then looked at a photo of his family. He picked up a picture of his father and stared at it until Renee walked into the room.

CW measured her silence as one that had meaning.

"Every time you look at his picture you get that sappy look," Renee said.

"Please. Not now, Renee."

"What more can you do? You've given your pound of flesh to him. It's time to let go."

CW led her to the couch, where they sat down.

"I've worked all that stuff out with the doctor," CW said trying to convince her that he was okay. "Besides, I wasn't even thinking of him."

"What were you thinking about then?"

"This inmate I met today. A white guy who makes 3-point shots like no one I've ever seen. He's inhuman. And he doesn't speak to anyone."

"Oh, he doesn't talk to anyone? I see."

"What do you see, Renee?"

"Your father? He didn't talk to anyone towards the end, did he?"

"Yeah. So?"

"So, you can't save the world, CW."

CW got up from the couch but not before telling Renee that he was not trying to save anyone.

"Where are you going?"

“I’m going to check on our daughter.”

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On the breakfast line, Boo Hoo kept to himself. Inmates around him were engaged in conversation.

Boo Hoo took his tray of food and sat at a vacant table just as CW walked into the mess hall. He looked around and spotted Boo Hoo sitting by himself. After a beat he spotted Philip walking around pounding his billy club in the palm of his hand.

Jeremy entered behind CW and noticed him looking at Boo Hoo.

“Boo Hoo did talk to me one time,” Jeremy told CW. “He asked me how his kids were

doing. I went to see them and, although they wanted nothing to do with him, I told him what he wanted to hear. That was four years ago. Hasn't said anything to me since.”

“Boo Hoo has never seen his grandson. Is that true?”

Jeremy nodded. “Both his kids are in their late thirties now. One had a little boy about the same time he arrived here. Yeah, Boo Hoo's never seen his grandson.”

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Later, in the gym, about twenty inmates play basketball. Most just shoot the ball from the foul line, or do jump shots. Sach and another inmate paired-off and went one-on-one. Boo Hoo shot baskets at the three-point line.

When CW entered, he watched Sach sink a jump shot. He clapped and mumbled, “Good shot. Good shot.” Then CW saw Juan, a smaller, but extremely quick inmate, foul another player while doing a one-on-one drill.

Ramsy, the Admin Office cleaner, sat on the bench next to a pile of towels. When he saw CW, he ran up to him and introduced himself.

“You need an assistant coach, or something?” he asked. CW quickly sized Ramsy up and down, and then focused on the inmates. After a long pause, CW said, “You can be my assistant if you want. Not the same as the assistant coach. It's more like a gofer.”

“I accept,” Ramsy said. “Gofer it is.”

CW moved to the center of the gym so everyone could see him and blew on his whistle. "All right," CW said. "Anyone who's not trying out for the team, off the court."

Two inmates left the court while Boo Hoo picked up his walking cane and started to hobble off the court.

Ramsy headed for the chair with the towels. He picked them up and started handing them out to Lester and the other inmates who were waiting for instructions from CW.

"Ramsy, not now. You do that last. When we're finished."

As Ramsy put the towels down, CW walked over to Boo Hoo.

"Mr. Flanagan ..." CW starts to say, but is interrupted by Lester.

"His name is Boo Hoo, Coach. He's the best shooter in town."

Lester broke into a 'Boo Hoo' chant. "Boo Hoo ... Boo Hoo ... Boo Hoo", but no one followed his lead. "It was funny when I practiced it in my head," Lester said.

CW walked over to Boo Hoo and said, "Mr. Flanagan, you may shoot at the other end of the court. I just need this end for the time being."

CW pulled Ramsy into the conversation. "Go get some balls," CW told Ramsy, "and take Mr. Flanagan to the other end of the court and let him shoot some baskets. And you can retrieve the balls for him."

Ramsy was more than happy to oblige, and while Ramsy slowly escorted Boo Hoo to the other end of the court, CW addressed the other inmates. "Listen up, you lugheads," he said, "We're having two tryouts. One today. And one Monday."

"Lugheads?" Sach said. "Oh, no. I don't want to be a lughead." CW's stare was more than Sach could bear. "Sachmo's the name," Sach said. "Sorry."

"Sachmo, please. You should be called pig 'cause you hog the ball so much." The inmates toss wise cracks at each other, one after the other until the name-calling started to get out of control.

"SHUT UP!!!!" CW finally said. And then everyone shut up and froze. "Let's get something straight right now," CW said. "My sole reason for me being here is to teach you how to play basketball and, as unlikely as that may be, to help you beat the guards

in a scrimmage. I would like nothing better than to leave that task for someone else, but I can't, so we're stuck with each other.”

“Why are we playing the guards anyway?” Juan said. “What's their angle?”

CW gave a hard stare at Juan, which was a query for his name.

“Juan. My name's Juan.”

“Well, Juan,” CW said, “it seems we are helping the guards get ready for their important game with the Philadelphia Police Department.”

“So,” Sach interrupted, “if we beat the guards, we get to play the cops?”

“No. We are just going to play the guards. To get them ready for their game with Philadelphia police.”

“Name is Moose,” Moose said. “I think we're ready to play the Screws now.”

“Yeah,” Dreyfus added, “We can kick their sorry asses, and it'll all be legal.”

Some other inmates gave Dreyfus the high-five after he said that, then he faced CW and said, “Sorry. Dreyfus, here.”

“You guys think you're pretty good?” CW asked. “Well, I've watched you twice now, and

I'm not impressed. You ... Moose is it?”

Moose nodded and expected the worst.

“Well, when you go in for a lay-up, you always go to the right side and use your right hand. It won't take a good defensive player long to pick up on that. In fact, your last two lay-ups were blocked. All of you, if you do layups best on the right side, practice twice as much doing layups on the left side.”

Then CW pointed to Dreyfus and asked him his name again.

“Dreyfus,” was the quick response.

“Well, Dreyfus,” CW said, “kicking opponents' asses is not what I'm all about. You'll be learning how to play basketball, and if you're referring to beating them in basketball, then yes, we're going to kick their asses.”

“And Juan ... let me just say that you are fast. I can see that. Unless you're like Allen Iverson, which you are not, you're too small to go in for layups, and they'll just put someone twice your size on you and knock the ball away every time. You can't take shots from the outside for the same reason. So, don't hog the ball. Draw them in when you go for a layup and then pass. Be a playmaker. Pass the ball to Sach.”

“Yeah,” Sach said. “I'm the hog, remember?”

“And you, Sach. You have more talent than any two guys put together here. But you're too passive on defense. If you only care about scoring, you're not a complete player. I need hustle from you on defense, and if you can't give it, you won't play first string.”

“I fouled out too many games in college,” Sach said. “So the coach wanted me to be laid back on defense so I wouldn't foul out.”

“You can be aggressive without fouling,” CW said. “I remember a guy on our high school team made All American because he was great on defense. He was under six foot, too. Had his hands up in the guy's face all the time so he couldn't see, or shoot. Like this. Don't worry I'll teach you how not to foul out.”

“You're foul, all right,” Moose said to Sach as he pinched his nose.

Everyone laughed, except CW who stared them down until they all fell silent. The power of CW's will was strong, and he didn't want the inmates to start flinging their dirt around at each other. He knew if he did try to stop it he'd have a difficult time as a coach. He just could not let it get out of hand, so he reminded them again of the need to respect each other if they wanted to win.

“I think you all have lived in the survival mode for so long,” CW said to them, “that you haven't got the slightest clue on how to be givers. You're all takers. Be team players.”

Boo Hoo, although at the other end of the court, couldn't help but hear CW. His voice echoed throughout the gym. Boo Hoo was impressed at the respectful way the inmates listened to CW, as if they were hanging on his every word. He continued shooting 3-pointers, and he continued to get them in.

CW continued his soliloquy. “Share more,” he said. “Pass the ball. Juan, that message was for you. You're the playmaker, so make it happen.”

“Richard's the name, Coach. You can't share around here. Stick your neck out, man, it'll get chopped off.”

“Yeah. That's right,” Sach said. “We're inmates. You know what that means around here. We're the shit and the stink all rolled in one.”

“What I'm talking about,” CW continued, “is what happens here on this court. I'm talking about basketball, and while I'm coaching you, I'm your coach, not a prison guard. Can we get that straight?”

The inmates weighed in on CW's words. CW eyed each of them until he got a consensus from all of them that they would learn how to share.

CW taught them how to set up pics. Then he taught them how to move out of a zone to create paths for the ball handler. CW, in his infinite wisdom as Coach, was going to teach them how to share by practicing a routine in basketball.

“If you want to beat the guards,” CW said. “You'll need to do this, and much more. And you can't begin to do any of it unless you respect each other.

CW let them digest that point for a beat, then said, “While you're playing on my team, I don't want anymore 'doofus' remarks. In fact, I don't want foul language used at all. You hear. You will not be on this team if you can't respect yourselves and your teammates. Get used to it, and get disciplined, gentlemen. It starts with verbal respect. If you can't do that, then leave the court right now.”

Everyone looked at one another. Richard silently mouths an expletive. But no one was walking.

“Good,” CW exclaimed. “Now, everyone in this place says you can't beat the guards, but you can. I can't think of a better reason to reach down deep into your soul and play this game the way it's supposed to be played. James Naismith, who invented the game way back in the 1890s said ‘Be strong in body, clean in mind, lofty in ideals.’ So, let's play basketball the way it was intended to be played with clean minds and strong bodies, and if other people can't follow that, then we're going to have to teach them.”

CW accepted the cheers from the inmates as if he deserved them.

“All right,” CW continued. “Now form two lines. Come on. Go ... go ... go. Two lines.”

The inmates formed two lines, and CW handed the ball to Juan.

“Now, Juan, I want you to respectfully offer the ball to ... Richard”

CW pulled Richard from the other line. “Richard, I want you to be polite when accepting the ball, and then verbally offer the ball back to Juan, politely.”

Some inmates cover their mouths to keep from laughing. Others bite their lips to keep from smiling.

“When I blow the whistle, I want whoever has the ball to go for the basket. Do a lay-up, shoot from wherever you are. I don't care how you do it, just score. The one who does not have the ball, your job is to make sure he doesn't score and do it without fouling. It's a contest. One-on-one.”

The inmates nod. They begin to understand.

“Okay, Juan. Offer Richard the ball, and let's do this.”

Juan paused to take in the snickers, and then turned to Richard. Juan held out the ball but Richard didn't take it.

“You want the damn ball, or what?” Juan said.

CW blows the whistle loudly at Juan. Juan clutches his ears.

“Don't test me, Juan. You'll not be on this team using that language. Now, offer the ball nicely, like you're trying to impress a lady.

“May I interest you in this ball?” Juan said after he thought for a few seconds on how he was going to ask Richard.

“Better. Much better,” CW said.

“I'd be delighted,” Richard said as he took the ball. But he looked at CW because he didn't really know what to do next. He was going to go straight for the hoop, as some of his teammates were suggesting from the sidelines, but he loo

“Now, offer the ball back. Don't forget – do it politely.”

“Do you want this ball back?”

The inmates laughed at Richard's attempt at talking nice, but they stopped when they became the victims of CW's bullish stare. “Respect each other!”, was all CW said.

Juan and Richard continued to offer each other the ball as they travelled down the court until CW blew a quick spurt on the whistle. Richard had the ball and ran to the hoop. Juan was caught blinking. Richard completes the lay-up unobstructed.

“Good,” CW said, and then addressed the rest of the team. “And that’s how you do it, gentleman. And Juan?” CW then turned his attention to Juan. “He caught you flat-footed, didn't he? Pay attention. Ok. NEXT.”

Boo Hoo, meanwhile, was sitting in the bleachers; stoically watching CW feed the ball to another duo who 'offered' the ball to each other, like Richard and Juan did. CW blew the whistle and the inmate who had the ball at the time committed himself to a jump shot. He made it.

CW nodded to Boo Hoo who offered a barely perceptible nod back to CW.

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Later, CW had the team doing lay-ups, jump shots, etc. while Boo Hoo watched a full-court scrimmage from the stands.

Sach made several great shots, establishing himself as the best offensive player of the inmates. However, on defense, Sach is less than stellar. CW instructed Sach to stand his ground and to wave his hands in the offensive player's face to confuse or blind him from shooting.

CW substituted inmates frequently and watched the men carefully to determine each inmate’s capability. When it came time to substitute Sach with another player, Sach didn’t want to leave and told CW that he didn’t want to leave. “Why are you taking me out?” he said forgetting this was a tryout, not a game, and CW had to remind him of that. Sach rapidly fanned himself with his hand. He was obviously tired, and didn’t have the strength to argue anyway.

CW had already made a decision on Juan, so he took him out of the game as well.

The inmates that were sitting down didn’t know it at the time, but they were the team. CW doubted the remaining inmates on the court could show him anything but he figured he’d pick Lester even though he was too old to play for any length of time. CW figured he probably offered moral support more than anything else.

## CHAPTER FOUR

In the Administration Office, CW opened the file cabinet and thumbed through the folders. He picked out the Juan Gonzales' folder, read it for a beat then put it on top of the cabinet. He saw Boo Hoo's folder and read it, and noticed a name in it that he knew. It was a person in the DA's office by the name of Bensen.

"Bensen!" he whispered to himself.

Just then Philip passed by and saw CW reading Boo Hoo's folder.

"I didn't know Boo Hoo was on the team?"

"He's not," CW said.

"Then put it back. Weren't you supposed to limit yourself to just people on the team?"

\*\*\*

Philip and CW worked at their desks in the administration office when Philip spotted a roach on the floor and got up and stomped on it. The crunch sounded like a potato chip was being squeezed. He kicked it to the corner where it landed next to four other roaches that met a similar fate.

Philip turned his attention to the window and looked outside. In the outside recreation yard Philip watched two inmates talking to each other. One put his hand on the other's shoulder. The other inmate pushed the hand off rather vigorously. Two other inmates wrestled harmlessly to the ground enjoying the human contact more than anything else.

"You can't figure out these animals. They're less than animals. They're like insects."

"Insects are animals," CW offered. "Google it."

Philip saw the Warden and decided it was time to go. "Really, now." Philip said as he prepared himself to leave. "I would just as well step on one. I love the little crackling noises they make." He leaned into CW and whispered so only he could hear, "By the way, the Warden didn't exactly appreciate you reading Boo Hoo's private file. Adios, amigos."

The Warden appeared in front of CW's desk and stood there until CW looked up.

“I thought I told you not to read anyone's folder except those inmates trying out for the team,” the Warden said. I suppose you were trying to get to know Flanagan better. I'm gonna say this one more time. The private files are off limits. Do you understand me?”

CW nodded, and the Warden left. As Philip walked by he added, “Yes, indeed. I do love

those crackling noises.”

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As CW walked down the cell block to Boo Hoo's cell, one of the inmates, who was clutching the cell bars, said “Hey, Coach. Here comes the coach. Oorah! Coach, do you want to play on my team? Oorah! Oorah!”

Another inmate, also standing by the bars, was quieter. The bulb overhead was out and the inmate's extra light on the night table was off, so CW couldn't see his face, because it was so dark, just his knuckles squeezing the bars of the cell.

CW stopped at Boo Hoo's cell and watched him shoot baskets. He stopped shooting feeling CW's presence. “I just wanted to stop by and tell you,” CW said, “When we use the full court, you won't be able to use the gym.” He waited for a response, however none was given.

“But most of the time we'll be half-court. You can shoot baskets at the other end during those times.”

As CW turned to leave Boo Hoo actually spoke and said, “Thank you.” This moment of recognition had CW in a quandary of sorts. He didn't know whether to continue the conversation or not to push his luck and just leave. He decided on the latter.

Once CW got out of hearing range, Lester said, “Hey, Boo Hoo. Gavin seems to be okay. You think?”

“Yeah, he's okay,” Boo Hoo said. “Not the best dresser, though.”

“Yeah, you're right,” Lester fired back. “What's he gonna do, though. He wears a uniform. He gotta wear the uniform. By the way, sorry about before when I was chanting your name. Seemed funny at the time. Not so funny now.”

At first Boo Hoo didn't respond, then, finally, he told Lester to shut up.

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Renee and CW's daughter, Susanna, sat at the dining room table of his home eating dinner. CW watched his daughter play with her food. He urged her to eat, but she complained that she was full.

"You see what I mean now when I let you eat before dinner? I let you eat those cookies because you promised me you would eat dinner. And now you're not eating. You're going back on your pinkie swear."

Susanna started eating.

"You didn't answer my question," Renee said to CW, but CW just continued eating without answering. "How does Bensen know the white inmate?"

CW mumbled something through a mouthful of food.

Susanna reminded her father he shouldn't talk with a mouth full of food. CW chewed in a clowning way and swallowed hard forcing a gulping sound. He opened his mouth to Susanna for inspection. It was okay to speak now, so he told Renee that Bensen was Assistant DA presently, but he was the Prosecuting Attorney at Boo Hoo's trial.

"Bensen's going to be at the barbecue tomorrow, isn't he?"

CW nodded, and Renee responded with "I just wanted to make sure you don't pester Bensen and ask him all sorts of questions."

"I don't know, Renee. I'll ask him some questions. But I'm not going to be a pest. I promise."

CW smiled at his daughter. Renee gritted her teeth at CW, and CW felt Renee had something else to say, so he queried her with a look.

"Correct me if I'm wrong," she said. "This Boo Hoo guy professes his innocence and he doesn't talk, right? And your father didn't talk for the last 3 months of his life either, right? Hmm. Now, let me see. Are there any similarities here?"

CW slammed his hand down on the table frightening Susanna.

"I'm sorry. I'm sorry," CW said. "My hand slipped. It has a mind of its own sometimes."

He held his hand up and wiggled his fingers. “Hand,” he said. “You stop doing that, you hear?”

While holding his wrist with his other hand, he made believe his hand could talk. With a high-pitched voice, CW said, “Okay. I’ll stop if you put me in your pocket now.”

Susanna giggled as CW put his hand in his pants pocket. But CW’s glance at Renee revealed his true feelings. And her returned glare revealed her anger. It was hard to tell who was more angry.

“I never said he professed his innocence,” CW said.

“You shouldn’t be getting so emotionally involved with this guy, is all I’m saying.” Renee got up and brought her plate to the kitchen sink. CW and Susanne smiled at each other.

“I like it when your hand talks, Daddy. That was funny.”

Renee walked back into the dining room and said, “Yeah, your father is a barrel of laughs, alright.”

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CW and Bensen were already engrossed in a conversation by the barbecue pit in a back yard of a mutual friend’s house. Both of them had their plates full with a hamburger and a salad but were paying less attention to their food than they were to their conversation.

“He didn’t even defend himself at his own trial,” CW said. “Why?”

“Because he couldn’t remember details. I remember his case well. I mean, he did kill his wife and that was indisputable. He even admitted it. But the hard part was determining the motive.”

“He thought his wife was committing adultery, no? Crime of passion.”

“That’s what the defense attorney was trying to establish. But a neighbor heard them arguing the night before. So, I argued anger as motive. I mean, that’s what my boss, who is the Governor today, wanted me to do. So I did it.”

“That’s very weak. A bonehead move.”

“You don’t hold back any punches, do you?”

“Not to you,” CW said. “So, tell me about the case.”

“If I remember right, Flanagan comes home a day early from a convention, or a business meeting on his wife's bridge night, and he wants to surprise her. So, he opens the front door, hears a noise, thinks it's a burglar, grabs a gun from the den, goes upstairs, and finds his wife in bed with her tennis coach. See, I still have a good memory.”

“Like I said, a crime of passion.”

“However, the tennis guy was fully clothed, so it couldn’t be much of a passion thing.”

“But the wife had a night gown on, so ...”

“Listen, CW, Charles Oswald was a tennis pro. He said Flanagan shot his wife in the head, and Flanagan didn't deny that account of the shooting. He said his recollection was fuzzy but that he would’ve never killed his wife in cold blood. She was hit by a stray bullet. That’s what he said, but sorry, CW, there wasn’t enough evidence to support that for me. That statement, combined with a ‘fuzzy recollection’, did him in.”

“You remembered Oswald's full name? Impressive.”

“It was really just the first name. He looked like my doctor whose first name is Charlie. Oswald was easy to remember. So, anyway, Flanagan shoots his wife and Oswald comes at him.

They struggle. The gun goes off a few times. A bullet hits Flanagan in the hip. Another hits Oswald in the knee which ruined his tennis career, and that was that. He wanted to turn pro but couldn't after that. Oswald was one pissed-off character, I remember. Which made me think he was lying, but Flanagan's attorney didn't counter very effectively, I remember that as well.”

“What excuse did Oswald have for being in the bedroom in the first place?”

“The window. Oswald said he was asked to go up to the bedroom by Mrs. Flanagan to unjam the window.”

“Yeah, right. While she waited in a nightgown. Feeble. Very circumstantial.”

“It nevertheless established why he was there. Not unreasonable.”

CW looked over Bensen's shoulder and caught Renee's eye. CW moved a foot or two in front of Bensen to block himself from Renee's view.

“Of course, the window wasn't jammed.”

“Not when we checked it. But it was supposedly stuck at the time. We had to believe that else my case would fall apart.”

“So, you go after him with a first degree murder charge?”

“Yes, I did. Those were my orders. He got a fair trial, CW. He was convicted by his peers, and he got twenty years. A light sentence for first degree, but that's what he agreed to in the plea bargain.”

“Did they have sex, Oswald and Flanagan's wife, I mean?”

“If you're asking if semen was in the autopsy report, the answer is 'no'. I doubt whether there would've even been a trial if it was present.”

“So, you just gave me Oswald's version of what happened. What's yours?”

“Flanagan killed his wife, okay? That's my version. He admitted to that.”

“In cold blood?”

“Look. This was my first murder case. I looked at the facts, and I prosecuted the guy based on that.”

“But you thought there was reasonable doubt then, and you reluctantly did what you were told. You still have doubt. I can tell. It's in your voice. It's in your eyes.”

Renee appeared out of the blue. “Is my husband boring you, Harold?” she said.

“Not at all, Renee. Boring he is not. Headstrong, maybe.”

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After the barbeque was over, CW and Renee walked to their car parked in front of the house. Bensen cornered CW just before he got into his car and said, “I haven't thought about this case in ages, CW. Did we have all the facts back then? Now, I'm speaking rhetorically here. If Oswald lied, now that would establish grounds for a mistrial. Could even get a Governor's writ to release Flanagan. But a notarized confession is needed. Frankly, I just don't see that happening.”

CW thanked him and said good-bye to Leslie, his wife, who was standing by him encouraging Bensen. “Tell Renee not to be a stranger,” she said as she pulled her husband away.

Of course, CW said he would and he walked back to his car and they left.

## CHAPTER FIVE

Boo Hoo was sleeping soundly in 140 cell block. The dream he was having was incredibly clear and true – the kind of dream that one has but forgets ten minutes after waking up. This one was different though because it was events that actually happened to Boo Hoo, events that he would never forget. It started out in a moving paddy-wagon. It was about ten years ago and Boo Hoo was in the early stage of middle age. He was unshaven, and stoically gazed out a dirty window. The end of town scooted by fast and images of the landscape whistled by him. He made no effort to focus on anyone or anything.

Other convicts were more animated. One chewed gum while he pretended to sleep. Another sang a song unrecognizable in tune or lyrics. One man started to cry but held it in.

The paddy wagon pulled into the Longhorne Correctional Institution and stopped at a holding area. The convicts stepped off the paddy wagon and into a self-contained fortress where armed sentries stood atop two picket posts as they watched the convicts walk past a cold, stone wall topped with barbed wire.

Still in the dream, Boo Hoo stepped out of the shower, dripping wet. He dried himself with a cloth towel and the two guards escort him to a Doctor in a white coat.

“Bend over,” the doctor said in a deep, melodious voice.

Guard One, Henry, grabbed Brendon's head and forced him to bend over.

“Spread 'em, Flanagan,” the doctor commanded.

Brendon anticipated the worst.

“Listen up, everyone,” Henry said. “We're looking for contraband. The sooner you understand we mean business, the better off you'll be.”

The Doctor pulled a rubber glove over his right hand and fluttered his fingers in the air. Boo Hoo wrinkled his face at the ‘snap’ sound of the second rubber glove that the doctor needed to finish the procedure.

“Cough!” the Doctor commanded.

Brendon coughed. He squinched again, and groaned loudly at the intrusion.

While the doctor removed the glove and tossed it in the garbage, Brendon's demeanor was one of submission now.

“Next,” Guard Two said loud and clear.

Henry escorted Brendon to a supply bin where Sach, the inmate Supply Trustee, tossed Brendon a set of jumpers. Then Sach put a blanket on Brendon's outstretched arms. A bar of soap came flying out of the supply room and hit Brendon in the chest and fell onto the blanket. Then a face cloth flies out; then a hair brush, a toothbrush, and a comb. Henry kept inventory.

“Don't lose these,” Henry said. “This is the only time we're handing these out for free.”

Guard Two and Henry escorted Brendon, who was now in his jumper suit, and two other inmates, as they slowly walked down a cell block. They pass a resident inmate, a pedophile, who gripped the bars of his cell as Brendon walked by. Their eyes met.

“I shouldn't be caged in like this,” the Pedophile said. “I hardly touched that little girl. I just gave her a piece of candy. What are you looking at?”

Boo Hoo's head snapped forward as he walked past another cell occupied by an inmate reading a magazine.

Juan, in an orange jumper suit, pushed a laundry cart from behind Brendon and began handing out laundry.

Boo Hoo continued walking and passed by another cell where a resident was rocking back and forth on his mattress. Their eyes met, but the inmate continued rocking and remained silent.

Boo Hoo passed another cell where a Crazy Inmate hid himself in the darkness and appeared as a shadow. The Crazy Inmate appeared out of the shadows of his cell like a stalker at night. He fastened himself to the bars of his cell and ignited a match. He put the flame to his hand. Boo Hoo heard a crackling sound but the Crazy Inmate didn't move his hand.

“They say I'm crazy,” the Crazy Inmate said. “If I am crazy, then I don't belong here. I am crazy, don't you think? Tell them I'm crazy, won't you?”

Henry immediately yelled for the guard at the controls to open the cell door of two-three-one, and the cell door opening produced a loud clang resonating throughout the

prison. Henry snatched the matches from the prisoner. He left, then gave the guard at the end of the cell block the signal to close the door.

“You’re not supposed to have matches in your cell,” Henry told the inmates with him. It’s considered contraband and is against the rules. If you don’t want to go to the hole then don’t bring in this or any other contraband into your cell. I won’t report this man because he’s ... you know, crazy. You’re not crazy, so ... I would report you if you had contraband in your cell. Read

the list of items at the end of the cell block. None of those items on the list are allowed in your cell.”

“They say I’m crazy,” the Crazy Prisoner said. “If I’m crazy, then I don’t belong here. I am crazy, don’t you think? Tell them I’m crazy.”

One of the inmates with Boo Hoo started breathing hard and quick. His eyes bulged. He was having an Anxiety Attack!

“I don’t belong here,” the inmate said. “Get me outta here. I can’t breath.”

Guard Two put his hand on the new inmates shoulder. The new inmate bit the Guard’s hand and Guard Two howled from the pain.

One of the Resident Inmates in one of the surrounding cells incoherently howled while banging metal cups against the bars. Henry and Guard Two begin beating Inmate One while Brendon's knees buckled, which caused him to fall. His comb and toothbrush fell to the floor as well. He leaned against the cell door, and pulled himself up.

Juan snuck over, casually picked up the toothbrush, and put it in his shirt pocket.

“Possession is nine-tenths of the law around here,” Juan said. “Hey, you must be Brendon H. Flanagan.”

Brendon looks up. Terrified!

“Oh, we get to know the newbies before you even check in,” Juan said. “Sounds like you’re a banker or something with a name like Brendon H.”

Henry and Guard Two continue to beat Inmate One while the Crazy Inmate hops from one foot to the other.

“Fight back, you wimp,” the Crazy Inmate said.

Henry looked at the bite on Guard Two's bleeding wrist.

"Get back to your work, Juan," Guard Two said.

"Hey, catch you later man," he said to Boo Hoo. Then, in Spanish, he said to Guard Two, "You too, you big ignorant, stupid gorilla."

A handful of guards appear at the end of the cell block securing the floor, but Henry yelled out "Don't sound the alarm. Smitty got bitten, that's all. He needs to be taken to the infirmary."

Brendon sat back down on the floor. He was still in shock and tried to do a deep-breathing routine. A hand from inside the cell appeared

Guard Two snapped his fingers and the Crazy Inmate reluctantly handed the comb over to the Guard. The Guard put the comb in Brendon's pocket and then helped him to his feet and led him into his cell.

Brendon's body responded to the hard icy SOUND of the steel cell doors slamming shut like a track runner might respond to the starter's gun going off to start the race. Then he sat on the bed, his body folding up into a ball. In the next cell, Lester peered through the cell bars. "Hey man, don't worry," Lester said. "This doesn't happen often."

Boo Hoo didn't respond. "Word has it you're some kind of corporate puke," Lester continued. "Brendon H. Flanagan. What's the 'H' for?"

Lester heard sobbing noises coming from Brendon's cell.

"Hey man, don't do that." Lester warned. "That's not so good around here. Shh!"

"I know what BH stands for," another inmate said, not too far away. "BH is for 'Boo Hoo'. Boo Hoo...Boo Hoo..."

The other inmates joined in on the chant, and before long everyone was chanting 'Boo Hoo'.

While the inmates were reciting Brendon's new name, he tried to control himself. Boo Hoo leaned against the wall on his bed, but fell face down on his pillow, still sobbing.

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Boo Hoo woke up with a jolt, and it took a while to adjust to his surroundings. For a second or two he didn't know where he was. But Boo Hoo finally realized where he was and he got up. He sat bedside, put on a bandanna over his eyes, and began tossing basketballs at his makeshift hoops. A shadow appeared over him. CW hovered from outside the cell.

“Hey, Flanagan, I saw the DA yesterday. Bensen ... he was the prosecuting attorney at your trial. We discussed your case. I hope that's okay with you. If I judged him correctly, or what he said, at least, he thinks your lawyer sucks. So do I.”

Boo Hoo got up and pushed his bandanna from his eyes. “You can call me Boo Hoo. Everybody else does.”

CW's jaw dropped. And then he broke out in a broad smile. At last, he got Boo Hoo to talk to him. “I'll be a monkey's uncle,” CW said.

“Why did you go see Bensen?” Boo Hoo wanted to know.

“We were at a barbecue. Your name came up in conversation, and you became the topic

of conversation for quite a while. We both realized one thing after we talked for a while.”

“Yeah. And what was that?” Boo Hoo wanted to know.

“That you're lawyer sucked.” CW laughed, but Boo Hoo wasn't laughing. “So, did Bensen tell you that I shot my wife in a fit of anger?”

“Sort of. Care to tell me your side of the story?”

Boo Hoo moved close to the cell bars and talked softly. “One rule from now on.”

“And that would be...?” CW asked.

“Don't get too close,” Boo Hoo said, then waited for a response. He got just a nod.

“Nothing from me today,” Boo Hoo added. “I'm not much of a talker right now. So, no story from me today. But you can tell me yours. I'm all ears.”

CW shrugged his shoulders and made a face as if to say 'my story?'

“You can't expect me to expose myself if I don't know you. Why are you interested in my case, anyway?”

“I'm just asking questions, is all. Get to know the people I coach better.”

“But I'm not on the team.”

“Would you like to be?”

“I don't know,” Boo Hoo said. “Let me think about it. I can see you're not like the other guards.”

“I hope that's good.”

“It is. Don't worry.”

“No pressure,” CW assured. “You think about it and let me know. We'll do this on your schedule.”

“Basketball is the only thing that has helped me keep my sanity. I don't have to think. I just do it. It's like learning how to feed yourself.” Boo Hoo saw that he had struck a nerve with that last statement.

“If you want to win,” CW said, “You can't be blind.”

“I suppose you're right. You know ... you're the first person around here that sees inmates as people.”

A long pause has both men sizing each other up.

“I've been in hell, CW. And I don't think I've ever returned, actually. So, don't change the subject. What's your story?”

CW sighs deeply, as if debating whether to tell it. He decides to tell part of it. “My dad once told me there's two ways of shedding light. One's to be the candle. The other is to be the mirror that reflects it. He taught me basketball. He was a decorated cop. But he was a lot of things to me, however he had a fault that he thought was a principle. He always told the truth. He was too honest. His candle shined too bright for some cops or politicians, who had reason to be threatened. He was demoted to beat cop again after twenty years of being a detective. He didn't talk to anyone for three months. Then he ... he ...”

“Killed himself,” Boo Hoo said as if he knew the story.

“Yes.” CW said somberly.

“I know that pain,” Boo Hoo said. “But I never had the courage to do it.

“Well, it seems I've approached the wrong people with my questions. Now my family is being threatened. Do not get me wrong. I love my wife and daughter dearly, and the thought of losing them is unbearable, but I can't stop inquiring. I think the Governor is the problem. He got me this job so he could keep tabs on me, I think. But ... I realize I can't restore my father's rep; too much time has past, so now ...”

“So, now you want to save me,” Boo Hoo said.

“No. No. Well... Yeah. But my wife gets pissed during my ‘let's save the world’ campaigns.”

Lester was leaning against his cell bars and was all ears. He could hear everything.

“She sure does get angry, sometimes,” CW said. “But she doesn't understand. No one understands, really.”

“I know the Pity Pot will kill ya around here. Listen. Just so you know ... I don't need to be saved.”

Lester whispers loudly to the next inmate, but out of CW hearing range. “Boo Hoo's talking to the coach. Pass it down.”

News traveled fast in prison. The words “CW has Boo Hoo talking” passed from one cell to the next until it reached the guard station at the end of the cell block. One of the guards whispered the words to another guard who took the message to the opposite side and it shuttled down to near end of the cell block, and then to the guard station there. Finally, the message reached the bottom floor and had everyone in prison now thinking CW was some kind of an inmate whisperer.

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Darrin poked his head in the administration office and saw the Warden, Jeremy and Henry in the respective surroundings.

“CW has Boo Hoo talking,” he yelled out. The message died there, because there was no other place to take it.

“Well, how do like that?” Jeremy whispered to himself.

The Warden was stone-faced angry. He looked at Henry and nodded to him, as if to say, 'check it out'.

So Henry left and headed towards Boo Hoo's cell.

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“So that’s my story, Boo Hoo. Right now it’s all about clearing my father’s name.”

“As family oriented as that story is, I don't want to be a crusade of yours, Coach. You can't help me. You can't bring back my wife, or make my children love me again. So, find another windmill to blow on.”

Boo Hoo gave CW his back. He could almost feel the chill coming from the Sharp Shooter.

“I'm not your savior, Brendon. I don't want to be your savior.”

“ Yeah, you're just a concerned citizen. This conversation is over.”

Boo Hoo pulls his bandanna over his eyes and throws his makeshift basketballs in the hoops as Henry enters the scene.

“The Warden wants to see your ugly, black ass,” Henry said to CW. “Now.”

CW wasn't finished with Boo Hoo. He had one more message to give him. “You're not a crusade of mine, Boo Hoo. Can't someone just care?”

With that, CW exited, leaving Henry and Boo Hoo by themselves. “Listen to me, you dried-up piece of manure,” Henry said to Boo Hoo. “I've been easy on you because you've kept your mouth shut. You start any trouble and you'll wish you were never born.”

Henry left and he hurried to catch CW. When Henry finally reached him, he said, “You better start understanding one thing around here, Gavin. This is not like the country club over at Bucks County. These inmates are prisoners, and are not human beings. They're street garbage, and the white ones are less than that. They're particles of vomit.”

## CHAPTER SIX

In the gymnasium, CW studied the inmates doing lay-ups while Boo Hoo watched the action from the stands.

“Okay, folks,” CW started out. “This is the last day to show me what you got.”

While a full court scrimmage took place between the inmates, CW roared his instructions for pic and rolls. He also made his substitutions and observed the strengths and weaknesses of each player. He watched intently as some inmates appeared out of shape, but had talent, while others appeared in shape but were unskilled. One player tripped and passed an airborne shot to no one.

CW basically had his team already picked so he loosely watched the players do their thing. He occasionally glanced up at Boo Hoo who was sitting alone in the stands. It seemed to CW that Boo Hoo was taking a special interest in the practice game.

The coach’s attention was diverted on a steal by Juan. The precision between Juan and Sach was phenomenal as Juan passed the ball to Sach who was making a break to the basket. Sach went in for an easy layup.

On another play, Juan ran two steps faster than anyone else and caught up to the ball handler. He swiped at the ball, but committed a foul.

“NO. NO. Swipe when he's bouncing the ball. Down low, like this.”

CW swiped at an imaginary ball just a couple of inches off the floor.

“If it goes out of bounds, that's okay. You've interrupted their momentum.”

Frustrated, CW took a deep breath and sat down. Juan made another try at swatting the ball. This time he caught Richard's sneaker and tripped him, causing a foul. Richard got up and chased Juan, but Juan was too fast and got away. CW buried his face in his hands.

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CW knocked on the door of Kimberly’s house. She was married to a Harold Dickenson, but CW didn’t know which name she went by. For legal purposes, CW believed she went by her maiden name which was Kimberly Flanagan.

She answered the door and he introduced himself as a prison guard at Longhorne.

“My name is CW Gavin,” he said. “Are you Kimberly Flanagan?”

Kimberly nodded, so he was right about about the maiden name issue. However, to be sure he added the note of why he was there. “I would like to talk to you about Brendon ... your father,” he said.

She said her father was dead and shut the door in his face. He was unsure if he got the right Kimberly Swanson, so he knocked again. This time there was no answer, which led him to believe that maybe he did come to the right place.

Still, finding no satisfaction in trying to contact Kimberly, he went to Kolleen Castanano’s house. CW knocked on her door, and she answered. He introduced himself the same way as he did with Kimberly, only this time he received a nicer response. “Are you Kolleen Castanano?” CW asked.

“Yes, I am,” she said.

“I’d like to talk to you about your father if you'll let me.”

“Is he okay?”

“Oh, yes. He's fine.”

“What do you want to talk about?”

“Well, I'd like to know if you think your father is innocent, because I think he is.”

“Sometimes I think he is, but most of the time ... I don't know.”

“There's a lot pointing to his innocence, and I’d like to explore that.”

“I'm sorry. My sister called and she warned me you might be coming. I have to go now.”

And then Kolleen politely closed the door.

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Later, at the gymnasium, CW addressed Richard, Juan, Sach, Dreyfus, Lester, Moose and several others while they were sitting in the bleachers. The list of those who made the team were already posted and this was the team that CW selected. “Based on the past two tryouts, you're the players I wanted”, CW said. “Some of you have speed. You have tons of it, but we need to work on your passing and defense. Juan ... that

was directed towards you, in case you didn't know." The rest of the team laughed and nodded in agreement.

"He can't shoot for crapola, Coach," Lester said.

"At least I know who my father is," Juan fired back.

"Gentlemen, please," CW exclaimed. "Can we just respect each other, at least while you're playing basketball? No slurs, okay?"

"Yeah, you piss-heads," Sach added. "Be a little more considerate, will ya."

CW took a slow, silent breath in, then exhaled more loudly.

"Come on, Coach," Juan said. "We're cool. We're changing in the right direction. You can't expect us to change our stripes overnight."

Lester and Juan 'high-five' each other while CW made eye contact with each and every player. They appeared sincere, macho and vulnerable all at the same time. CW surrendered a smile to Juan. "You're right," CW said. "I guess this is going to be a learning process for all of us."

CW turned to Ramsy who had an armful of red jerseys. CW took them, one by one, and threw a jersey to specific players. "Okay," CW said. "Reds against non-reds. Get out there. Let's see what you got."

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As the scrimmage progressed, Juan was guarding Sach when Dreyfus set a pick-and-roll on Juan. But Dreyfus moved too soon, and CW blew the whistle. The play stopped.

"You can't be moving on a pic, Dreyfus. You gotta be set." CW positioned himself to show him what he meant.

Play resumed, and Dreyfus set up a good pic, but Juan barreled through it and committed a foul. CW blew his whistle again.

"No, no, Juan." CW yelled. "You have to anticipate the pic. You just can't knock him over like that."

"Why not, Coach," Juan said. "In baseball, if he blocks my path while I'm running the bases, I can run 'em over."

“Well, in basketball you can’t do that. This is basketball, Juan. Not baseball. The rule is just the opposite. If you establish your position with two feet firmly planted on the ground, the player can't run through you. Does everyone understand that?”

Everyone nods.

“But the key is being physically set before contact is made.”

CW blows his whistle and they continue the scrimmage.

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Boo Hoo tossed makeshift basketballs in the hoop in his cell while his eyes were covered with a blindfold to get the feel of the distance. As CW approached, Boo Hoo stopped throwing

sensing someone by his cell. He turned his head, as if he could see. He took off his blindfold and saw that it was CW.

“Would you like to join the team?” CW waited for a response but didn’t get one. “You could stand at the top of the three-point key during strategic times. Maybe make quick six, nine points for the 'gipper'.”

Boo Hoo didn’t respond and went back to shooting baskets.

“Listen, I'm sorry if I said anything that might've been offensive. I want you to know, though, I saw your daughters yesterday.”

Boo Hoo stopped throwing and lifted the bandanna off his eyes again.

“They're very charming,” CW said, “especially that Kolleen. She seems very sensitive, like her dad. And Kimberly? Wow! She's got a mind of her own, doesn't she?”

Boo Hoo bolts to his feet and stands nose to nose with CW as best one can with the bars separating them.

Boo Hoo was overjoyed that CW saw his kids. He immediately wanted to know how they were.

“They’re fine,” CW said. But he didn’t have anything else to offer after that. After a long pause Boo Hoo said, “Okay, you win, Gavin. My story begins many years ago so

I have a lot to tell you. Sit down.” They both sat. Even though prison bars separated them, they were in a good position to speak to each other.

“I came home from a business trip on my wife's bridge night,” Boo Hoo began. “She never missed bridge, so I expected the house to be empty.”

Boo Hoo proceeded to tell CW his story. On a clean, crisp Spring night, Boo Hoo turned his car in the driveway and expected to leave the car and enter into an empty house since this was his wife's bridge night. He wanted to surprise her since she wasn't expecting him until the next day, so he was going to climb in bed and wait for her. But when he entered the house, he heard a noise coming from upstairs. He looked at his watch, and determined that it was much too early for his wife to be home. So, he rushed into the den and came out seconds later with a revolver in his hand, thinking he might have to confront a burglar. Then he went up the stairs and gingerly walked up to the bedroom door. Another sound prompted him to open the door quickly and catch a robber in the act of stealing something. Instead he saw Charles Oswald, his wife's tennis coach, half-naked in his bed with his wife who had on just a nightgown. She started to

give an excuse, but stopped and lapsed into asking for forgiveness, as if she knew she couldn't sustain a cover up of her indiscretion. A loving, tender look crossed her face and she said, “I'm so sorry, Brendon. Oh, my God! What have I done?” She sat on the edge of the bed, her hand covering her mouth.

The gun dangled from Boo Ho's hand as Oswald lunged at him. They struggled, and the gun fired repeatedly. A bullet entered Gloria's head killing her instantly. Stray bullets sprayed the room. One hit Oswald's knee and another penetrated Boo Hoo's hip, causing the limp he had present day.

“And that is the end of the story.” Boo Hoo felt melancholy after telling CW what happened. “I loved her,” he added. “And the odd thing is, I still do. The memory of her, at least.” He paused, as if he enjoyed the feeling he was having. “I indulge myself in these thoughts about once or twice a year.”

“It must be painful,” CW said.

Boo Hoo chuckled at the understatement. “I must be careful. One can't expose himself this way around here, or else you're labeled as weak.”

They sat on that thought for a moment.

“Or a crybaby,” CW finally said.

“When I was found guilty, I turned to the only people in my world I loved. But my daughters believed I killed their mother intentionally, so they didn’t offer any emotional support. One of them yelled 'I hate you. I never want to see you again'. Yes! I cried every day for a while. I couldn't stop until Oswald came to see me. That’s a whole different story.”

“I got nothing to do,” CW said. “I’m all ears.”

This time Boo Hoo began the story about nine years ago when Oswald came to Longhorne. He sat in the visiting area waiting for the guard to retrieve Boo Hoo, or Brenden, as Oswald knew him, and as the guards knew him at the time.

Oswald sat in a glass-partitioned booth. While an inmate in the next booth talked to a loved one, Boo Hoo entered the room and took a seat across from Oswald. He picked up the phone, and Oswald did the same.

“What do you want?” Boo Hoo said.

“Don't get many visitors, do you?” Oswald asked just to be annoying.

“What do you want?” Boo Hoo replied wanting to dispense with the pleasantries.

“I was going to turn pro when you shot me, but now I just want to see your face while I show you something.”

“I didn’t shoot you. The gun went off and we both got shot accidentally.”

“Look at these,” Oswald said, as he held up three Polaroid photos in his hand. He put the first one up against the glass so Boo Hoo could see plainly. “That's your daughter,” Oswald said. “It’s Kolleen. Hard to tell, all bruised up like that, huh?”

He takes out another picture and slapped it to the glass. Boo Hoo's face showed the anguish as Oswald spoke.

“How could she recognize me? I had a mask on. She put in a good fight, though. You'd be proud. But, in the end she succumbed. They all do. How delightful! A real good ... how should I say it ... experience?”

He slapped up another photo against the window. The sound caused Boo Hoo to twitch, as if stuck by a needle.

“I had to hit her real hard to pose for this one,” Oswald said with a gravelly voice.

Boo Hoo's eyes filled with tears. His face turned pale. Stoic.

Oswald's face was filled with energy like a crazed look of a madman.

“And so there you have it,” Boo Hoo told CW. “That's my story of what happened. Take out of it what you will.”

“He took those pictures while she sobbed on the floor. He told me that if I ever mentioned this to anyone he would kill her and her newborn son. But that was a long time ago,” Boo Hoo said. “That was a long time ago.”

“Regardless,” CW said. “I won't say anything.”

Boo Hoo's mind drifted, but he was still there. “I know. I just wanted you to know that I lost my soul that day,” he said. “I wanted to die, but destiny would have nothing of it.”

“So, that's why you retreated into basketball?”

“Yup. I lost myself in shooting the ball at the hoop. After Oswald's visit I wandered around non-compos-mentis-like. Somehow, I ended up at the gym shooting basketballs. Then an odd thing happened. My mind went blank for a few minutes while I shot a basketball. So, that night, to keep me from falling off the edge, I thought of shooting basketballs. Creative Visualization, I guess you call. After a few days, it was the only way I could sleep. It was the only way I could stop crying and obsessing.”

Boo Hoo picked up a ball and shot it at his makeshift hoop. He continued to do that while talking. “From that day on all I thought about was throwing a ball in the basket. No thoughts about birthdays, or Christmas trees or Easter bunnies. The moment I stopped thinking about basketballs falling through a hoop, my wife's bloody face would come back, and those photos of my daughter's bruised body would haunt my mind.”

They both stood up, and Boo Hoo peered through the bars. “And then you come along, promising a bunch of stuff, dredging up these memories. Well, thank you Father Theresa, but I was doing just fine before you arrived. Butt out. Stay away from my daughters before you get them killed.”

Boo Hoo sat back down, put the bandanna over his head, and went back to shooting baskets. He missed more than he made.

CW knelt down close to CW so he didn't have to raise his voice. "But it's too late now, isn't it, Boo Hoo? You've told me your story. You've come out of your cocoon. You can't retract that. Your daughters don't know the truth, and you have a grandchild who you've never seen. That's just not right. That's just not right, is it?"

"Still ..." Boo Hoo stopped shooting baskets and thought about what he was going to say. "It's none of your business. Leave it alone."

"Have all the excuses you want, Flanagan. Just because you've given up that doesn't mean I have to." Boo Hoo jumped to his feet and stood nose to nose with CW, albeit between the cell door steel bars. "Don't let my bubbly and zealous façade fool you, CW. I don't hang on to dreams that don't have a chance of making it to the front door anymore. So, please stop."

"At the risk of sounding trite," CW began his trite statement, "I learned a long time ago that it doesn't matter if you succeed. The tragedy is not making the effort." Then CW left and walked past Lester's cell. Lester sat against the cement wall and appeared to have heard the entire conversation.

"You okay," Lester said.

"I'm fine," came back the response.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

Later that night at home, CW appeared somber while eating dinner with Renee and Susanna. His daughter looked back and forth between her parents knowing full well something was wrong with them. She sensed tension. She looked at CW and smiled. CW smiled back.

“May I please be excused?” Susanna asked.

“Where are you going,” was the response by CW.

“I did my homework so ... to watch TV.

CW nodded, and then watched her go into the living room and turn on the TV. She was out of hearing range, so he could finally talk freely.

“What do you want me to tell you,” CW said to Renee, “that I shouldn't be concerned? I see somebody who has been wronged and I should look the other way? That's not me, Renee.”

Renee banged the table. “Don't do this, CW. Not again. You want to spend another twenty-eight days in the hospital?”

CW stormed over to the roll-top desk in the living room, looked in the drawers, and rummaged through papers until he found a handful of photographs wrapped in protective paper. He brought them back to the kitchen table, and slapped down the first picture in front of Renee.

“Here's a photo of Susanna in the school yard.” He slapped down another. “Here's Susanna getting on the bus.” And another. “You at the grocery store.”

CW threw the rest of the pictures down on the table and pulled up a chair next to Renee while she took her time looking at the photos. Renee's face transformed into an expression of concern. CW looks at her squarely in the eyes and said, “This was their way of saying if I didn't stop asking questions about my father, if I didn't give up my little quest to clear his name, something terrible was going to happen to you and Susanna.”

“My God!” Renee exclaimed. “Why didn't you tell me this?”

“Because I wasn’t nagged about it until now.” CW immediately regretted saying that. “I’m sorry. That’s not true.” Why? I don't know. I didn’t want to frighten you, I guess.”

Renee softened a bit when she heard that. “I’m sorry for being a nag,” she said, “but I’m your wife, honey, and you're supposed to confide in your wife about important matters like this?”

She got up and hugged him. “If something happened to you, Callen Williams, I don't know what I'd do.”

“Callen Williams? You must be upset if you’re calling me that.”

CW cups Renee's face in his hands. “I love you so much.”

“I don't want anything to happen to you, you knucklehead,” Renee said.

“What could possibly happen to me if I pursue Flanagan's case? Huh? What?”

“I don't know. You tell me. I don't have a crystal ball.”

“Nothing. Nothing's going to happen to me.”

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CW walked up to Oswald’s apartment building that has slightly gone to seed. He followed the name tags on the mailboxes and saw the word "OSWALD" on one of the tags for the apartment "1A".

CW walked up to apartment door "1A", and knocks. He heard the muffled voice from inside the apartment. “Who’s there?”

“CW Gavin, from Longhorne,” CW said. “I would like to talk to you.”

An abnormal amount of time passes before he knocked again.

“The door's open,” the voice from inside said. CW opened the door and slowly walked into a shabby studio apartment. CW picked up a framed photo on a desk. The picture was of a college student, a boy wearing a Vistanova University sweatshirt.

Oswald sat on a recliner holding an oxygen mask to his face. An oxygen tank stood upright on the floor next to him. A stack of books sat on a night table within his reach.

Oswald put the mask to his face to breath and removed it to talk.

“Something tells me you're going to make my already shitty day worse than it is.”

CW put the framed photo back on the desk. “Oswald?”

“Surprised to see me this way, are you?” Oswald said. “I should be asking the questions black boy. I'm the goddamn house pimp. And what's your name again?”

“My name is Gavin. And I'm here on behalf of Brendon Flanagan ...”

Oswald takes an extra long breath in the mask. “I haven't thought about him for at least ten minutes.” Oswald took another breath. “If you want to just talk, that's fine. I don't get many visitors.”

CW inspected the broken man in front of him. He was trying hard to hide his astonishment.

“I try to tell the doctors that it's just a touch of bronchitis but they won't listen to me,”

Oswald said. “I feel like I've swallowed a golf ball. Lung cancer, they tell me.”

“Flanagan told me that you lied in court. And he told me what you did to his daughter.”

“He did, did he?” Oswald tried to laugh but ended up in a coughing fit that had to be stopped with several puffs on the mask. When he stopped coughing, he asked CW to come closer.

“You want to talk serious,” Oswald said, “I need to make sure you're not bugged.”

“I can assure you ...”

“Yeah, Yeah. I watch a lot of those police stories on TV. I know how it works. Come on. Closer.”

CW moved closer and Oswald frisked him. Satisfied that CW was not bugged, Oswald pushed CW away.

“I told him that his daughter and grandchild would suffer if he told anyone anything,” Oswald said. “When you see him, tell him I'll catch him in our next life for violating our agreement. I'm a little tied up right now, if you know what I mean.”

“Yes, I do. You're not in the best of shape to do anything about it now, are you? But I do have a question, Oswald.”

“Let me save you the trouble,” Oswald said. “What I'm about to tell you will answer most of your questions. So, listen up – and let me finish without being interrupted.”

He took a couple of breaths from the mask as if those artificial breaths provided an extra source of energy, and impetus. “I was in the bedroom fixing a stuck window, realigning the frame. As I was checking the window, which slid up and down quite easily now with a touch of grease, Boo Hoo burst into the room, jumped to conclusions, walked up to his wife, and shot her point blank. I rushed him and drove him against the wall. We fought for the gun and it discharged a couple of times. One of the bullets hit me in the knee and another hit Flanagan in the hip, another went stray into the wall. It was very painful, but I managed to get to the phone and dial nine-one-one. And then I passed out.”

“But that's not the way it happened, right?”

“But that's what I told the Judge and Jury, and the prosecutor, and the media. Let me tell you another version. I got a lot of versions. But here's another one.”

“Go ahead,” CW said. “I'm all ears.”

He proceeded to speak, although it was hard to do so. In a gravely and wheezy voice, he

told an entirely different story where he was in bed with Boo Hoo's wife, Gloria, and both were in their birthday suits. He was half drunk, he said, so he wasn't sure if he had made love to her or not, or when, for that matter. But he got a wake up call by the sound of the front door slamming. It startled both of them.

“I fell to the floor trying to get out of bed,” Oswald said. “I wasn't expecting him until the next day, because that's what Gloria had told me. Still, I managed to get dressed quickly and Gloria was able to get on her robe and slippers on when Flanagan stormed in with a gun and pointed it at both of us.”

He gawked at Gloria a little bit, than at me, and then at Gloria again, as if he didn't know who to shoot first.” It was hard for Oswald to swallow. “I feel like I've swallowed a golf ball. Lung cancer, they say. But I said that already, didn't I?” He tried swallowing again, and he grimaced in pain.

“Yes, you did. And you can stop if you want...”

“No ... No. It’s a fun story. Let me finish. So, Flanagan was upset, right. You could tell. But so was Gloria. She had an agenda, and you could tell that also. She examined her conscience in an instant, I guess. You could see she regretted having the affair with me, the way she pleaded with Flanagan to forgive her. Flanagan looked dazed, so I jumped him and in a mad struggle the gun went off several times. When things went back to normal, and the shooting subsided, Gloria was dead - hit by a stray bullet, I guess, and Brendon and I were sprawled on the floor bleeding. He was moaning from a hip wound, and I was next to him, yelping because of a hole in my knee, and the pain, of course. Blood was everywhere. I didn’t know whose blood was whose. All I knew was there was red everywhere. While I was howling in pain, I put on my shirt, and splattered some blood on it, probably Gloria’s. I mean, she was dead but she died from bleeding out, and I felt the least I could do was limp over to the phone and dial nine-one-one. And then I passed out. That was a stroke of genius, let me tell you. The cops come and they see him with a gun in his hand, and me on the floor passed out and bloody, and they just know I’m the victim.”

After Oswald took a breath from the mask, CW asked, “So a STRAY bullet did hit his wife?”

“In this rendition it did.”

“Why did you, or rather this character you’re talking about, beat up his daughter?”

“Are you telling me I should’ve picked on someone my own size?”

“Something like that. Why?”

Oswald threw off his blanket, pulled up his pant leg, and pointed to the hole in his knee.

“That’s why,” Oswald said. “I was supposed to be the next Borg, but that never happened because he did this. I wanted him to suffer for it and his daughter provided me with that opportunity. So, I beat her up a little bit, that’s all. And that was that ... it was only six months after my injury. Oh, it was painful, but I still beat her up pretty bad. I had a mask on, so she didn’t see who I was. I twisted a scarf around her neck real tight and told her if she squawked to anyone her little, precious, Flanagan son would never see his first birthday party. I was very persuasive.”

Oswald’s evil laugh threw a chill in the air.

“Listen,” CW said, “you don’t have long to live. Why not search your soul ...”

“Oh, no, no. No.” Oswald said. “You're not asking me to make amends now, are you? Just because I'm dying doesn't mean I've changed my spots. I'm very tired. Go. Leave. I'm done. That story I just told you, by the way, was just rhetorical.”

“OK. But let me tell you. The DA said that he would ask the Governor to get a release for Flanagan if you confessed your lie. He needs a notarized statement. You're the only one who can help him now. Telling the truth might...”

“Oh, yes. The truth shall set me free.”

“It could. Maybe it would.”

Oswald threw a book at CW and yelled, “Get the hell out of here!”

“Maybe your tormented soul would find peace. You never know.”

Oswald threw another book at CW which hit the desk and knock the picture of the boy onto the floor.

“I'll call the cops. Get ...” Oswald started to cough uncontrollably as CW exited. While coughing, he noticed the picture of the boy on the floor, and immediately slid off the recliner and crawled on the floor marine style until he reached the photo. He wiped off the dust from the glass and put it back on the desk.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

CW and Philip sat at their desks at the administration office and observed three tall men walking up to Judith's desk. Judith got up and went into the Warden's office.

Philip leaned over to CW and said, "Those are our aces in the hole. They are the new guards. Or should I say the new basketball players."

"One of them looks like Jimmy Fleet," CW said.

"You mean the guy who played for 15 years but retired because he had a bone spur in his knee. Well, it looks like he doesn't have the bone spur anymore."

The Warden walked out and escorted the three men to CW.

The Warden introduced the 'new guards' to CW. As they shake hands, CW said to Fleet, "The Knicks. Retired."

Then, as CW shook Hayes' hand, he said, "You were traded from the Boston Celtics and quit five years ago."

"They traded me and I didn't want to live in Milwaukee," Hayes said.

And then, as he shook Clyde Jones' hand, CW said, "Rookie-of-the-year ten years ago. Then you broke your ankle and were never the same afterwards. Retired early."

"I fell off a truck during off season," Jones said. "Can you believe that? Re-fractured it at training camp."

"These men will be working primarily on, umm ... off premise projects," the Warden said. "Does that sound right, men?"

The new guards look at each other and nod. No complaints.

"They will also be playing a little basketball for you, I presume."

"Well, you can presume all you want, Gavin," the Warden said. "However, speaking of basketball, the guards will be using the Community College gymnasium to train, so the gym here is all yours for the time being. I'm told I have to treat you with respect, so that's my respect."

The Warden escorted the three men to his office.

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CW knocked on the door at Kolleen Castanano's house and waited for Kolleen to answer. When she did answer she remembered him from the previous visit and was less than hospitable than before. CW told her that her father didn't intentionally kill her mother, and she could

possibly be the key to freeing Boo Hoo, or rather Brenden, from prison.

"What could you possibly tell me that would make me believe that?" she said.

"A version of the truth," CW said. "A story about an accident that happened when your mother committed adultery."

Kolleen was extremely skeptical but asked him in for coffee nevertheless.

"Please forgive me for being blunt," CW said, "but nine years ago you were attacked." CW showed Kolleen the picture he had of her bruised and battered, and she grabbed her chest. Her demeanor was shaken.

"Where did you get this?" she asked. "Nobody knows what happen, not even John, my husband."

"I got this from Oswald, the man who attacked you. He took pictures of you after he violated you, and he showed those pictures to your father nine years ago just after he got to Longhorne."

"He wore a mask so I couldn't ID him," Kolleen said. "My father's known all this time. Oh, my God!"

"Yes. Have you told anyone?"

"No. He threatened to do harm to my son if I told anyone. I never knew who he was because he had a mask on."

"Kolleen," CW interjected, "Oswald is dying and he's not a threat to anyone any more. But we haven't got much time. We ... you have to talk to him, and get him to confess that he lied in court."

CW got up from the kitchen table and told Kolleen he had to leave. He left a dazed person wondering if she had made a terrible mistake.

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CW ran through the gymnasium doors late for team practice, but the team had already taken the initiative and were practicing with Sach as the team captain. CW blew his whistle, and the team stopped the play.

“Hey, it’s the coach,” Juan said, and they all cheered as if they were happy to see him. He blew the whistle again, and the practice resumed, this time with CW at the helm. As usual, the team practiced at one end of the court while Boo Hoo, tossed 3-point shots at the other end.

CW began to hustle the players together when Henry and his team of guards sauntered into the gym. All activity ceased as the guards/players walk onto the court as if they owned it.

“I thought you guys were supposed to practice at the College.”

“Gymnastic tournament at the college today,” Henry said. “The Warden said to come here and practice, or rather, scrimmage you degenerates.”

“We're not ready for that,” CW said.

“Come on, Coach. Let's scrimmage,” Juan. He felt fit and ready to take on the challenge.”

“You guys aren't ready, I said.”

“We turn our backs, they'll think we're cowards,” Sach said.

The resistance to turn their backs on this challenge was big, and CW didn’t know how to handle it.

CW and Boo Hoo lock eyes. Boo Hoo lets the ball slip from his hands and he hobbled off the court, a gesture for CW to take on the guards.

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CW stood in the Longhorne gymnasium mid-court with a ball in his hand and with eight players encircling him, and two of the tallest players ready for the tip-off that will begin the scrimmage. He threw the ball up, and the guards got the ball first.

Boo Hoo watched the scrimmage from the bleachers with keen interest, and the Warden was at the door giving the indication that this was more than just a scrimmage.

The inmate team seemed to be horribly overmatched. They missed shots, were confused on assignments, and tripped over each other.

Henry, who was coaching the guards, was on the sideline clapping, laughing and appearing confident. The Warden saw Sach make an incredible lay-up maneuver while being covered by two guards, which seemed to bother the Warden more than Henry, and Sach seemed to be the only threat the inmate team had. Juan, although he had speed, seemed to wander around aimlessly with no direction or purpose.

When the scrimmage over, the action had taken its toll on the inmates. They were bent over in physical stress. But, so were the guards, a fact that was not unnoticed by CW.

“Alright men, hit the showers,” CW said.

The inmates mumbled their dismay while they left for the showers. CW walked over to Henry and told him he had a talented team and congratulated him on his temporary recognition on who was coaching the better team.

“You're going to get crushed when we play for real,” Henry responded. “This was for fun.”

“We'll see,” CW said as he looked at the guards who were still on the court. Most of them were bent-over-tired or gulping air in distress.

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Later, after all the players have cleaned up, CW entered the shower. The inmates were exhausted and they wore defeat for their demeanors for their effort in the scrimmage. They were hanging their heads in shame.

“Whoa!” CW chortled. “What's going on here?”

Ramsy handed out towels one by one, and each player put it around his neck.

“We stink, Coach.” Moose said.

“They're faster than lightning!” Juan said.

“They got ringers in there, Coach. Did you notice that?” Sach said.

“They beat the crap out of us,” Richard added.

“STOP!” CW said. “Everyone. Just cool your jets.”

“What are you going to say, boss? You saw what we saw.”

“They made a mistake scrimmaging us, gentlemen, because they showed us their vulnerabilities. And we didn't show them our strengths.”

“Hell, man,” Lester said, “they got no vulnerables.”

“Then you saw a different scrimmage than I did,” CW said. “This is the best thing that could've happened, gentlemen. For one, they got tired fast, and when that happens, they shoot from afar and miss. We didn't exploit that. Next time we will.”

“We got tired real fast, also.”

“Sure, we got tired, too,” CW said, “but we ran all over the place, they didn't. We'll reverse that as well. I think they're going to take us lightly after this. They're not going to get into shape, not like we are. We'll be in superior condition when the real game comes. We'll use the fast break a lot. Believe me they won't be able to handle that.”

The men don't appear to be convinced.

CW walked back and forth in front of the men. “Gentlemen, they don't have what we have.” CW ponders a few seconds as if he's debating on what to say. “They don't have Boo Hoo! We do.”

All the men froze for a moment.

“Yeah!” Lester yells out. “We might have a chance if we can put him at top of the three- point key and ...”

“But on defense it'll be four against five with Boo Hoo in there,” Richard said. “He can't run around and play defense.”

“That's not what I'm talking about,” CW said. “You are all going to be more LIKE Boo Hoo. You'll need to think, sleep and eat basketball. You'll shoot baskets in your dreams.”

CW walked the line and peered into their eyes while he talked. “Gentlemen, our game with the guards is not just a practice game to help them with their annual tournament. I was hired to coach you, not to win, but to get you competitive so that the public won't feel pity for you like they would have today. In case you didn't know, this game we're preparing for is a symbolic gesture to let you know who's boss.”

CW paused, letting his provocative statements take root. “I want the community to know that given the chance you can be team players and that the Governor's little experiment is a good one.”

“Next you'll say that it's not who wins,” Dreyfus said, “but how you play the game? That's for the people out there, not us. We're the lowlies on the food chain. We can't change that.”

“Sometimes you have to shoot for the impossible, Dreyfus.” CW waited a beat, then headed for the door, but before he left, Sach stood up and faced his teammates.

“What do we have in this place? We hide our pride and our shame. We talk about what we want when we get out, because we have very precious little to call our own in here.” He faced Dreyfus. “All we have is our pride. They can't take that away unless we let them. I let them take a little bit of my pride today.”

He turns and faces CW. “I want it back. Coach, I want my pride back.”

CW walked back into the center of the room. He looked at Sach and nodded his thanks for the passionate speech. “I brought up Boo Hoo before because of his single-mindedness,” CW said. “Yeah, he's been practicing for years, and hardly ever misses, but I'm not asking you to never miss. I'm asking you to focus and practice. Focus. Practice. Focus. Practice.”

He pounds his chest and said, “Reach down deeper than you ever had. Have heart.”

CW looked at each and every player as if he's searching for something. “I've seen the best that humanity can offer when losing a game, not winning. There's discovery in losing, but there's immortality in winning. Both provide the needs for future success. Still, all that matters in life is that you give it your best effort. Heart! Focus! Practice!”

CW pierced the eyes of each teammate as he as he walked around the room. “We'll get our bodies into shape. We'll overcome the pain, practice the basics, and think, eat, sleep basketball, like Boo Hoo. The greatness doesn't start there.”

CW pointed to his head. “But your journey will be cerebral as well Starting tomorrow we'll practice with a different attitude. Not cocky, like you were before today, and not like losers like we are now. Go hit the showers again and wipe off that shame and pain. Tomorrow is a new day. You think you're tired now? Wait. You'll be telling this to your grandchildren. You'll be telling them that you added a new meaning to the phrase, ‘no pain, no gain’.



## CHAPTER NINE

At the Longhorne Mess Hall, CW entered and stood on line in the Longhorne Mess Hall. He scouted the room, as if he was looking for someone. He spotted Boo Hoo. CW picked up a drink and then walked over and sat down across from Boo Hoo.

“I’ve put your name on the roster.” CW thought he was going to get a response, but he didn’t get one. “I know you can’t move around much. We’ll use you for a minute or two, that’s all, like at the end of the game or end of the half. You can stand at the top of the three-point key, somebody feeds you. I can see it now …” CW talked as if he was daydreaming. “Juan steals the ball, throws to Richard who feeds Sach, and he goes for the basket but passes to you instead. Swish!” CW stood and loudly proclaims, “Score!!!” CW sat back down. “Exciting, huh?”

A small perceptible smile creased Boo Hoo's face, but he stifled it quickly and looked the other way.

“Our guys are going to lose if you don’t show up. I don’t have the heart to tell them that they’re out-skilled. But if we can make it a close game, they might walk away with a little pride at least.” He waited for Boo Hoo’s response. He still didn’t give one.

“Help them with their shooting then. They respect you. You can help them by building their confidence just by talking to them.”

No matter how hard CW tried, he couldn’t get Boo Hoo to talk.

Exasperated, CW responded with, “Damn you, Flanagan. Stop behaving like a psycho. We need you is all I’m saying.”

Fed up with Boo Hoo’s behavior, CW got up and left.

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At the prison’s gymnasium the next day, the players sprinted while dribbling the ball from one end of the court to the other. The Warden came up to the gymnasium door and watched. He saw the prisoners change their routine from taking shots to just sprinting to the opposite end of the court. Then they went back the other way and took jump-shots after at the sound of CW’s whistle, which was a signal to stop and shoot, or instead of stopping and shooting at the sound of the whistle, they might go in for the lay-up. In either case they were having problems making their shots.

No one wanted to sprint down the court the first time with Juan, so Juan sprinted down

the court by himself, grabbed a basketball, and then he went back to dribbling the ball the length of the court the other way and went in for a layup at the sound of CW's whistle. In the beginning the inmates were doing fancy-style layups, then they choose to take a jump shot instead, which after doing sprints, they were shooting air balls, which was a tell-tale sign they were tired. Later in the practice they were all shooting air balls as if the basketballs were filled with cement instead of air. In short, they were exhausted.

CW and Ramsy watched the inmates miss some shots. "If nothing else, we'll get them into shape," CW said. "I have no doubt about that. But their shooting? My God! They're terrible, aren't they?"

"Yes," Ramsy agreed. "They do stink ... in more ways than one."

At that moment Boo Hoo hobbled into the gymnasium floor and onto the court. Action stopped. Boo Hoo looked at CW, then at the other players.

"You guys need any help?" Boo Hoo asked. Before anyone knew it, the whole team rallied around Boo Hoo. A new spirit filled the room.

At that point the Warden left.

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At the gymnasium the next day, the inmate team ran drills again, and this time they were tested even more than the day before. Again they ran sprints and again they switched to dribbling down to the other end with beads of sweat emanating from every pore of their bodies. Again, when the coach blew his whistle, they either went in for a lay-up, or they stopped short and did a jump shot.

Another day passed and the inmates spent most of their work-out doing sprints. Back and forth. Back and forth. Another day, and another week of hard pressured work outs, and the coach wasn't showing any signs that he was going to let up any time soon. He was showing no mercy. They would run when they first started practice, and they ran during practice, and they ran to close out the day, and when they got tired, they would run some more. To the casual observer, they were getting faster, quicker and more precise and, in time, the cement was getting much lighter, and the ball was hitting its target with greater frequency. Their moans and grunts, however, would fill the stadium, which was a guide to CW that he was indeed getting them ready for the

game. After every workout they were spent physically. Emotionally they were much better off because they knew they were getting quicker, and more accurate with their shots.

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Boo Hoo instructed one player how to shoot the ball, while the rest of the team paired off with one person dribbling, and the other person trying to steal the ball.

“Do a zig-zag pattern when you run with the ball,” CW instructed, “and you players on the other line try to steal the ball without fouling.” CW blew the whistle, and the player with the ball all of a sudden did a zigzag pattern while the player without the ball ran with him, stride for stride, trying to steal the basketball but the zig-zag pattern caused the defensive player enough confusion that the offensive player scored easily.

When Juan's turn came, he was the offensive player, but he was directed by CW to switch and be the defensive player. As the offensive player did the zig-zag pattern. Juan stole the ball and went in for the lay-up with ease.

The Warden peeked through the gym door and saw Sach shoot and score. He continued watching. Always watching.

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At the Community College, the guards practiced with less intensity. Philip went in for a lazy lay-up and missed. He thought nothing of it and joked with the other teammates.

The Warden watched the guards scrimmage each other and saw Henry bark his instructions, but few, if any, were paying any attention to him, or improved their play based on his directions. The professionals controlled the tempo of the scrimmage and the guards seemed lackadaisical at best, and were content with letting the professionals have their way.

Meanwhile, the inmates were practicing hard on their conditioning. The sprints were a routine, and gasping for breath, even after a grueling wind-sprint exercise, were a thing of the past. However, at the end of the day, after practice was over, they were bent over with hands on their thighs, heaving breaths to the ground, but not nearly as bad as before.

The Warden was worried that the guards were taking the inmates too lightly because of the way they were trashing talking to each other. He felt he had to do something, but he didn't know what.

## CHAPTER TEN

Kolleen stood in front of Oswald's apartment rummaging through her pocketbook for a pair of scissors, and a canister of mace spray. She found both of them, took out the canister and gave a quick spurt to make sure it still worked. It worked, so she put it back in her purse, and she knocked on the door.

There was no answer, so she jiggled the knob. It was unlocked; hence she cautiously opened the door and entered. While Oswald lay on the recliner, asleep and wheezing, Kolleen looked around the room and spotted the picture of the boy with the Vistanova sweat shirt on. She picked it up.

"Put it back," he bleated.

Frightened, Kolleen dropped the picture, the glass shattered, and the photo fell out. "You scared the living daylights out of me," she yelled then picked the photo up and turned it over. The words "YOUR son" was penciled in on the back of the photo, as if the person who wrote it was angry.

Oswald struggled to get up, but he couldn't. The only thing he could do was demand again that she put the picture back.

But she was afraid of him, and froze.

"Put it back, I said. You broke it, damn you. What are you doing?"

Kolleen looked down and spotted three other photos on the floor. Obviously they were hidden behind the Vistanova boy's photo. She picked them up as well, and saw the photos were of her, badly bruised, taken nine years ago. "It WAS you, you sick prick," she said.

"I said put the pictures back," Oswald demanded. He coughed and wheezed which gave Kolleen courage to stand up to him.

"I bet you I could take you two out of three falls right now," Kolleen joked but wasn't trying to be funny.

"Wow. No one talks like that unless you were on a wrestling team."

"After you beat me up I figured I'd learn how to protect myself, so I took Jitsu lessons. I beat three male students in my weight class, believe it or not."

"Well, as you can see, it wouldn't take much to beat me now."

“All these years,” Kolleen said, “I lived a lie, didn’t I?”

Oswald was silent. He didn’t want any further aggravation. The fact was, he couldn’t breathe deeply without coughing.

“Listen; as much as this disgusts me,” Kolleen said, “I’ll forget what you did to me if you’ll confess to the authorities that you perjured yourself during my father’s trial. That’s assuming, of course, that you will admit you perjured yourself, which we all know you did.”

“Yeah, I did,” Oswald said, “but I’m not going to say anything to anybody. Put the pictures back.”

Kolleen waved the pictures, then said, “You put them back or I will ...” Oswald stopped because he realized he couldn’t do anything except make idle threats.

She put the pictures in her pocketbook and Oswald struggled to get up, but couldn’t. He coughed and wheezed as if he is going to die right in front of her.

“Give me those pictures,” he said laboriously.

“The one of the boy. He’s your son, right?”

“That’s none of your business,” Oswald said.

As Kolleen headed for the door, she said, “I bet you if I showed this picture around Vistanova somebody would recognize him and tell me where I could find him.”

“Ok. You win. Stop.”

“Do what Mr. Gavin asked you to do, or I’ll find the boy and tell him what I know and your precious image will be destroyed.”

She took the pictures from her pocketbook and waved them. “And I’ll show him these pictures of me, and tell him what kind of scumbag you really are.” She left and slammed the door behind her.

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While CW coached the team at the Longhorne gymnasium, Judith ran onto the court and handed CW a message and left as quickly as she came in. CW read the note, then walked over to Boo Hoo. “This may be your ticket out of here,” CW said.

Then he walked over to Juan and said, "Take over for me. I gotta go." He handed the whistle to Juan and left.

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While driving, he held his cell phone to his ear and said to Bensen, "I'm in my car driving so I don't want to be long. Listen, we need to act quickly." He swiftly told Bensen that Oswald was rushed to St. Luke's Hospital on 10th Avenue and had asked for him. CW thought Oswald wanted to confess, and he needed Bensen there to be a witness. Bensen agreed and promised to be right there.

At St. Luke's Hospital's cancer ward, CW bolted out of the elevator and rushed to the nurse's station and asked for Oswald's room number. The supervisor walked over and asked him if he was 'family'.

"No. I just know him."

"Well, I'm sorry, but Mr. Oswald died ten minutes ago."

Dejected, CW walked away, and as he approached the elevator, Bensen and a stenographer came bursting out.

"We're too late." CW said.

The nurse from the nurses' station came ambling over. "Are any of you Mr. Gavin?"

"Yes," CW said. "I am."

"I'm the one who called your secretary earlier. Before Mr. Oswald died, he had me write this letter." The nurse pulled out a letter from her pocket and handed it to CW. "He said that it had to be notarized. Our receptionist is a Notary Public. She notarized it and I witnessed it. He told us to call you and give it to you. He died seconds later."

CW read the letter quickly, then handed it to Mr. Bensen who read it and said, "This might work."

CW kissed the nurse and thanked her.

As CW, Bensen, and the stenographer got into the elevator, Bensen told CW that he would take the confession to the Governor but he couldn't promise anything.

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At Kolleen's house, CW sat across from her and her husband, John. Kolleen's 10 year-old son, Joey, came in the kitchen and hugged her goodnight.

"I'll take him to bed," John said as he got up.

Kolleen's face showed her appreciation because she not only didn't want her son or husband to hear what she was about to say, but she felt she would use a lot of curse words and she didn't want her son to think she had a potty-mouth.

Once John and their son were out of hearing range, Kolleen let loose a string of curse words that would have embarrassed a trucker.

"Okay," CW said. "So, you threatened to track down his son if he didn't do as you said? Good thinking. I guess the thought of his son knowing what he did was more than Oswald could endure. So, he caved in. Of course, he was dying and I'm sure that played a part."

"Oh, I'll tell ya, he was one scary-looking dude," Kolleen said.

"Well, he's dead now. So, you don't have to worry about him any longer."

"But had I known it was him, I would've realized he was lying about my father a long time ago. All these years ... wasted years."

Just as she said this, John came back. No sooner had he come back, there was a knock at the front door and John motioned to Kolleen that he'd get the door.

CW and Kolleen remained silent, as if waiting for someone of note at the door. Seconds later, Kimberly burst in. "I knew it," she said, referring to the fact that CW was there.

"I knew it," Kimberly said again. "I saw a car parked outside and I knew it was your car." She said to CW, then turned to her sister and said, "Don't tell me you let this guy talk you into believing ...?"

"Kimberly," Kolleen said sternly. "Shut up and sit down. Listen for a change. I have something to say and I want you to hear it." Then Kolleen told the whole story to Kimberly. John listened, although he already knew what happened that day. However, he was recently told about the hardship Kolleen had gone through when Oswald beat her up nine or ten years ago. CW hoped Kimberly would come around, and she did.

She was stunned, of course, especially at the revelation that her father might be innocent, but she believed Kolleen.

“I was just told the whole story moments ago,” John said, and then looked a bit melancholy at Kolleen. “You should've told me when it happened,” he said.

“He said if I told anyone he would kill Joey,” Kolleen admitted. “So, I thought it best to keep quiet. I know now that I made a mistake not telling you, John, but I'm telling you now, and the truth now is the best you're going to get.”

Kimberly leaned back in her chair, as if punched in the chest. “So, why do you think dad is innocent?” she asked.

“Because Oswald basically told me he lied in court. He said so in a statement written by his own hand before his death, and notarized and witnessed by a nurse.”

All this was a bit much to bear for Kimberly. She sat there, numb, frozen by the truth and

what that meant. “All those years ... all those years,” was all Kimberly could say.

Kolleen got up and went over to her pocketbook. She pulled out three pictures and brought them to John. Kimberly got up as well and together they inspected the gruesome photos together.

With tears in his eyes and a knot in his throat, John couldn't talk. “Had I known ...” was all he could say.

“What, John?” Kolleen asked. “What could you have done under the circumstances? He did that to me to get back at Dad for ruining his tennis career.”

“Dad should not have been put away,” Kimberly said. “What have we done? We've lived a lie all these years thinking Dad killed mom in cold blood, when he didn't.”

John looked at the pictures and then hugged Kolleen. “I'm so sorry,” he said.

Kimberly came over and hugged Kolleen too.

“Will he ever be able to forgive us?” Kolleen asked no one in particular.

“I wouldn't worry about that,” CW said. “He's already forgiven you.” CW was going to continue, but he stopped. He didn't know whether to tell them the following because he didn't want to get their hopes up, but he decided to say it anyway. “Hey,

listen, if all goes well, the Governor may pardon him. He might not have to go through another trial. But this Governor doesn't give out pardons that easily. He's a prick.”

“How many has he given?” Kolleen asked.

“Actually ... maybe one. That's why, if you guys don't mind, I'd like to keep your father in the dark for one more week. Let me break it to him while he's practicing basketball, or at night while he's in his cell.”

“You mean, don't tell him we know?”

“Yes. We're having a basketball game at the prison in a week. It's open to the public. You can prepare what you want to say and we'll surprise him then. Come. I'll tell him about the possible pardon, but I won't mention that you'll be at the game. Is that okay?”

“Yes. Okay. You can count on us.”

“Good,” CW affirmed. “I am being selfish, I know, but I want to see the surprise in his face when he sees you guys, that's all.”

They all sit back and ponder that thought.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

CW stood conversing with Boo Hoo outside his cell.

“I forgot what hope feels like,” Boo Hoo said. “I almost forgot what it meant to have hope. You know of the three virtues, faith, hope and charity, it’s said that the greatest one is charity. I think it’s hope. You don’t ever want to get your hopes up too high, though.”

“Why is that?”

“Well, don’t get your hopes up too high,” CW said. “The Governor may not pardon you, but I’m pretty sure, based on what Bensen said, you’ll be able to get a retrial if he doesn’t.”

“I’d rather prove my innocence in court instead of getting pardoned for something I didn’t do. It’s a matter of principle. But at this point ... I’ll take a pardon if he gives it.”

“I know,” CW said, “but listen, it all comes down to ‘will they accept a dead man’s confession?’ It’s not a guarantee, that you will be acquitted. I know ... I know. It’s been too long since you felt anything. Just sit with it for a while.”

“Do you really think the Governor will pardon me?”

“I don’t know. All I know is if he doesn’t, we’ll go for a mistrial, and we’ll try again.”

“And my daughters ... I want them to know that their father is not a killer.”

“Don’t worry,” CW consoled Boo Hoo. “Once the media gets a hold of this, it’ll be all over the news and the front pages. Anyway ... You get a good night’s sleep. See you tomorrow.”

And with that, CW walked away.

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Henry walked by the Warden’s door and the Warden called him in.

“You know how important it is to beat the inmates, right?” the Warden said.

“Yeah, I know,” Henry said. “We killed 'em in the scrimmage, and we’ll do the same thing in the real game.”

“Well, that’s what I want to talk to you about. Knowing is better than guessing, Henry. Have you seen Sach play? Sach is as good as anyone on your team, including Jones.”

“Aagh, we'll take care of Sach,” Henry said and then added, “You want me to set him up?”

“Hell, Henry,” the Warden whined. “You know how it works around here. Do what you have to do. Leave me out of it. I want to be able to deny knowing anything.”

“Sorry, boss. Lost my head.”

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At the prison gymnasium, CW had the men running in for lay-ups. He blows the whistle and motions for the men to huddle up. The men surrounded CW.

“Men,” CW began, “you've come a long way. But the next couple of days will be more intense than it ever was. We're going to go up one last notch.”

CW blew the whistle and the men lined up to do wind-sprints. After an hour of that they do a scrimmage. CW barked instructions, telling Juan to bend low and swipe at the ball. Boo Hoo watched while a player walked up to CW and asked to shoot baskets. CW took the prisoner to the free-throw line and pointed to Boo Hoo for help. Boo Hoo put a blindfold on him and told him to lift it. Boo Hoo had him shoot several shots to get the feel of where the basket was, and then told him to put the bandana down over his eyes. While he was doing this he could hear the coach yell 'pick', 'pick', 'pick'. He spun around and saw Juan hit the ball out of Sach’s hands. Boo Hoo spun the player around that you might do for ‘pin the tale on the donkey’, and positioned the prisoner so he had a direct line to the basket. The prisoner shot the ball and missed.

“Two feet off to the left,” Boo Hoo said.

The prisoner shot again.

“Hit the rim, and it bounced off,” Boo Hoo said. “Throw higher but make it the same distance.”

The prisoner shot the same line but higher. SWISH.

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CW had the inmates running the length of the gymnasium again. No dribbling, just sprinting. Before anyone knew it, CW had the entire inmate team run lay-ups from both sides of the hoop. Some players did simple lay-ups, others twisted, turned, and hooked the ball in the basket off the board from the opposite side of their approach.

Players like Sach looked like a pro. Other players looked awkward, and half the time they missed.

Later, Henry watched the inmates practice through the glass partition of the gym door. When Henry was making his rounds he noticed some of the players were off to the side of their cells doing sit-ups or push-ups. Intense. Very intense.

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In the Administration Office, Henry was talking on the phone. He hung up. "Let's go," Henry yelled. "It's Sach's cell."

"Shouldn't Jeremy be calling for a shake down," Darren asked. "And shouldn't the Warden be notified?"

"Jeremy's in the yard," Henry said, "And the Warden's with the Mayor in Center City in Philly. Who knows when he'll be back. We haven't got time. We got to do this now."

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Moments later, an inmate waited by the railing while guards were checking Sach's cell.

Henry came storming onto the scene as one of the guards turned over the mattress of another inmate's cell. "Nothing here, Captain."

Henry moved on to Sach's cell. Sach was leaning by the railing and throwing a look of disdain Henry's way. Another guard slipped a knife under the mattress as Henry's body blocked this clandestine act from Sach's view. Darrin came in to help check Sach's room.

"Did you get the mattress?" one of the guards asked Darrin who shook his head never believing Sach would do such a thing. However, Darrin checked and found the knife. He stared at it and called Henry.

Henry stepped forward as Darrin handed the knife to him. Henry walked over to Sach. “Well, well. What do we have here?”

Sach's demeanor shifted from cocky to one of rage while being escorted away.

“Take him to the hole. Administrative custody.” The two guards lead Sach away.

“No way. You guys put that there. This is bullshit, man.”

\*\*\*

Later, at the administration office, Jeremy said to Henry, “You don't call for a shake down without telling the Warden, or me, if he's not on the premise. You went against procedure, Henry.”

“I didn't have time. Got the tip and did what I had to do.”

”Isn't that a coincidence, Henry. Sach was the inmate's best player.”

“The operative word in that sentence is ... WAS,” Henry shot back. Jeremy stood toe to toe with Henry. Jeremy seemed indecisive, as if he knew better, but then clocked Henry in the jaw and threw Henry's body across a desk just as the Warden walked in.

“Shouldn't've done that, Jeremy,” the Warden said.

CW came storming in, fuming. He faced the Warden.

“How could you do this? Not now. Not three days before the game.”

“I don't know what you're talking about. I was in Center City.” The Warden then turned to Jeremy. “In my office,” the Warden said. “Now! Hitting a fellow officer? A very serious offense.

Henry got up and faced the Warden.

“A snitch said someone on block three had a knife,” Henry said. “I acted on it before it was too late. He got ten days in the hole, and that's that.”

Of course, the Warden asked why he didn't notify Jeremy, and Henry told the Warden that he was in the yard somewhere and he couldn't, at least not quickly.

“Why didn't you go get him?” the Warden asked trying to cover himself in case this situation came back to haunt him.

“I had to act quickly, Warden,” Henry said.

The Warden nodded and he wanted to walk in his office but CW blocked his path.

“Is this how it works, Warden?” CW said, seeing right through the façade. “Having other people do your dirty work?”

“What are you suggesting, Gavin? And you better be careful on what you say.”

“What I’m saying,” CW continued, “is Sach is our best basketball player and he's thrown in the hole just three days before the game? I think he was set up, and I think you set him up just like you did to my ...’ CW stopped as the Warden inched closer to him.

“Gavin, I was with the Mayor. I had no knowledge of what happened here. You make another accusation, and I'll suspend you for insubordination. To hell with the game. You hear?”

CW left without acknowledging the question.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

At the prison gymnasium, Boo Hoo and Richard practice at one end of the court shooting 3-point baskets while CW coaches the rest of the team at the other end.

“You don’t look comfortable with your feet set so far apart,” Boo Hoo said to Richard. But Richard assured CW that he felt comfortable and he took a shot that ended up as an air ball. Boo Hoo motioned for Richard to shorten the gap in his stance, and he did, then took a shot. It went in after a couple of bounces on the net. He did it again. Swish.

“Okay. Good. Keep your feet the way you have them now. Think of the arc, Richard. Before you shoot, visualize it going in. Now, close your eyes and shoot.”

Richard looked at the basket, closed his eyes, and shot. The ball hit the rim, bounced up, then fell in the net.

At the other end of the gym, CW and Ramsy watch the inmates run their drills. The inmates seem lethargic, like they are just going through the motions.

“You think we have a chance, Coach?” Ramsy asked.

“I honestly don’t think we had much of a chance even with Sach. Don’t tell anyone I said that, though.”

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In the Warden’s office, the Warden sat at his desk and the phone rang. “Governor,” the Warden said with surprise in his voice. “What do I owe this ...”

”Cut the shit, Pringle. I’m calling because I thought you might help me with a dilemma I have. I just got a request from Bensen. He says one of your inmates doesn't belong in your hotel there.”

“Oh, is that so,” the Warden said. “Let me guess. Brendon Flanagan.”

“That's the one. It seems Bensen had some help from Gavin.”

“Why doesn't that surprise me?”

“Gavin got a deathbed confession from the main witness at Flanagan's trial. It says he lied.”

“It. He’s an it?” the Warden asked.

“No. He died, but before he died he wrote a note ...”

“How do you know ‘he’ wrote it.”

“Because it was notarized and witnessed by a nurse. Anyway, IT said he lied at Boo Hoo’s trial. On one hand it’s a good PR opportunity to grant him a pardon, and on the other hand I’d be setting a precedent and I don’t know if I want to do that.”

“Can’t he go for a retrial?”

“Of course, but he’s making a pit stop in my office first. In other words, if I say no, the prosecuting attorney will use that in his case at trial and I don’t know if I want to chance having to defend my position of saying ‘no’ to the pardon.

“Then say ‘yes’ and be done with it. No skin off your nose.”

“But I don't know if that is the right thing to do either. I mean, we can't cross examine a dead man. Know what I mean? And you better believe that is what will be done. What makes me think he lied? What were his motives? What did he gain by lying?”

“Okay. Okay. I got the picture.”

“Listen, William, there's a lot of people who thought Gavin, Sr. was set up, and that I dragged my feet on this corruption issue.”

“Yes, I know.”

“If I pardoned Flanagan, Gavin gets the kudos,” the Governor said. “On the other hand, I figured I could get a few people off my back, but I'm not in the business of granting pardons without definite proof. Shit, I've only pardoned one prisoner during my tenure.”

“Well, you called me for advice, so I’ll give it.”

“Please do,” the Governor said.

“Don't do anything. When asked, just say you’re thinking about it. And if anyone pressures you, just tell that they have a good case for a retrial.”

“Give me a good reason I should do that, William.”

“I'll give you two. First, like you said, deathbed confessions are not reliable.”

“And your second reason?”

“The second reason is because Flanagan's a psychopath. He's rarely spoken to anyone in nine years. I'll testify to that.”

Sometimes, knowing when to push instead of pulling is all I need to know. I got too many people to please, you know what I mean?”

“I wouldn't want your job, Sir.”

“Thanks, William.”

“Any time,” the Warden said, and hung up.

\*\*\*

In the prison gymnasium, CW worked with the prisoner team at one end of the court while Boo Hoo worked on Dreyfus' shooting technique at the other end. The Warden stormed in at Boo Hoo's end of the court, turned to Dreyfus and told him to ‘get lost’. Dreyfus didn't have to be told twice. He tossed the ball to Boo Hoo and left.

Although CW couldn't hear their conversation, he saw the basketball slip from Boo Hoo's hand as if he was just told terrible news. Everyone stopped practicing and all eyes were on Boo Hoo.

The Warden finished talking with Boo Hoo and pointed to CW.

“Strike three, Gavin.” The Warden said as he left. CW rushed over to Boo Hoo and asked him what the matter was.

“The Warden says the Governor has denied my pardon request,” Boo Hoo said.

Boo Hoo waved his arm in the air, a sign of surrender. “I don't have any more tears left.”

“Don't give up hope,” CW said.

At center court now, Boo Hoo's empty laugh echoed throughout the gym. He turned to CW and yelled “HOPE?”

Boo Hoo then walked over to CW and said, “You're a menace, Gavin, a very dangerous person. You're gonna give me a dose of hope again, are you? That's like giving someone radiation treatments around here. If it doesn't cure you, it'll kill you. Leave me alone, and stay out of my life.”

\*\*\*

In the administration office, CW talked on the phone while Jeremy packed his personal belongings from his desk.

“I don't know, Kolleen,” CW bellowed into the phone. “Bensen said the Warden convinced the Governor that you can't trust a dying man's confession. We need more ...”

Just then, the Warden walked in and headed straight for CW who said his goodbyes to Kolleen and hung up.

“After the game you're on suspension pending medical review,” the Warden said. “You went into an inmates' folder without approval. You meddle in an inmate's personal affairs. You're out of control, Gavin. I'm scheduling you for a psychological workup. I don't think you're

fit for duty any longer.” The Warden walked away.

CW took his time digesting what the Warden just said. “So, where's he sending you,” CW said after a long pause.

“Upstate,” Jeremy said. “The youth shelter.”

”A downgrade is better than a six month suspension with no pay, I guess,” CW surmised.

Henry came out of nowhere and plopped his personal belongings on Jeremy's desk.

“Damn, Henry!” Jeremy said. “Can't you even wait until I'm gone? Hey, CW. Meet your new supervisor.”

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That afternoon in Boo Hoo's cell, he sat against the bars shooting baskets blindfolded, as he usually did at that hour. Only this time he was missing the hoop. He stopped shooting and took the bandana off. His face was contorted, as if he was in pain. Tears welled up in his eyes

In the next cell, Lester sat close to the bars and asked if Boo Hoo was okay. Lester didn't get an answer.

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At Bensen's office, Bensen was interrupted by his secretary, Joan, on the intercom telling him a woman named Kolleen had come to see him.

"Who is she?" Bensen said. What does she want?"

Bensen heard angry, muffled words over the intercom, then Kolleen burst into the room with Joan close behind.

"I'm Kolleen FLANAGAN Castanano," Kolleen said. "Flanagan is my maiden name." Kolleen waved three pictures at Bensen then slammed them down on his desk. Bensen waved his secretary off and she left.

\*\*\*

In the Warden's office the next day, Henry came into the office and handed the Warden some papers.

"What's this?" the Warden asked.

"Papers on Sach," Henry said. "You need to sign them or else we can't keep him in the hole more than three days. If you don't sign those papers, you have to release him tomorrow."

"Oh, that's right. I forgot. And tomorrow's the game." The Warden thought a bit then added, "Tomorrow's the game, right? Let me ask you something, Henry. If your job depended on

it, and you were asked to sign papers that you knew were a lie, would you sign them? Would you risk your career?

"Well, that would depend if other people knew it was a lie."

The Warden tossed the papers in his 'in' basket.

"Being locked up in an eight foot cell for three days is enough to cramp the muscles and spirit of any man, don't you think? The three-day restriction ends exactly what time of day tomorrow, Henry?"

“Just around half-time, Boss.”

“Then, release Sach at half-time. He won't be in any condition to do anything.”

“Good thinking, Boss,” Henry said, then left.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

In the hole, Sach strains while doing sit-ups. He appeared healthy and strong.

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In the prison gymnasium, the bleachers began to fill from opposite ends of the court. Four Security Guards escorted inmates from one side of the gym, while their family, friends, and members of the news media, are escorted by two security guards at the other end.

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In the Warden's office, Ramsy quickly rolled a dumpster into the office and emptied the room's wastepaper baskets. He was in a hurry, of course, to finish his prison duties so he could make the game. But he noticed the papers with Sach's name on it, in the Warden's in-box, and he stopped to read the unsigned papers concerning Sach.

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Back in the gym, a camera for local TV "Channel 2" was stationary at the far wall and the entire action could be shot while just standing there. It was mounted and could be used remotely. Camera Man One had a camera and he was perusing the perimeter for action shots.

The Announcer and Warden William Pringle occupy a makeshift press box on the inmate's side of the bleachers. The Warden scanned the gym while the Announcer tapped the microphone. A loud noise erupted then surrendered to silence. The Announcer turned the microphone off and turned to the Warden.

"Okay. We're ready," the Announcer said. "Boy, you sure have a lot of security out there."

"Need 'em, in case the inmates try to escape," the Warden said.

At court level, the TV Newsman looked into the Channel 6 cam and brushed his hair with his hand, then began speaking. "In the City of Brotherly Love," he said, "our Governor is conducting an experiment which he hopes will improve the reputation of the penal system in this State. He has arranged for a game between the guards and inmates at the Longhorne Correctional ..."

A thunder of Boos from the inmate's side of the court interrupt the TV Newsman as the guard team bursts into the gym. The guards bring with them a half a dozen or so basketballs and they immediately begin warming up doing lay-ups, etc.

“Cut. Cut,” the Newsman yelled at Cameraman Two who was filming at floor level at mid-court.

While watching the drama unfolding, the three ex-pros on the guard's team put on a display of ball handling and shooting bordering on theatrical. A bevy of expletives emanated from the inmate side of the gym. Some security guards responded by showing their presence. And the Announcer's voice echoed throughout the gym.

In the press box, a network TV monitor faced the Announcer so he could see what was being broadcasted. Right now shots from the floor were being broadcasted from the mounted camera.

“Woowa! What a shot that was,” the Announcer said. It was hard to tell who was more entertained, the Announcer or the crowd.

On the floor, the Newsman waved for Cameraman One to continue.

“Well, ladies and gentlemen,” the Newsman said, “I've seen it all. You wouldn't believe what's taking place down here. Jimmy Fleet, who just a few years ago retired from the Knicks with knee problems, is suited up here as one of the guards. He's found a new occupation, it seems. Yeah, right!” He winks into the camera.

The network switched to show the action on the floor. The Newsman watched Hayes and Jones flip the ball to each other as if they belong to the Harlem Globetrotters.

“Hell, man! This is not a contest,” Cameraman One said to the Newsman. “Who are they kidding? Give me a break!”

Just as he said this, an uproarious applause erupted as the inmate team burst through the doors. CW and two referees followed them into the gym. The inmates immediately started their pregame practice routine.

CW viewed the entire gym in one sweeping scan. He spotted his wife and blew her an air kiss. He looked on the inmate side and spotted Boo Hoo, looking depressed and in the worst possible spot to watch the game, about five rows up, against the wall.

CW then spotted a Mystery Man, who was writing feverishly on a pad at something he saw. He looked up and saw CW staring at him. He nodded and CW nodded back,

and then took his time scanning the family side of the bleachers. He spotted his wife. Their eyes met and they waved to each other.

Ramsy appeared suddenly and pulled on CW's sleeve.

"Not now, Ramsy. I'm busy," was all CW said as he spotted Juan who appeared awe-struck by the guards' performance in practice.

"Come on, Juan. Stop gawking at them and let's go. Come on, team. Loosen up. Let's get ready. Focus. Keep your focus."

The inmates started practicing in earnest while CW continued to bark out his instructions.

Jones, the player on the guard's team, noticed the Warden was huddled in secrecy with Referee One. The Referee pointed to his hand as if to say, "Show me the money."

Jones could hear the Warden respond, "Shut up, you imbecile. Later. You'll get it after the game."

The referee left and the Warden caught Jones staring at him. The Warden tossed him a 'get-back-to-your-business' look and Jones left without a word.

As the Warden turned to go about his business, a Reporter cornered him and said, "Warden. My name is Steven Largent and I'm from the Star Ledger. May I asked you a question?"

The Warden didn't respond and the Steven took it as a sign that he could ask the question.

"Good. Good. So, Warden, do you think this experiment is going to improve the characters of the inmates?"

"I'm not responsible for this," the Warden said. "This experiment's the Governor's. I believe he's expecting to improve the image of the penal system. It's just an image thing."

"Yeah, well I'm sure the inmates have a lot of pride and courage, but the first image we get is the guards are going to beat the crap out of the inmates with Fleet and ..."

"What are you saying? Fleet happens to be a guard, and he's good in basketball."

“Yes. But ...”

“But nothing. I say talent will win this contest. Not courage or pride or whatever. Let's see how much pride they have after the game.”

“What do you mean?” the Reporter asked, trying to extend the interview.

“What I mean is, the inmates really don't have much of a chance of winning.”

“Does it really matter who wins? Isn't it supposed to be a gesture on solidarity ... pride.”

“Of course it matters who wins. This interview is over. I have to go now.”

The Warden left, and the reporter jotted down some notes and shook his head, a mixture of disgust and disbelief.

Organ music played. After a couple of beats the inmates in the bleachers yell in unison “CHARGE!”

The Announcer asked everyone to stand for the ‘National Anthem’, and for a few minutes the crowd faced the American Flag, which was proudly displayed in the corner of the gym, and listened to a woman who sang the Anthem with flawless ease. Once she sang the song, the crowd erupts and the players got back to displaying their skills doing fancy layups, and three-point shots.

‘Holy Cow’, the Announcer in the booth said, as if he was the NY Yankee shortstop turned baseball announcer, who used that phrase all the time. “Did you see that,” he said to no one in particular. “Holy Cow”.

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Courtside, Ramsy tried to talk to CW again, but to no avail. CW was just too busy to pay attention to what Ramsy had to say. CW was more concentrated on the guards who dominated the game right from the ‘get-go’, a term this announcer used many times.

Before CW knew it, the guards took the lead in a ‘holy-cow’ hook-shot by Jimmy Fleet. They were ahead by 10 points and the game basically just started.

CW scolded the inmates for being intimidated by the guards, and the team started playing competitively. When Referee One called a questionable foul against the inmates, chaos erupted, but was soon repelled when the Guards pounding their bill-

clubs against the palm of their hands. They were in control, especially since several guards with rifles were stationed out of sight of the public above the announcer booth. The inmates, however, knew they were there and that made all the difference in the world in keeping the inmates in line. There were no sick or serious offenders allowed to go to the game anyway, so the inmates were pretty tame.

Jones, the basketball guard, the professional basketball player, who broke his ankle, committed a flagrant foul in front of Referee One. Jones apologized to the inmate for doing so, and then looked at Referee One with disdain for not calling a foul.

As the Mystery Man buried his nose in his notebook, he looked up and occasionally glanced at the score and saw the game would soon be a runaway if the inmates didn't do something quick.

Just then, Juan stole the ball away from Fleet and went in for an easy layup, just like he did in practice.

Lester stole the ball and threw as far as he could and hit the inmates' goal post, and the ball ricocheted off the backstop, and Juan retrieved it and went in for an easy layup. Still, the guards led the inmates by twenty points.

The inmates were really trying hard, and the pros on the guard's team nodded their respect for their effort. Juan and Richard were strongly pressing the guards and forced 'frustration' fouls that had Henry in an uproar. Juan went for the steal, got faked-out this time, and the guard's player went in for an easy score.

Philip committed a flagrant foul in front of Referee Two who blew a whistle on him immediately. Richard went to the foul line and missed both shots. Play resumed and the guards were back on offense threatening to score.

CW bolted to his feet. "Pick! Pick-and-roll!" CW yelled at Juan. Juan handled the pick-and-roll correctly, and the guard took a jump shot and missed. The guards rebounded and scored.

Hayes and Richard collided, which resulted in the collapse of Hayes' weak ankle, causing him to hobble off the court.

The buzzer sounded for half-time and the scoreboard read, HOME 55: AWAY 30.

As the security guards escorted the inmate team off the court, Referee TWO came over to the Warden.

“Where's my money,” he said.

“You idiot. Not here. Later, I said,” the Warden whispered

On the inmates' side of the stadium, Ramsy and CW sat while staring out at nothing in particular. “Can I talk to you now?” Ramsy said.

CW nodded, and Ramsy proceeded to tell CW that the Warden didn't sign the papers on Sach, which meant Sach didn't have to stay in the hole for a week.

“For crying out loud, why didn't you tell me this before?” CW, realizing he had tried said, “Okay ... okay. Thanks.”

CW headed directly to the Warden who had taken a seat in the stands behind the guards' bench.

“I've seen some real bastard things in my life, but this is the lowest,” CW said.

“Careful, CW?” the Warden warned. “Watch what you say. Or should I say, the way you say it?”

“You didn't sign the papers on Sach,” CW said.

“Yeah, so?” The Warden did appreciate the significance of that statement.

“The maximum time allowed in the administrative custody without charges is seventy-two hours ...” CW looked up at the clock. “Which would be right about now. He should be released, that is.”

The Warden looks up at the score. “Then go get him,” the Warden said. “You need all the help you can get.”

CW was so angry he couldn't speak.

A couple of inmate players were still on the court walking to the locker room. CW met up with them.

“We need a miracle,” Dreyfus said. “We're getting clobbered.”

“And stuffed,” Moose said. “And packed. This just ain't right, us being humiliated like this. We need Sach.”

“I thought you said we were good, Coach.” Dreyfus said. “We still stink. Nothing’s changed.”

CW saw the Mystery Man in the stands, and they both nod to each other.

“We are good. We’re just not winning. Go. I’ll be there in a bit.”

CW turned and walked up to the Mystery Man. They shook hands, and the Mystery Man said, “Heard you were coaching and decided to come down and watch. The score is not indicative of your talent.”

“Wait,” CW said. “You haven’t seen anything yet. You still scouting for the Knicks?”

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Ramsy handed out towels to the inmate players in the locker room just as CW entered, who sat down on the bench, next to Moose.

“We're getting creamed,” Moose said. “It would be different if we didn't have those three Jolly Black Giants to content with.”

“What's with that anyway, Coach?” Richard said. “They got ringers on the team, and nobody is saying anything about that.”

“That doesn't change the fact that ... we suck!”

Just as Lester said this, Sach enters. “I see you derelicts can't do anything without me. You're behind twenty-five points and it's only half-time. I can't go anywhere without you guys fallin' apart.”

“Sachmo!” Juan said. “We got Sach back. Where the hell you been, man?”

“If you must know,” Sach said, “I had a nice three-day vacation in Cancun. I'm all rested, and ready to roll. Bring it on.”

The locker room becomes alive bit by bit.

“We can beat them. I just saw them walking to their locker room. They're tired, man.”

“They are tired,” Juan said. “I beat Jones easily the last two times I went to the basket. We can beat 'em.”

“No, Juan,” CW said. “You can't beat 'em.”

That comment stung the entire the team and stopped them in their tracks. It became so quiet; one could hear a pin drop.

“I got you guys in over your heads.” CW looked around the room to see where he could go from here.

“No, Coach,” Sach said. “Whuddya talkin' about. We can beat them.”

“Yeah. They ARE gettin' tired, Coach. I noticed that too.”

CW backed away and let the team express their own sentiment.

“I'm beating them to the hoop,” Juan said. “They are getting tired. I know we're tired too, but they are tireder.”

“I noticed that Fleet can't go to his left probably on account of his injury,” Lester said.

“All his moves to the basket came from the right.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Richard said in agreement. “I noticed that, too. And Hayes won't be coming back either. And ... we got Sach now.”

CW's smile is as broad as his shoulders as the inmates carry out their own pep talk.

Just then Referee Two poked his head in the door.

“Ready to play, Coach?” he said.

CW held up his index finger indicating they'll be ready in one minute.

“Well, dolls,” Sach said, “I don't know about you, but I'm ready to take it to them. What do you say?”

“Yeah. Yeah,” Juan jumped in. “Let's take it to 'em, boys.”

The team, showing a high level of testosterone, burst to their feet and stormed out of the locker room with a new fervor.

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The second half was already been in progress, and Boo Hoo looked up at the score. The inmates were a little closer with the score. The scoreboards read, Guards: 70; Inmates: 50. The conditioning exercises CW had the team do were paying dividends. One could tell the way Sach beat a guard player to the hoop. In fact, the Mystery Man in the stands took notes every time Sach touched the ball, giving off the vibe that he was very impressed with Sach's play.

Juan stole the ball and fed Sach. Score!!!

For the guards, Jones made a phenomenal play and scored. The inmates were still down by twenty.

Lester blocked Fleet's path to the hoop, so he shot from the outside and missed. Sach rebounded.

Juan made a phenomenal move, stole the ball and went in for in for an easy lay up.

CW noticed the Governor, and the Flanagan sisters walking in at the opposite end of the court. Boo Hoo's view of them is blocked, so he couldn't see.

CW looked towards Bensen and Flanagan sisters. He saw Bensen and decided to get up and go over to him. The sounds of the crowd were muted for a moment while he walked towards Bensen. A kind of glow appeared as if he was looking at the moon and a corona surrounded his vision. He approached Bensen and their eyes meet. Meanwhile, the players were beckoning CW for instructions. The guards scored.

Richard and Dreyfus look to CW for guidance, but CW had a single purpose at the moment, and it had little to do with basketball.

“Coach,” Juan beckoned as CW walked by. “Where are you going?”

CW looked at Juan and clapped. “Good play. Good play,” was all the Coach said.

“What do you mean?” Juan asked. “They just scored.”

CW continued walking towards Bensen. Finally, he was within arm's length, and Bensen handed CW a piece of paper.

“It's a writ of pardon,” Bensen said. “Boo Hoo is free to go. Right now if he wants.”

CW looked to the Governor who looked the other way.

Kimberly and Kolleen came down from the stands. CW took them out of the gymnasium pointed and said, “Around the corner and make two rights. That's where your dad is, at the other end of the court. I'll meet you there.”

Once they agreed, CW went back inside the gymnasium and took an internal path down to the other side through the gymnasium. As he walked this journey, CW clapped hard just as the guards scored again. He said to the inmate team, “Good play. Good play,” and continued his journey to Boo Hoo. To say the inmates on the bench appeared confused at the coach's bizarre behavior was an understatement, but CW kept on clapping and yelling, “Good play. Good play.” CW reached the other end of the court to where Boo Hoo was, and motioned him to follow him to the hallway.

In the hallway, CW handed Boo Hoo the writ.

“You're a free man, Brendon!”

As Boo Hoo read the writ, Kimberly and Kolleen turned the corner and stood behind Boo Hoo a few yards away. He caught a glimpse of his daughters, and tears welled up in his eyes at the pure enjoyment of the moment.

CW's reaction was pure delight as he watched Kimberly and Kolleen hug Boo Hoo in family solidarity.

"We're so sorry," Kimberly could barely say.

"Shhh.. We have so much to talk about, and 'sorry' is not one of the things I want to hear. But first ... I need to do something."

They all clutched each other, and no one was ready to let go.

CW walked the sideline to the center of the court and motioned for time out. He looked

up at the clock. It's a minute and thirty seconds left to play. Score: Home 85: Away 70: As the team huddled around CW, he said, "You guys are great. You're the best team I ever coached."

"What are you talking about?" Juan said. "We're the only team you ever coached."

"We're losing by fifteen points," Moose said. "We can't be that good."

The suspense increased with CW's silence. Finally, CW said, "The Governor has freed Boo Hoo."

The stunned inmates' faces showed hope, like a sprinkle of angel dust. Somehow Boo Hoo's freedom was tied their own hopes and dreams of the future and, presently, to the outcome of this game.

Sach put his fist forward as a gesture of camaraderie. Each teammate put their hand in. CW was the last.

"What can I say, Gents? You're playing with your hearts now."

They break. The inmates' mood shifted to one of confidence. No words. No noise. No claps. Just unrestrained determination.

Within 30 seconds of play, the inmates play ball more expertly than they have in the entire game. Within these seconds the inmates score five unanswered points. CW looked up at the clock. One minute to go, and the scoreboard read: Home: 85 Away:

75. The inmate team would have to score ten unanswered points in one minute. As good as they were playing now, the outcome looked dim indeed.

Although they were ahead by ten points, Henry looked worried as his team huddled around him. "It's all right," Henry assured them. "Time's on our side. No way can they score eleven unanswered points in just one minute."

CW, however, was more philosophical as the inmate team huddled around him. "No matter what happens, men," he said, "know that right at this moment you are a better team than they are."

Juan looked over CW's shoulder and pumped his arm in the air and yelled out, "Yeah! Yeah!! YEAH!!!"

Boo Hoo, red-eyed and sniffing, hobbled towards them dressed up and ready to play. "I heard you guys needed some help?"

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The commotion the inmates side made at the sight of Boo Hoo dressed in uniform was enormous. The security guards not only took notice of the chaos, but they stood by the exit doors in case in any of the inmates got any bright ideas of making a quick 'run for it'. This was the very thing the Governor was afraid of if the game got too close. He was afraid that a 'mob rule' movement would rouse a group of people and they would get chaotic and destructive.

Sach immediately escorted Boo Hoo to the three-point key and told him to stay there. He, and the rest of the team, took their positions on the court. The guards, and Henry, just laughed at Boo Hoo as he hobbled back and forth from one foot to the other.

A-worried-looking Warden gazed at the clock. Fifty-nine seconds to go. Surely, he figured that the guards could run the time off the clock, but he knew better. The dye was cast. Hayes, with an icepack on his ankle, clapped and shouted and was taken in by the excitement as much as anyone.

The game continued and the guards brought in the ball first. Juan immediately stole the ball, and flipped it to Boo Hoo, and he scored three points with ease since no one was covering him. Henry points to Boo Hoo and shouts to Philip. "Stay on him," he said. "You got him."

"But he's not moving," Philip said.

“I don’t give a damn. Make sure he doesn’t get the ball.”

In the meantime, CW roamed the side court like a maniac. Jones had the ball and Sach fouled him before Jones had a chance to shoot.

Jones took his time with the ball and shot the free throws. He misses one, and sunk the second shot.

The Scoreboard read HOME 86; AWAY 78.

Juan immediately chucked the ball to Boo Hoo who tossed the ball up and scored, catching Philip flat-footed. The Scoreboard read HOME 86; AWAY 81. The Warden, paced back and forth on the sideline now. He yelled instructions to Henry to call for a time out.

“No,” Henry said. “We only have one time out left. Clock is on our side now.”

The Warden patiently waited, alternately looking at the clock and the action on the floor. Juan stole the ball again and fed Boo Hoo who was now tightly covered by Philip. Boo Hoo faked a throw to Sach. Philip committed himself to cover Sach with that fake Boo Hoo just made, but Boo Hoo took a shot instead, scoring three more points with ease. The scoreboard now read 86-84.

Jimmy Fleet got an inbound pass and Sach fouled him.

“Sach is outta here,” the Announcer said. “That’s his fifth foul. He scored eighteen points. All in the second half.”xx

“Sorry, Coach.”

“Sorry?” CW repeated with a tone of amazement. “What are you, nuts? You carried us the whole second half. I suppose it should’ve been someone else, but those were smart fouls.”

Jimmy Fleet stood at the free throw line and tossed it up. He hits his first shot. SCORE 87-84. He looks at the clock: 9 seconds left.

Sach crossed his fingers and puts them to his temples and mumbled, “He scores this, the game is over,” Sach said.

Fleet took his time. He finally took his shot, and the ball bounced a few times on the rim and then took a hard bounce to the left. Juan ends up with the ball.

CW frantically called for time out to Referee One. Referee One looked over to the Warden who shook his head. Jones saw CW calling for time out and looked to Referee Two and points to Juan. The clock ticks down. Five ... four...

Referee Two saw Juan calling time out and he blew his whistle. "Time out, inmates," Referee Two said, then added, "No time outs left."

Time left in the game: 3 seconds.

Jones watched the Warden take Philip aside. The Warden must yell because the noise in the gym.

"Take him out! You take Boo Hoo out before he gets the ball. BEFORE he gets the ball. Even if he gets two foul shots in, we still win." The Warden pushes Philip into the group of players.

The Governor seemed not to be too happy with what he saw. He and the Warden share a glance, and the Warden nodded, giving the Governor that feeling that the Warden believed he had things are under control.

The whistle blew for play to continue. The score was the guards 87 and the inmates 84. The inmates needed Boo Hoo to score to tie.

Philip walked towards Boo Hoo but Jones blocked his path. He tried to get around Jones but has a difficult time doing it.

Juan threw the ball to Boo Hoo just as Philip broke free of Jones. Boo Hoo shot at the exact time Philip come down hard on Boo Hoo's head.

Boo Hoo lay on the floor bleeding from a cut on his brow. Referee One, who saw the play, did NOT call a foul.

The ball hit the top of the rim and bounced up. As it came down, Jimmy Fleet jumped up and hit the ball away.

The Referee Two blew his whistle and yelled, "Goal tending."

The buzzer sounded for the end of the game. The people in the stands jumped and yelled, crazed with excitement. The newsman yelled into the camera and added to the hysteria. No one was sitting. The Scoreboard read: HOME 87 AWAY 87.

Jones stands between a fallen Boo Hoo and Referee One.

“He ain't gonna pay ya. Not now,” Jones said to Referee One who looked at the score board and sadly nodded. A hush spreads throughout the gym as Referee One blew his whistle and pointed to Philip. “Foul.”

Pandemonium erupted again as Jones helped Boo Hoo up. Boo Hoo had blood and sweat streaming into his eyes. CW called time out and came over to see if Boo Hoo was okay. But he wasn't okay. Boo Hoo couldn't see.

CW wiped Boo Hoo's face with a towel.

“I can't see. I can't do this,” Boo Hoo said.

CW rolled up the towel into a bandana and put it over CW's head above his eyebrows so he could see. As CW escorted Boo Hoo to the free throw line, Boo Hoo tried to communicate with CW but his voice got swallowed in with the crowd noise. “Thank you. Thank you for everything you have done,” was what Boo Hoo was trying to say.

“Shut up and concentrate, you psycho,” CW said. “You can do this in your sleep. Just concentrate. CW walked back to the bench.

Everyone remained quiet while Boo Hoo took a couple of deep breaths. He bounced the ball a few times. The crowd, all of a sudden, became muted. The drama of the moment was conveyed in the faces of the crowd, especially Kimberly and Kolleen who watched Boo Hoo pull up the towel and rub his eyes. He couldn't see, and his eyes stung, so he pulled the towel back over his eyes.

He tossed the ball high in the air at the rim. The ball spun in a high arc and came crashing down and hit the rim once, then twice, and then bounced off and onto the floor. No score. The

whistle blew, and the game was over. The score was tied, and the heavy sighs spread throughout the gymnasium.

Silence prevailed as everyone watched the Warden conspicuously running about trying to get the guards together to play an overtime period. He tried to command everyone at once, but to no avail.

“Flanagan can't play anymore,” the Warden said. “Sach has fouled out. Let's win this thing. Come on, let's go.”

The Governor appeared to be unusually calm for the moment. He nodded to the Warden, and the Warden nodded back as if to say “I know what I have to do.” He then

leaned into Henry, slipped a shank into his hand and whispered, “Get the team ready for overtime and get Flanagan.”

Henry pushed a few guards/players out onto the floor to get ready for overtime play. Jones and Fleet remained seated on the bench, along with Hayes who still had an ice pack on his leg. Jones and Fleet shook their heads refusing to take the court.

“No mas,” Jones said in Spanish. “No more. The game is over for us.”

“You have to play,” the Warden said. “We can't play without you.”

Jones stood up and motioned for the crowd to quiet down. After a few seconds it was so quiet, everyone could hear a pin drop. He looked at CW who was caring for Boo Hoo's cut. Jones walked a few steps forward and faced the inmates' side of the bleachers and began clapping and chanting “Boo Hoo ... Boo Hoo ... Boo Hoo.”

Before long, the entire court was clapping and shouting, "Boo Hoo". Even the guards were chanting Boo Hoo's name.

In the meantime, the Warden waved his hands frantically trying to get the guards to stop shouting Boo Hoo's name, but he couldn't control them. He couldn't control anyone.

Boo Hoo raised his hand in recognition of the appreciation. He stood up to acknowledge the accolades, and the chant was replaced with a wild cheer.

Jones went over to Referee Two and whispered something, then Referee Two blew the whistle and yelled, “The game is over. Tie score.”

And with that, the inmates jumped and waved their arms in triumph, as if their team had won the game anyway. As there was pandemonium on the court, Henry meandered over to Boo Hoo. The swarm of people set the stage for a perfect opportunity for Henry to stab Boo Hoo,

which he tried to do, but Henry got shoved and the shank imbedded itself in a spectator's shoulder. No one saw the act, and the act itself got lost in the mayhem, but the network camera caught the action as it was happening.

Security Guards stood close to the exit doors ready for a riot, and ready to use their billy clubs if any of the inmates decided to run to their freedom.

Boo Hoo spotted his children advancing on the court, and he rushed to them fearing for his life.

CW sat alone on the bench when Jones walked over and sat down next to CW. They both watched Boo Hoo hugging his daughters.

“Where the hell did you find him?” Jones asked CW.

“It was more like we found each other.”

They both stared into the chaos.

“It was an honor to play on the same court with you guys. I'll never forget this as long as I live.”

“Neither will I, Mr. Jones,”

Jones patted CW on the shoulder, then got up and left.

A panoramic view showed inmates kissing their family members; Boo Hoo hugging his daughters; the Warden ordering the security guards to hover over the exit doors; and CW's wife hugging him from behind.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Six months later, Boo Hoo was throwing a baseball to his grandson, Joseph, on Kolleen's front lawn. He was really enjoying the time he had with Joseph when CW pulled up in his car with his daughter, Susanna.

CW got out of the car waving a Philadelphia Inquirer in his hand. Susanna ran from the car to Joseph, and they played while CW talked with Boo Hoo.

They said their pleasantries, and then CW showed Boo Hoo the headlines. "They have Henry," CW said, "on network tape trying to kill you. And now he is singing like a bird about all the indiscretions he knows about the Governor and Warden Pringle. And now the Warden and the Governor are singing like two song birds in a bush. The Governor finally admitted that he pressured my dad in fingering Cusack when he was the DA. The Warden said the Governor told him to kill you, and he in turn buried a shank in Henry's hand and told him to do the job. The video shows Henry getting pushed and caused him to accidently embed the shank in the spectator's shoulder."

"That is great news, CW. Finally, you can come to closure on that."

CW told Boo Hoo that he had to come to tell him the good news in person. Of course, Pringle was no longer the Warden at Longhorne. He's waiting for his sentence, actually. Word has it the Judge wasn't so quick to buy into the plea deal. We'll see what comes of it.

Kolleen poked her head out of the front door and asked the guys if they wanted to come in for some ice tea.

"Good idea," CW said. "Hey, I love your new house. Very Charming."

"Well, thank you, CW," she said and then disappeared inside.

CW and Boo Hoo took a slow stroll towards the house, and CW pulled out a toothbrush from his pocket. "Here," he said as he handed CW the toothbrush. "From Juan."

Boo Hoo stared at the toothbrush and scratched his head, puzzled over why was Juan giving him the toothbrush.

"He said he's been wanting to give you that for a long time."

"Ah, yes," Boo Hoo said, remembering. "I dropped it and had to buy a new one."

CW just nodded, but finally said, “I forgot to tell you, but Jeremy's the new Warden now.”

“That’s great! And what happened to Henry.”

“Nothing, really. He’s going to take early retirement, he says. And Sach? There was a Knicks scout at the game and he loved what he saw. Sach signed a two year contract with the Knicks. He'll be out in a few months and we'll be watching him on TV soon.”

“Boy, that’s great news.” As the men enter the house, Boo Hoo wanted to know if CW wanted to wager a little money and shoot some baskets later.

As disappear into the house, CW laughed hard and said, “not with you, I don’t.”

**THE END**