

Chapter 6

Chuck and Lyle were full of hope as they returned to New York; things were cooking. They were on a magic carpet ride, and all they could do was to just hold on.

The Hawk was flying high, as he fumbled through his keys to his apartment. You watch, Lyle. Our phone is going to ring from the moment we walk through this door, with offers from people who heard about us performing at Quayle's party.

Lyle was *Lyle* keeping his wits, living in the here-and-now--yet, always a bit worried about what would happen next. Try to hurry, Chuck. I'm afraid I'll piss myself if I don't get to the bathroom real soon.

Well, Mr. Smart Guy, who drank six cups of coffee on the plane and was in such a hurry to get out of the terminal without going to the restroom first? Aha! Here it is.

Indeed, the phone rang.

What'd I tell you, Lyle? See? gloated Chuck as he picked up the phone.

Hello, Chuck Clarke here! he says, beaming with optimism. Then, Chuck's countenance fell as the voice on the other end, in an instant, doused his fire with cold water. Yes, hello Mrs. Fushman. . . yes, we were playing at a party for the Vice President. . . No, *really*; we *did!* . . . You saw us on the *news*? . . . No kidding?

Then, the cantankerous old crow launched into her reason for calling. I'm circulating a petition among the other tenants, asking that you two be evicted because of that hideous *racket* that always comes out of your apartment.

But Mrs. Fushman, we're *songwriters*, and someday we'll be famous. Don't you want to say I knew them when . . . ? We *gotta* work on our material.

Yeah, I'd like to say I knew them when, alright I knew them when they were a couple of pains-in-the-ass losers who sang their God-awful crap all hours of the day, and coming in at strange hours from their sleazy two-bit dives with God knows who.

Ok, we promise to try to keep it down. Chuck half-heartedly conceded.

And tell the *Texas Troubadour* that he ain't out on the friggin' prairie. Tell him to yodel somewhere else. I feel like I'm living next door to *Slim Whitman*.

It was an *offer*, alright *stop singing in the apartment, or get evicted*; though, it wasn't exactly the kind of offer Chuck expected.

I'm gonna fix her *vagen* if it's the last thing I do. vowed Lyle, mocking her German

accent.

Yeah, what a bitch! . . . By the way Lyle, where did *you* learn German?

Hogan's Heroes. She kinda looks like *Shultz*¹, doesn't she?

Nah, he's *prettier*.

After the boys settled-in for the evening, Chuck sat on his piano bench and browsed through the mail.

Lyle, you got a letter; it's from *Willa*. (hands to Lyle)

Willa? a surprised Lyle asks, as he anxiously grabs and opens the envelope. She says she'll be back in New York this week. Chuck, she's coming back to me! Lyle said, thinking his prayers had been answered. He let out a big Texas-style Yeeehaaaa! , making sure all the neighbors heard it, too especially Frau Fuschmacher.

The banging on the wall between their apartments confirmed the message's transmission.

Lyle, try to keep it down, please. Chuck warned. You know, Lyle, maybe you should wait and see what happens before you think about getting back together with her.

While Chuck always had Lyle's best interest at heart even now, there was a trace of jealousy in his words. If Lyle and Willa got back together, it might be the end of *Rogers & Clarke*, he thought.

Late in the morning on the following day, the phone rang.

Lyle, could you get that? I'm working on the *Times* Crossword Puzzle.

Hello? Willa? Is that you?

No, Lyle, it's me Marty Freed.

Oh! Sorry. Hello, Mr. Freed. How are you, sir?

Ask Marty for a five-letter word that's the sound of a sneeze. requested Chuck.

ACHOO. answered Marty, hearing Chuck in the background.

¹ Sergeant Shultz from the show, played by the great John Banner. Achtung!

Gesundheit! joked Lyle².

No, that won't work. commented Chuck. I said *five* letters, Lyle.

Listen Lyle, I got a call today from a Mr. Lee Atwater; he is the campaign manager for George Bush. I don't know what the hell you guys did in Indianapolis, but you were a big hit with the Vice President. Atwater wants to talk to you guys, personally.

Yeah, Marty. My Daddy had worked with Mr. Bush during his years at Texas Oil.

Your Father *knew* George Bush? Ah, the *Texas* thing; I see. That's what did it! You fellas amaze me – you know that? You can fall into a bucket of shit, and come up smelling like roses. chuckles Marty.

I'll tell Chuck right away, Mr. Freed.

Wait, let me give you the number. Give this guy a call now, ok?

Upon hearing the news, Chuck promptly abandoned the puzzle³ and phoned Lee Atwater. Pacing the floor, he nervously cleared his throat as he awaited an answer from the other end.

Yes, Chuck Clarke for Lee Atwater, please. Yes, I'll hold. Chuck redirects his attention to Lyle. See, Lyle; I told you that Bush – Hello Mr. Atwater, Chuck Clarke of *Rogers & Clarke* here. . . Fine, thanks. . . Yes, it was a great party. . . Thank you. . . (abruptly changes his expression) Meet next Monday? At the White House?. . . (stunned) S-Sure! Yeah, why not? I mean – Uh, Mr. Atwater. . . ok, *Lee*, about the flight and accommodations. . . Oh, I see; *you*'ll take care of it? Gee, thanks. What? Sleep where? *The Lincoln Bedroom*? Really? . . . (clears throat) I mean, yeah – that'll be alright. . . Ok, Lee. Thanks again. . . See ya Monday. . . Bye.

Lyle, can you believe this?

Chuck, did I hear you say we're going to the White House?. . . Maybe even meet the President? Hey, maybe I can even bring Willa!

Will you stop with this talk about Willa? Don't you think it's strange that, now that we're beginning to make it, she wants to get back with you? Where was she when you needed her, back before we went to Morocco, huh?

Chuck's honesty rang painfully true for Lyle, as he choked back the tears. Nevertheless, he always held out hope for the day when he and Willa would finally reunite.

² Ok, so Lyle isn't exactly *Don Rickles*; so what?

³While thinking of a ten-letter Yiddish word for – bungling persons -- s-c-h-l-_-m-i-e-l-s

Ok, Chuck, let's go to Washington. I promised Bush I'd show him how to rope a steer.

Lee Atwater knew what he had to do — keep the boys from talking to *anyone* about the map of Ishtar. Bush had little competition from Dukakis, and Lee wanted to keep it that way. So Atwater decided it was time to call Jim Harrison to get the status on the search for the map.

Jim, Lee Atwater. Is this phone secure? Good. Hey Jim, what's the deal with these two stooges and the map?

Harrison was sweating bullets on the other end of the line, fumbling for answers, and sounding as lame as ever. Map? What map?

Cut the crap — I know all about it. What the hell are you guys doing to find it, huh?

Ok Lee, here's the deal. We recently made contact with Lyle Rogers ex-wife, Willa, hoping she could indirectly lead us to the map. We're flying her in to New York this week to visit Lyle. Being a rather naive fellow, Lyle just might spill the beans during pillow-talk, you know.

Harrison, you are one sneaky son-of-a-bitch, you know that?

Thanks.

George really *likes* these puds; can you believe it? The dumb bastard has a soft-spot for Rogers because he knew his Dad.

I think he even *likes* their songs! Jim replied.

Yeah, I know. He's been walking around humming the line, *Tellin' the truth can be dangerous business*. . . . -- So, Jim, how did you guys connect with the Ex-Mrs. Rogers, anyway?

She called us after getting a few letters from Lyle while he was in Morocco telling her that the CIA was going to back a *Rogers & Clarke* album. But, unfortunately, he never told her anything about the map. She wrote us a letter, begging us *not* to make them famous. Then, I, personally, sent a letter to Willa Rogers assuring her that the CIA would do *everything* in its power to make sure *Rogers & Clarke* would never be famous.

That's it? *That's* what you told her?!

No. There's more. I told her that her husband's life was in danger from fanatic Shiites and the KGB, both of whom were after a coveted map that Lyle and Chuck had

inadvertently acquired. If she could only talk to Lyle and *find out where he was hiding the map*, we could intervene and give him protection. But, I also warned her: Lyle must never know we sent her, since he doesn't even know he's being tailed by Shiites and KGB agents. We don't want to alarm him, you know. At least, that's what I told her.

I'll tell ya you're a rotten bastard, Harrison.

Thanks, Lee; But I don't deserve *all* the credit.

Bullshit! I'm just glad you're on *our* side. You *are*, aren't you?

Yeah, I'm on your side, alright.

Good. You know, I used to be one of Nixon's Rat-Fuckers; did you know that? Lee boasted.

Really? I didn't know that. I wouldn't have taken you for a *Ratfucker*, Lee.

Yeah, those were the good old days. Whatever the President wanted he could get. If he wanted whores, we'd get him whores and the Press would look the other way. . . Yeah. . . Lee recalls in a misty glaze.

I know what you mean, Lee. When I started at the Agency, we could bump-off what ever piss-ass Third World dictator we wanted, and Congress could give a shit. Now we have to get the fuckin' United Nations to condemn 'em and issue sanctions that everybody ignores anyway. What's the use?

Yeah. . . the good old days. . . (Abruptly) Well, I ain't got time for reminiscing, Jim. Keep me up-to-date on this situation. (Hangs up)

Lee didn't trust Harrison, and figured he'd better come up with his *own* plan to keep the boys from spoiling the election for Bush. *Neutralizing* Chuck and Lyle was out of the question, since Lee knew that Marty Freed would sell the map to the KGB and they would *love* to put the screws to George Bush. Since the boys were to meet with him next week, Lee knew what he had to do: *work on them*, find out what they want, and cut a deal.

Chapter 7

Chuck and Lyle waited on Willa's arrival from Dallas on that Wednesday afternoon at La Guardia.

Does my hair look alright, Chuck?

Yes, yes, yes, Lyle! The whole way here it was does this look alright, Chuck, does that look alright. . . Enough already!

Yes, Lyle was a bit nervous over seeing Willa for the first time since before the boys' departure for Morocco. Maybe she missed him as much as he missed her; and *just maybe* they could get back together.

Chuck was concerned that Willa would *steal Lyle away*, and the team of *Rogers & Clarke* would cease to exist.

In her heart, Willa still loved Lyle, but she still detested his musical ambitions. Why couldn't he have just stayed in Ponder? After all, weren't they happy there? She came to New York to give Lyle another chance—forget this music stuff and go back to Ponder, or else she would return alone. Her lone concession was that he could go back and play accordion with that Mexican band like before. That was as wild as it was going to get, she demanded. Besides, she was worried about him, with all that stuff that that man from the CIA told her. New York was a bad place, full of evil people, she thought. Better that Lyle should live in Ponder.

When she walked through the gate, she saw Lyle's face light up with joy. They ran to each other and embraced. It was an emotional moment.

Even Chuck's icy feelings toward their reconciliation melted away. Lyle was his friend, first and foremost. Lyle's happiness meant more to him than anything else.

On the way back to Chuck's apartment, Lyle asked Willa about extending her stay, to include the Washington visit with Lee Atwater.

Think of it, Willa—we're going to meet the Vice President of the United States, and maybe even the President, himself!

Willa was thinking that she would rather be on a plane with Lyle heading for Texas, not Washington.

Back at the apartment, Willa and Lyle spent the evening together, while Chuck decided to go spend the night at his folks' house. The reunited couple laughed and loved the night away. Neither thought a single thought about those things that divided them. It was as though they were sharing a beautiful dream.

The phone rang the next morning at about 9. Lyle and Willa had just finished breakfast in bed and were thinking about getting dressed when Marty's call came in.

Hello? . . . Oh hi, Mr. Freed. . . Chuck's not here right now, but, . . . wait, let me get a pencil. . . . United out of Kennedy . . . departs for Washington at 9:45. . . . Driver will be there to take us to Lee. . . . Ok, gotcha. . . Thanks Marty. Bye.

Willa, I'm so excited! It's finally happening! We're making it! We're gonna do something with the Bush campaign!

Lyle was like a kid, again, dancing around the apartment, and singing. He thought he had it all—a best friend, a career in music, *and* the love of his life.

But it was apparent, now, even to Lyle, that the love of his life didn't quite share his enthusiasm.

Willa, honey? What's wrong?

She broke her silence.

Lyle, come back to Ponder with me. You're in danger. Leave this place and this business behind. We're Texans. We don't belong here. You could go back to the tire factory, and maybe we could, even, adopt a child. You always wanted a son. Now's the time.

Lyle was speechless. Just a few seconds before, he was flying high. Now, those sweet dreams and flying machines were in pieces, on the ground.⁴

After a long silence, he found his voice, singing this lyric:

I want you.
I need you.
But there ain't no way I'm *goin' back to Ponder*.
Now don't be sad (*don't be sad*)⁵
Cause two out of three ain't bad.⁶

Willa wasn't familiar with the Meatloaf song. The only meatloaf she knew, was the kind smeared with barbecue sauce.⁷

Is that the kind of crap that you're writing, Lyle? Well, *that will never* be a hit—not in a

⁴I love that line in James Taylor's "Fire and Rain." Don't you?

⁵Chuck sings the back-up line from outside his door.

⁶Thanks to Meatloaf for allowing me, or at least, for not kicking my ass for using this.

⁷Well, that could be *either* one. Now he's *really* gonna kick my ass. I hope you readers appreciate that I really went out on a limb to entertain you!

million years, so FORGET IT!

Willa indignantly stormed out of the apartment, mowing down Chuck in the process, and slammed the door. It was over so fast, Lyle thought.

I can't believe it. Willa left me *again*. Why oh, why oh, why . .

Chuck dusted himself off and came to Lyle's aid.

It's not your fault. You did nothing wrong. She just can't accept your impending stardom. Call it jealousy, or whatever, she just can't handle it, Lyle. You'll survive.

The words triggered another musical outburst by Lyle, that goddamned Gloria Gaynor song, still fresh in his mind from the weekend at the Scranton Holiday Inn disco lounge:

do you think I'll crumble?
do you think I'll lay down and die?
Oh no, not I!
I will survive!
I will survive!
da-da da da-da da-da. . .⁸

Chuck had just started dancing to the tune, when the phone rang. Mrs. Fushman had taken about all she could take of Lyle's crooning.

Chuck Clarke, here.

Tell that fuckin' moose to shut it, or I'll call the police! (CLICK)

The next Monday morning, Chuck and Lyle were on a flight to Washington, over Chesapeake Bay, well into the plane's descent.

What *does* Lee Atwater want with us, Chuck?

I think Bush was so impressed with us in Indianapolis that he wants us to play for the Reagans.

Really?

Yeah, sure!

⁸Lyle couldn't remember the rest of the words — thank goodness. I mean, like, the original was bad enough!

Oh, cause I thought that maybe the government might be after the map.

SH-SH! Lyle! What did I tell you about talking about the M-A-P? You never know who's listening.

Chuck was right. The flight attendant adjusting the seat directly behind them was actually one of Harrison's henchmen in-drag.

Miss? I'll have two more bags of salted peanuts, and bring my friend another Brass Monkey and keep the change. Lyle requests and hands her a five.

Have I seen you somewhere before, Miss? Lyle asks, wondering where he had seen *that* face.

That is such a *lame* pick-up line, Lyle. C'mon. Haven't I taught you better than that?

No, no that face! I've seen that face!

Probably in a nightmare, Lyle yecchh.

Now I remember Ishtar! Chuck! That's one of Harrison's goons!

SH-SH. . . Are you sure?

Yeah. I'm sure. Remember the guy with the really bad overbite who followed us from the camel market?

Yeah, I do come to think of it! It's Old Can-opener face, himself! . . . You're right, Lyle. Even if Bush just likes our music, Lee and Jim have something else up their sleeves, if you know what I mean.

What? Battleship tatoos?

Now Lyle, Did I say *anything* about Mrs. Fushman?

Lee Atwater had sent a driver to pick up Chuck and Lyle. Holding a sign reading Rogers and Clarke, he was spotted by a couple of hikers who had come to Washington to celebrate Rogers and Clarke the *Rogers and Clarke* known for their pioneering of the Pacific Crest Trail not *Chuck and Lyle*. The Pacific Crest Trail⁹ is a path linking Canada and Mexico, envisioned in the 1930s by Rogers and Clarke-- the

⁹ Hey! What is this? A history lesson, or what? Skip the background. We don't need another load of crap like that, er . . . crap from Chapter 4 or 5 or whatever, where you gave us some bullshit history of the Middle East!

pioneers, adventurers, or whatever the hell they were¹⁰.

About to find transportation to the Smithsonian, one of the hikers noticed the sign Lee's driver patiently held.

Hey Charlie! Look! *Limo service* to the museum!

Great, Larry! Now that's *class* sending a limo!

Charlie and Larry walked up to the driver holding the sign, waving and saying, We're here! Thanks for picking us up!

The unwitting driver, remembering Lee's instructions to pick up a couple of bozos at the airport, said, *Hya doin fellas. Right this way.* The driver thought to himself as the conspicuously bozo-like duo got into the back of the Lincoln, Lee was right. These two schmucks¹¹ really fit the bill.

Meanwhile, back at the airport, Chuck and Lyle impatiently searched for the driver who was to pick them up.

Where the hell is he? Damn it! Lyle, you wait here and I'll go call Lee.

Chuck, wait! Don't leave. Let's give him another 15 or 20 minutes. I heard that the beltway can be murder!

A short while later, the limo carrying the *trail-mix twins* pulled up to an office building in the heart of the District of Columbia, and Lee Atwater came out to greet the boys.

Hiya fellas! Welcome to Washington. How was your flight.

Great! We're so excited that, finally, the work of *Rogers and Clarke* is being noticed!

Yeah, well, it'll still be a while before *they'll* be household names. (Lee abruptly gets to his point) Listen fellas, I need to talk to you about this *map*.

[*Boy, isn't that footnote guy getting a little surly with his comments?*]¹²

¹⁰ Hey! Let's let the footnotes guy do the funny stuff, ok? Don't horn-in on my territory, damn it!

¹¹ See? Even the *driver* can say *shmuck*. Lyle needs to learn the lingo!

¹² Surly? What did you do? Pull that one out of your little thesaurus? You could have said *atrabilious, bad-tempered, bilious, choleric, curmudgeonly, dyspeptic, fractious, irascible, misanthropic, quick-tempered, saturnine, snorty, techy, ugly, vixenish, or even vile. But ya doesn't hass ta call me surly!*

Sure, dude. What do you want to know?

The hikers thought Lee meant the map of the *Pacific Crest Trail*.

Lee couldn't believe it was going to be this easy.

Where is it?

We packed it. Wanna see it?

Yeah, but, *not here inside!*

Lee led *Lewis & Clarke* down the long hall and into his lush office.

Wow Mr. Atwater! The Smithsonian sure is nice! marveled Larry.

Yeah, but where are all the exhibits, anyway? asked Charlie.

Whaa? . . . a puzzled but indifferent Lee blurted. He hadn't caught their drift, yet.

Yeah, fellas; *it is nice* now where's the *map*?

Larry unstrapped and reached deep into an olive-drab US Army knapsack, pulling out trail mix, bug repellent, a flashlight, and one of those folding cups.

Here, hold these. Larry instructed as he handed a mildly perturbed Lee an armful of the knapsack's contents.

Ah, here it is. he said as he found the map.

Charlie snatched it and unfolded it.

Lee grabbed it out of Charlie's hands as though he were swindling a little old lady out of the deed to her ranch¹³.

A dark frown appeared on Lee's face.

Hey! What the fuck is this shit? This isn't the map of Ishtar! Where *is* it?

Ishtar? What are you talking about? This is the Pacific Crest Trail! answered Charlie.

What the hell is *that*? a furious Lee demanded.

¹³Just like they used to do on *Bonanza*, remember?

The Pacific Crest Trail¹⁴ is a path linking Canada and Mexico, envisioned in the 1930s by Rogers and Clarke-- the pioneers, adventurers, or whatever the hell they were¹⁵.

You're not Rogers and Clarke?

Charlie and Larry erupted in obnoxious nerd laughter.

Heck no, man! Didn't you study history? Larry asked.

Yeah I did and you guys are going to be *history* if you don't get the fuck out of here NOW!

C'mon Charlie. The Smithsonian really sucks. Let's hike back to Altoona¹⁶.

Lee royally chewed out his driver.

When I said stupid, I didn't mean *that* stupid! Now get me to the airport immediately!

Chuck and Lyle had settled-in at the airport lounge, feeding the jukebox, and getting wasted as they waited and waited for Lee's driver. They laughed and talked about their childhood, and just as Chuck was about to tell Lyle what he once did with his grandmother's turkey¹⁷ Lee and his driver found them.

Fellas, hi, Lee Atwater.

Hi, Lee! We waited and just figured you got stuck on the Beltway I hear it can be murder, you know. Chuck replied.

Yeah, it is Say listen fellas, let's go out for some dinner. What'd ya say? You hungry? Yeah, we're starved, Lee! answered Lyle, who is usually hungry to begin with.

What would you like, Mexican, Chinese?

Anything but Middle Eastern! requested Chuck.

¹⁴ Here we go again.

¹⁵ Ok, we heard this once already! Enough!

¹⁶ Altoona, Pennsylvania: home of the Horseshoe Curve, and popular vaudeville venue.

¹⁷ We don't really want to know now, do we?

Over dinner, Lee got down to business with the boys.

Fellas, how would you like to work with the Bush Campaign?

Yeah, sure, Lee. Chuck accepted. What do you want us to do?

Well fellas, let me be frank here. George Bush is going to be elected; I have no doubt. But, given the Vice President's past service with the CIA as its director, where certain deals had to be cut to preserve the peace --you have to make deals with those people about *everything* Mr. Bush had to shall we say look the other way with regard to the coup that installed the Emir as ruler, if you know what I mean. Now, while Mr. Bush certainly did nothing wrong, some leftist crackpots in this country would jump on this tidbit like a dog on a steak. You know the kind America haters ready in a heartbeat to give the US to the commies. Your map, fellas, in the wrong hands, could tank the Bush candidacy, and who knows? Maybe the future of the free world, itself.

Wow! Lyle gasped, eating right into Lee's hand.

To Chuck's credit, the years of managing a music store in New York taught him how to spot a trade.

So let me get this straight, Lee. The map of Ishtar could possibly embarrass the Vice President, and so, you want us to hand it over?

Lee stiffened and shot, Uh, yes, in fact, I would, yes! I mean, yes, the Vice President and I would be extremely grateful to you both. Lee was surprised and overjoyed at how easily the boys seemed to be handing over what he wanted.

Not so fast, Lee! Chuck countered. Lyle, observe.

I'm here to tell you that the map is not for sale, Lee. We consider it an insurance policy on our lives. You don't know what we went through with that damn thing. There ain't no way we're gonna part with it no way.

How about for one million dollars? proposed Lee.

Lyle choked once on his twice cooked pork, drinking everyone's water just to wash it down.

Chuck sat motionless and steely-eyed, staring into Lee's empty stare.

Lee Atwater, political guru, with accolades and accomplishments abounding, had met his match. If there was one thing that Chuck knew, it was how to deal and he had the guts, too.

Lee, we thought you wanted us for our music. But now that I see what this is all about, let me tell you what we want. First, forget the map. You don't get it. Second, we want

George Bush to adopt the song *Dangerous Business* for his campaign theme. Then, if he wins the election, we want to play the Inaugural Ball. How's that sound?

And if we say no?

Then we leak the bit about the Bush's CIA overthrowing King Fah — we learned all about it Lee from Shirra Assel — and Dukakis will be the next president.

Listen fellas, I'm gonna have to talk to the Big Kahuna, and I'll call you in the morning. I've made other arrangements for your accommodations — I hope that'll be alright. Burt Reynolds is spending the night in the Lincoln Bedroom, sorry.

That's ok. Lyle conceded.

Chuck and Lyle got a cab downtown to the Holiday Inn.

Boy Chuck, we're seeing a lot of *these* lately.

The boys walked up to the desk and rang the bell.

Can I help y. . . AHHH! GOD! Not *you two*, oh no, not again!

Whatdya know, Lyle. If it isn't our old friend Curt, Curt Manners! You remember Curt from the Holiday Inns in Indianapolis and Scranton, Lyle?

Listen baldy, we just came back from a high-level meeting with George Bush's top campaign advisor.

Oh, let me guess — he's the organ grinder and you're the monkey! Right?

Ha, Ha, that's really funny, isn't it Lyle?

Just check us in. Lee Atwater made our reservations — Chuck Clarke and Lyle Rogers.

I don't believe it! Curt exclaimed. How the hell do *you two* rate?
Chuck hands Curt a card and says, Look Curt, let's put away all this nonsense and discuss business. We're gonna be famous someday, and we'll need a good road manager. With all your experience in the travel and hotel industry, you might be a good logistics guy to have on staff. What do you say?

Yeah, let's let by-gones be by-gones. chimed in Lyle.

Curt appeared to be touched. These guys were offering him something with a future. They were reaching out to him. With a humble heart, he replied, Gee fellas, I don't

know what to say. You're offering a dream come true. All this hard work for Holiday Inn and for what? A good salary, good benefits, job security? Is it really worth it? Fellas, I know what to say. How about BITE ME!?

Just then, who would walk into the hotel and up to the desk, but Rick James, himself.

Look Lyle, it's him!

Superfreak guy?

Yeah! Let's watch him check-in.

Curt responded, May I help you?

Yeah, man. I got reservations Rick James. Oh, and hey man, can I have *pink sheets*?

Halo? . . . Good Morning! Housekeeping! Do you want your room cleaned?

Chuck gets up and trips over Lyle's pants while looking for the light. Damn it, Lyle! Quit being such a slob!

Lyle responds, Hey! Keep it down, ok? Go back to sleep it's only 5:30!

5:30? What the hell is the maid doing here at 5:30? Chuck muttered. (walks over and opens the door)

Halo, you need towels?

No, no, we're leaving today. Why are you here so early, anyway?

The nice man at the front desk tell us you want service at 5:00; sorry I'm late.

That sonofabitch!

(The maid starts to cry.)

Aw, what's the matter?

You angry with me.

No, no, I meant it for someone else, not *you*. I'm sorry. (reaches into his wallet on the desk) here, take this for your trouble.

Thank you too much. No need towels? toilet paper? shampoo?

No, nothing thanks oh wait! Could you get me a *Variety* downstairs?

Jes, no problem, sir.

Good, thanks. (closes door)

From beneath his big heavy bedspread¹⁸, Lyle asked, What the hell was *that* all about?

That bald prick at the desk . . .

Curt?

Yeah, that bastard told the maid to wake us at 5 can you believe that asshole?

(phone rings)

Lyle s muffled voice asked, Can you get that?

Yeah, I ll get it, but who would be calling us this early? Hello, Chuck Clarke here.

Chuck? Lee Atwater. You weren t sleeping, were you?

Me? sleeping? at 5:40? Naw, never Lee!

Ok Clarke, let s get down to business. Vice President Bush wants you to rewrite the lines to *Dangerous Business* for his campaign.

And? . . . (Chuck looks for more.)

Ok, Clarke, mark January 20th on your calendar for the Inaugural Ball.

(Chuck can t contain his enthusiasm.) WOOOO-O-O-O-O-O-O-O!!! Er, . . . I mean, that ll be fine, Lee.

That s the deal Clarke you schmucks¹⁹ keep your mouths shut, and we ll promote your little song and your cornball act. After my boy s in, we never want to see your faces again you got that?

Yeah, yeah, sure Lee. No problem.

¹⁸that had been stained with God knows what!

¹⁹ Even *Lee* says it and he s as Non-Jew as you can be!

Good. We'll be in touch. (hangs up)

Chuck begins to celebrate.

Lyle, this is our ticket! We're gonna get national exposure!

Yeah, Chuck! Even Willa will see us!

(phone rings again)

Chuck Clarke?

Yes, Mr. Clarke. Sorry to disturb you, but we're getting complaints about noise coming from your room. Frankly Mr. Clarke, we haven't had this many complaints since Keith Moon stayed here in the 70s.

Ok, no problem Mr. . . ?

Fusmacher, sir.

What? Fusmacher? Do you have an aunt in New York by any chance?

Well, yes I do, as a matter of fact! Why?

Oh, nothing. . . just a guess. (hangs up)

(Again, there was a knock at the door and Chuck opens it.)

(It was the maid) Yes, do you get my *Variety*?

Jes, here you go, sir. (hands Chuck a covered dish)

What's this? (opens)

Here you go, one fried egg.

Chapter 8

Back in New York, Chuck & Lyle started playing the two-bit sleazy dives again that Marty Freed had booked for them before they flew off to Morocco and Ishtar was

just a place in a book²⁰.

Night after night, they sang their songs to virtually no-one.

*Telling the truth can be dangerous business.
Honest and popular don't go hand in hand.
Ok, I'll admit that my son George W.,
Snorts more coke than the guys in the band . . .*

Thank you! You're marvelous! Chuck banters, he and Lyle oblivious to the apparent hopelessness of being stuck in a cocktail lounge entertaining a bunch of people who have no better place to be. The boys know that soon enough even *these people* will know the names of Lyle Rogers and Chuck Clarke when the undiscovered duo will sing their hearts out before the entire world²¹ celebrating the new presidency of George Herbert Walker Michael Washington Jefferson Clinton Bush.

The months passed, and sure enough, George Bush was elected President of the United States²².

On January 19, 1989, Chuck and Lyle landed at Dulles Airport for their big performance the next night. They hailed a cab and got in.

Chuck noticed the driver. Hey buddy, you look familiar.

Yeah, so do you guys.

I know you! You're Lee Atwater's driver! Lyle spouted.
Na-a-a-a, I'm that rat-fucker's ex-driver! And you're those two hacks.

Who you callin' a hack you hack²³?!

Holiday Inn! ordered Chuck.

Chuck and Lyle went through the revolving door to the Holiday Inn Downtown DC discussing the set list for the next night's performance at the inaugural ball.

²⁰ In the *Funk & Wagnalls* p. 214, Volume 17, between *Inda Buhtt* (19th Century Swedish proctologist) and *Italian War Victories* (a brief entry).

²¹ Or at least to the 17 people or so who actually *watch or care about* Presidential Inaugural Balls.

²² Wow! What suspense! Really? No Shit?

²³ Wow! What a unique situation! Chuck and Lyle *are* hacks, so *is* the driver, and so is this *writer*! A Triple Hack ! Or, for you hockey fans, a Hack Trick!

Lyle, we lead off with *Hello Washington* followed by *Dangerous Business* and *How Big is Bush*.

No, no Chuck. Since *Dangerous Business* was the campaign theme, we should start with that.

(Another voice interjects) I think you two should start with *If We Suck and You Know It, Clap Your Hands*.

What?! an off-guard Chuck asked as he and Lyle turned around toward the front desk.

If you want to know what to start with you could leave town, sell your possessions, and promise never again to work in the music business. . .

Oh God! It s Curt!²⁴

Oh nono them again! Gaspd a wincing Lyle.

Hello boys.

What are you doing, *stalking us*?

Yes, it does seem to be someone s idea of a cruel joke, doesn t it?²⁵

Well Mr. Bite Me from your last set of insults, have you heard that we are performing at the prestigious Inaugural Ball tomorrow night? Huh? Chuck indignantly asked?

Yeah, we told you we were gonna be famous? Chimed in Lyle.

The only Balls that you two will ever sing at are each others²⁶

Them s fightin words where I come from, Mister! Exploded Lyle as he reached across the desk, grabbed Old Chrome Dome by the shirt and pulled within an inch of his face.

Listen you bald prick! You re really starting to piss me off! I m gonna tear off your fuckin head and shit in your neck!²⁷

²⁴Another triple-dance! Ring the bell, sucka!

²⁵Yeah, mine!

²⁶Did I warn you that some of this material may not be suitable for children? However, it may be suitable to line bird cages.

²⁷Lyle would then use the popular *He needed killin* Texas defense.

Lyle! Lyle! Cut it out! Let him go! He s not worth it!

An hour later, Chuck and Lyle were in their room watching TV when there was a loud repeated knock at the room s door.

Police! Open the door!

Don t get it Lyle. It s Baldy. He s pleading with us to open the door.

Yeah, he s come to his senses and wants to apologize. Lyle chuckles.

He s even saying please. What a laugh.

Fah-get it! Gedadaheer, says Chuck²⁸

Yeah, *smuck*?²⁹

The knocks persisted and got louder.

This is the Police! Lyle Rogers, open the door NOW!

Shit Lyle! Curt called the cops!

Lyle opened the door to face the music.

Lyle Rogers, your under arrest. Curt Manners is pressing charges against you for assault. Have you ever seen Kojak?

Yeah, why?

Good. We don t have to read Miranda. Take him down to the station, boys.

Here it was, the eve of the biggest break of their lives, and Lyle was in jail. Worse, it was the weekend and Lyle would be stuck there until Monday, missing the Inaugural Ball.

You re just gonna have to go on without me, Chuck. Lyle pleaded from his cell, resisting the amorous advances of his cellie Ox. Hey! Cut the shit! Er... I mean . . .

²⁸You can take the boy outta New Yawk, but you can t take New Yawk outta da boy!

²⁹Closer, Lyle. Say sh, now say muck. Now put them together.

please cut the shit, . . . sir!

Lyle, I can't do that we're a team!

Chuck, remember that time in Ishtar at the Chez Casablanca when you couldn't get outta Morocco and I had to go on without you?

Yeah, well . . . let me talk to Marty. I'll see you in the morning. Get some sleep.

As Chuck left the block, he heard Lyle ask, Uh, . . . Chuck, . . . you mind stayin' just a little longer at least until Ox falls asleep?

Here Lyle, give him *this*. (hands him a shiny new penny)

Ox curiously accepts the penny from Lyle and proceeds to stare at it while moving it around watching the light dance off of it. He refuses to take his eyes and attention off it.

Ox? Ox? Hey Ox? . . . Whatdya know, Chuck! He's mesmerized by it! Chuck?

Apparently, so was Chuck.

Chuck wasted no time the next morning, on the phone with Marty in New York, even considering a replacement for the evening. Chuck had only twelve hours till showtime. Rick James, having met the boys on their last trip to Washington, called and offered to fill-in for the evening.

I can't believe that Curt has done this to us, Rick. an exasperated Chuck said.

Yeah, that muthafucka gave me some shit when I asked for pink sheets. Rick confided.

Pink sheets? D-Does that actually work? Chuck asked.

Rick's one word reply and laugh said it all, Sh-e-e-e-e-i-i-i-i-t . . .

Chuck waited and waited in the hotel room, hoping that Marty could somehow convince the authorities to let Lyle at least perform the show.

The phone rang. Marty Freed was calling from his Manhattan office.

Marty? Whadda we gonna do?--

Don't sweat it kid; I'm workin' on it. Did I ever tell you about the time I bailed Dean Martin outta the L.A. County Jail for drunken disorderly conduct? (interrupted)

Marty, please. This event is so big for us . . .

Yeah, I know kid. The Hollywood Bowl was big for old Dino in the 50's too ya know! Especially psychologically, you know, his first gig without Jerry.

What d you do? Chuck asks, having an inkling that the old fart might just be able to pull something off.

Just go to the Lincoln Center tonight and perform. Bring Rick James with you. He *called* me, you know, about an hour ago. . . . expressed interest in filling in for Len.

Lyle!

Yeah, whatever. Go! I'll take care of it.

Chuck hung up the phone, not fully convinced that Marty could do for Lyle what he did for Dean. After all, Lyle was *no Dean Martin!*

Seven o'clock, Lincoln Center: Chuck and Rick James go through a couple of numbers in preparation for their spot in an hour and a half. Chuck nervously awaits word from Marty, or better yet, Lyle himself.

Hey man, I'll do a little *Superfreak* for the prez, maybe change the lyrics a little for the occasion. What dya think?

*He s a very kinky president,
You know he sent Dan for some Efferdent.
When he makes his moves on Barbra,
She really likes it.
They don t call him Bush for nothin !*

*He really likes pork rinds. (He s a supergeek)
But can t stand broccoli. (The man s a supergeek)*

Mr. Bush! Mr. Bush! He s Mister Pussy, Yow!

Uh . . . not bad, Rick but instead of Mr. Pussy we should sing Mr. Vagina. . . . political correctness, you know.

The tension was building as the eight o'clock hour began to lapse. Despite the presence of the great Rick James, Chuck felt like the Griswolds when they arrived at Wally World after traveling across the country, only to find it closed.³⁰ All our boys had

³⁰National Lampoon s *Vacation*

endured led up to a big fizzle in the end. It was one of Chuck's darkest hours. The last time he had felt so low was that time he went out on the ledge of his Queens apartment as part of a half-hearted suicide attempt.³¹

Hundreds of FOB Friends of Bush poured in and mingled. C-SPAN, with their only camera, was there too. A guy with a golf jacket and a microphone spoke quietly into the mike. The Inaugural Ball commences now with featured performers Chuck Clarke and Lyle Rogers, . . . er, correction. . . Chuck Rogers and Rick James.

At eight-thirty sharp the lights came up, and the band Marty hired to back the duo launched into a vamped intro for *Dangerous Business*. Chuck took a shot of courage--a bourbon, of course--and began his intro.

Before he could get two words out of his mouth Chuck noticed a silhouette in the back of the immense hall. As the intro continued, the dark mysterious figure slowly made its way through the thick crowd. Chuck, Rick, and the band were held spellbound as the long intro droned on. Closer and closer came Mr. X until Chuck gasped, Marty?!

Yeah, hi Chuck.

I didn't expect to see you! Chuck exclaimed.

And I'll bet you didn't expect to see *him* either (Marty points behind Chuck) turn around!

Lyle! Wow! You're a sight for sore eyes!
So are you, after looking at Ox for 24 hours! You know, he's *still* staring at that shiny penny you gave him.

He's here with us, Chuck. said Marty.

Who, Lyle? Chuck asked, obviously confused and a little dazed from sudden events.

Yeah Lyle, AND Ox too! He was only in to sleep off a drunk; they let him out. So I says to myself, hmm . . . he'd be *great* security!

Where is he? asked Lyle.

Oh he's backstage at the buffet. Let him eat.-- Marty said.

Anyway, Marty how the hell did you get Lyle *out* ?

(Chuckles) Well, years ago I personally saw the D.C. Mayor smoking pot in Doris Day's bathroom in Beverly Hills. So I calls the guy and says, Mr. Mayor, I have a little problem

³¹From the movie *Ishtar*. Rent it!

and you're the man that can help me what do ya say? At first he says no way and I say Doris Day, November 25, 1959, hey man you gotta light? (Marty hates hypocritical politicians.)

Aw, Marty. . . Chuck gratefully says as he gives Marty a warm hug.

Shit, Lyle! Everyone's waiting for the show Let's go!

Yeah, Chuck let's do it!

*Tellin' the truth can be dangerous business
Honest and popular don't go hand in hand
If you catch the Mayor in the can with a doobie
You can get Lyle Rogers back in the band . . .*

Song after song, the boys with a little help from Rick James, mesmerized the crowd. Chuck and Lyle were a smash *spirit* won over *ability*. They were simply magic that night.

In the midst of the magical evening, Lyle asked, Where's Ox?

Just then, the 350 pound gentle giant emerged on stage holding a bound and gagged Curt Manners high above his head!

Chuck, Lyle, and Marty were beside themselves with laughter. Much to his delight, Ox got a thunderous cheer from the crowd. Curt kicked and made an unintelligible noise through the gag, ptt mm dwn!

What a long strange trip it's been!³²

Epilogue

So, you want to know what happened to all the characters after the story ended? Ok, I'll oblige you.

Chuck Clarke and Lyle Rogers retired from the performance end³³ of the music business following that climactic evening at the Inaugural Ball. Years later Lyle said, It's like when Neil Armstrong walked on the moon. What could he have *possibly* done after that, that would have been a thrill? Chuck replied, Well he could have walked on the moon *for real*. Lyle, you simp. Don't you know that whole thing was faked? He was in a studio near Quantico, Virginia!

³²Thanks to the immortal Jerry Garcia!

³³Thank goodness!

Anyway, we get Lyle's point. Chuck and Lyle live in an apartment somewhere in New York City, produce local acts, write, teach, and live off the royalties of *Dangerous Business* and a stipend from a CIA slush fund. They are happy.

Marty Freed passed away in 1993. He was 73. He too was contented in his later years, a CIA stipend also allowed him to slow down and enjoy his final years. He died of natural causes, hastened by his incessant smoking and his fondness for hard drink.

Shirra Assel became the first democratically elected President of the Republic of Ishtar. She still keeps in touch with the boys.

Kevin got a job as one of the *Solid Gold Dancers*, and went on to work with Paula Abdul. He lives in LA and NYC with his companion Todd.

Jim Harrison was reassigned by the CIA to a post in the Arctic Circle as a communications analyst. He spends his days and nights 300 miles south of the North Pole in a shed with a space heater, a case of rations (airdropped monthly) and *Gilligan's Island* reruns on tape. His job is to listen in on Russian and North Korean radio transmissions. He was chosen for the post because he thoroughly understands those and seven other languages and because he's a rotten bastard.

Lee Atwater died of a brain tumor several years after George Bush was elected. Though he was truly a mean son of a bitch as a GOP strategist, Lee lightened-up and came to terms with his mortality, realizing what mattered most in his life family. And just as Lou Gehrig, he died believing himself to be the luckiest man alive.

Ox became a professional wrestler and made millions as The Para D Ox. He continues to sell out arenas to this day. Chuck and Lyle get a beefstick every Christmas from him. He moved in with Curt Manners and Curt is to this day too afraid to kick him out.

And, who could forget Chuck and Lyle's cantankerous, unyielding, and pigheaded landlord? Agnes Fushman went on to be a contestant on TV's *The Price Is Right* winning a luxurious vacation in Hawaii. Leaving the studio following the taping of the show, she was hit by a Port Authority bus. Unfortunately, the bus sustained significant damage; Mrs. Fushman only suffered minor cuts and scrapes. However, she sued the New York Transit Authority and they settled for twelve million dollars. She moved to Germany and is living miserably ever after.

This story is dedicated to all of the *losers* of the world. There is something delicious about the weak confounding the strong. I have no doubt that God has a soft spot for those who aren't the smartest, best looking, or most talented. If you have made it to this point in the book, I thank you for allowing me to share the story of Chuck and Lyle with you. I will close my writing with these words of wisdom (author unknown) that are with me wherever I go:

If you think you are beaten, you are. If you think you dare not, you don't. Success begins with your own will. It's all in your state of mind. Life's battles are not always won by those who are stronger or faster; sooner or later the person who wins is the person who thinks he (or she) can.

God bless the Chucks and Lyles of the world.