

Leaves
In The
Wind

Kit Cain

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CHAPTER 1.

A few years ago I had decided to write stories about interesting characters I'd met in my travels around the world, but unfortunately the stories turned out to be too short and I wasn't sure how to go about finding more characters who had a longer story to tell. I had put the project on hold indefinitely when whatever's in charge of my universe solved the problem for me—not without a price, however.

As I pulled my older motor home into its accustomed spot in the RV park just outside Las Vegas, I noticed a well-worn travel trailer parked in the adjoining space. Since I only spent the winter months here in this warm desert air, it must have arrived while I was back home in Washington. I hadn't been settled for more than a day than its owner strolled over while I was out covering the motor home wheel-wells and introduced herself as Gertrude Steinhart. She was short, in her late 40's, had graying hair, and wore clothes that were far too tight because she was built ... well ... sort of like a stump with two headlights.

Within a span of what I would guess was 20 minutes or so I had a complete history of her life including her native Indian and Jewish ancestry, her ex-husband (the S.O.B), her daughter's problems, car problems, trailer problems, personal injuries, love of—and problems with—horses, internet problems, and finally, questions about my life, which, up to that point, had been mostly problem free.

Being a neighborly sort of person I agreed to take a look at her kitchen drawer which had to be completely removed each time she wanted something out of it. And, after fixing that, there was the bathroom fan which had never worked. Judging from the various odors from the cat litter boxes, the bathroom drains, and the trailer's occupant the shower probably didn't work any better than the vent fan.

In all fairness, however, there was a certain amount of reciprocal energy interchange, as she had a telephone and internet connection I could use while waiting the two weeks for my own to be hooked up. The use thereof, however, turned out to be less and less. After I had repaired the leaky roof, the swamp cooler, the leaking sewage tank, and several cupboard doors—and also cleaning up a very sluggish computer—I started checking first to make sure she wasn't around before I stepped out of my motor home.

I had tried to make it clear that I was not retired with nothing to do. But interestingly enough, over the period of time all this went on, I was slowly becoming more than a



little impressed by the fact that she was at least trying to get her life together; she just didn't know how to start where the mechanical world was concerned. With a little encouragement and guidance she would do the work she could do herself and didn't mind working up a sweat in the desert sun to make her little trailer a more beautiful place. She had also learned to mobilize other male help around the park without also arousing too much animosity ... spreading the work load around, so to speak.

With this perspective, it's easy to understand how I felt when she knocked on my motor home door one morning as I was working on a screenplay. As I opened the door, I said,

"Gert, I'm real busy. Come back later."

"But I just need a little advice," she said.

"Uh-Oh," I thought to myself, "a master of male manipulation."

"What is it?" I asked.

"I've been given a nice little storage shed by Bill Connors and I need to figure out how to get it over here next to my trailer," she said.

"I'll meet you at 4:30 and we'll look at it," I said.

So, that afternoon we looked at the storage shed. Made of sheet metal and sitting on a plywood and 2X4 base, it had given the better part of its life to the sun and the desert's sandblasting winds. By the number of vacant holes, sagging plywood, and edges that didn't quite fit together, the building had been moved more than once and put back together by someone less than a handyman.

"Gert", I said, "this thing's too flimsy to lift with a backhoe or crane, and it looks like it might have to be disassembled and reassembled next to your travel trailer. I don't really want to tackle that job."

Undaunted by my unwillingness, Gert dropped in on several of her "friends" for further opinions. An hour later she was back.

"Dave thinks we can move it by putting a log under each side and then we can drag it to my place. I've got four people to help him tomorrow afternoon. Can you be there?"

I agreed to help and by the time I arrived at the shed the next afternoon, there were four men of varying sizes and abilities, none under 60 years of age, plus a number of even older "sidewalk superintendents." We all agreed that the best way to handle moving the shed was to raise it, one corner at a time, onto two, 6-inch Tamarisk logs that we found stacked nearby. Once done, it could then be hauled around the block. I was beginning to wonder how the hauling was going to happen when one of the man said:

"Monty should be here in a minute with a chain and his four-wheel-drive Jeep."

Sure enough, within two minutes, around the corner came a 15 year-old jeep that had seen better days and seemed to run more on three cylinders than its normal four. What stepped out of the vehicle was definitely one for the books ... not something you'd expect to find in a retirement park!

He was about 55, and had never cut—or trimmed—a hair on his face or head. A partly brown, partly gray, ponytail hung down his back to his waist, and his beard of soft gray hair seemed to stick close to his face, neck, and chin rather than hang loosely.

This was "Montana" LeFandra dressed perpetually in jeans and a large, loose-fitting shirt to cover up an extended and undisciplined belly. He looked more like a member of a motorcycle club than a member of retirement community, and this, I discovered later, was true to form. But looks can be deceiving—or can they?

Once a person spent some time around Montana—or "Monty" for short—you overlooked the outward appearances because he was always clean—except when he came out from under someone's car he been helping them fix—and he was always soft-spoken, cheerful, joking, and quick to laugh at himself. He was also a fixer of all manner of mechanical things, a trait which I quickly recognized as similar to my own, but he was even better at it than I, having spent most of his life working and playing with mechanical things ... particularly motorcycles.

He flipped the better half of his ever-present Camel cigarette onto the desert sand, opened the Jeep's back door, and out rattled a long piece of 3/8-inch chain.

"Hook it over the trailer ball," he said quietly, which we did, and off the whole contraption rattled with surprising ease down the paved road, around the block, and onto Gert's space in mere minutes. A few heaves and grunts later and we had the logs out and the shed sat in place right where Gert had dreamed it to be ... and where she'd find it when she came home from work that evening.

The next day, as I wandered up to the bathhouse, I passed Montana's old but well-maintained motor home, and there he sat in the morning sun, cigarette in hand, his faithful little friend Pierre, the black and white Terrier, pacing restlessly back and forth at the end of his leash.

"Have a seat," Monty said, making room for me in another chair on a concrete pad between the motor home and the jeep. We had a laugh or two about Gert as she'd already discovered Montana's handiness before she'd been in the park for more than a month.

"You want to watch out for Gert," I said, "she'll crank up your mechanical mule in a New York minute!"



"Ain't enough Viagra in Creation!" Monty quickly retorted with a chuckle.

"Don't be too sure," I said, "she got both of us and four more to boot just to move her shed!"

"Well," he chuckled, "Some things work; some things don't!"

"It seems to me you have a problem with your exhaust manifold," he added a few seconds later, having heard my motor home go by his place, "like it don't fit proper or somethin'." I agreed and told him about how the dealer I'd bought the vehicle from had agreed to fix the broken-off manifold bolt, but had put one of the world's worst mechanics on the job. The mechanic—if you could call him that—drilled out the broken-off stud with a hand drill and put a hole in the water jacket. I almost lost the engine.

It wasn't two days after Monty mentioned the noisy exhaust manifold that the manifold cracked in two entirely and the noise increased to deafening proportions. When Monty heard me drive by, he came over. I told him I'd called the dealer and there were five different manifolds for that year of engine ... and they were not cheap to buy or install. The parts manager said I was looking at over \$700.00 just for parts.

"That's bullshit," said Monty, "I can change that manifold in less than an hour and you don't need a new one. Chevrolet engines are very common, and we can get another used manifold for about 50 bucks. There's a big junkyard not far from here. Let's go see if they've got one."

So saying, we drove down the road to the "End-of-the-Road" junkyard. Monty and the junkyard owner seemed to know each other well, and after a few exchanged words, we ended up in a warehouse looking at a stack of used engines three tiers high. Monty picked out a couple of engines he recognized right away as my type of engine, and, pointing to one particular engine, said that particular one would fit without any difficulty.

In less than an hour's time we were back in the RV Park and had the old broken manifold removed from my engine. However, as with almost all mechanical things being rebuilt, there were unseen problems. That \$10.00 an hour mechanic working for the \$80.00 an hour dealer had also stripped the bolt threads inside the block. Fortunately, I had a machinist's tap that cleaned up the threads, and, after a trip to town to acquire a new bolt, the manifold fit into place as good as new. The actual time working on the engine amounted to 55 minutes, and the total cost for the parts came to \$51.00. Montana's credibility now stood at an 'A' rating, especially since he wouldn't take a nickel for his share of the work. I was both happy and impressed because I'd been saved about \$1,500.00 worth of repair bills.

Several days after moving the shed and fixing the truck, I was up at the bathhouse in the early dawn hours talking to Roger, the park owner, as he cleaned the swimming pool. He had a very long face on this particular day.



"What's bothering you, Roger?" I asked him.

"Didn't you see the water running down the middle of the road near your space?" he asked.

Actually I hadn't noticed it because such a small trickle could well have come from an over-irrigated tree or broken sprinkler.

"The water starts in the middle of the road," Roger said. "It means I've got to dig up and repair a leaky water main."

Later that day I saw Montana walking toward the leaky water main, pickax in one hand and shovel in the other.

"You aren't going to dig up that water main by hand, are you?" I asked him. "The last time Roger had a leaky water line he had a backhoe dig it up and the hole was 10 ft. deep!"

"Nah," Monty said, "Roger says it's only two feet down and that's why the traffic passing over them tends to make them break."

"Well ..." I said, "I'll give you a hand."

And so together we pick-axed through the macadam and shoveled into the wet sand, following the trickle of water to its source a few feet down. It took most of the day to saw the pipe off at its break, fit on compression seals, and fill the hole back in. It saved Roger at least \$500.00, but both Monty and I declined any compensation.

"I like to have a balance on the credit side of the ledger," said he, and I thought to myself: "There's a man after my own heart."

CHAPTER 2.

It was interesting for me to note the varying responses and reactions other people in the RV park had to Montana's presence. Though he was always friendly, cheerful, and willing to stop whatever he was doing to help others, there was always this aura of mistrust which he propagated through his dress, personal appearance, promiscuous behavior, and stories of his past. It was almost as though he understood full well what he was doing—the role he was acting with perfection—to test the perspective and the reactive mechanisms of those with whom he came into daily contact.

By his presence alone in the RV park, he was telling the world that he preferred the company of those who were at least transitory for a small part of their lives ... for most of the park residents were seasonal residents who chose the desert for their winter sojourns instead of the cold, wintry north. This particular park was also not one of the "High-end" RV parks, but rather somewhere near the middle. It was small by comparison, having barely 100 spaces compared to those larger ones with 500 or 1000 spaces.

As I spent more and more time with Montana, I found others warning me to "watch out". They had no justifiable explanation for their fears, but I fully understood where they were coming from, having myself grown up and gone to private schools with the children of the wealthier East Coast and New England families where fraternization with those of an apparently lower class was frowned upon or blocked. There is an instinctive mistrust of all unknown things bred into those raised in a carefully controlled social background which, though it produces a predictable consistency, works very well for those who only move horizontally within their class structure. For those who move as much vertically as horizontally, life is neither predictable nor consistent ... not at all like it is at the Golf and Country Club anyway.

Curiosity is one of those characteristics of the soul which social programming tends to quash as dangerous, frivolous, and irresponsible. Though I myself was a product of this carefully programmed training, my other life secretly and silently blew wind under the fires of my curiosity. Montana was an enigma to me ... and my curiosity begged to explore the experience. I did not, however, throw caution to the wind!

I had spent every summer of my life from birth in 1936 until 1954 in my Father's and Grandfather's Summer wilderness camp for boys in the back woods of rural Nova Scotia. From the time I was 10 years old, I had to work hard physically in order to carry my share

of the heavy annual maintenance load of sanding and painting canoes and boats, fixing roofs, putting out and taking in docks and rafts, shoveling out cesspools, cleaning sink drains clogged with cooking fats, hand-picking weeds from clay tennis courts, and a thousand similar tasks ... none of which I really enjoyed.

What I did enjoy was the hours spent in canoes on wilderness lakes and streams, the tenting, the campfires at night with stories of adventure, and the freedom to wander alone through miles of forest and logging roads. I often wondered later in my life why I was so attracted to places of great natural beauty and what it was about the "Explorer" in me that made exploration irresistible.

I realize now that curiosity is an inseparable and unquenchable characteristic of the soul. In the spontaneous exercising of curiosity we just naturally blow wind under its fires and we are either warmed by our experiences or burned by them until we learn what level of participation we are permitted. Like all the subtle characteristics of the soul, they are easily overwhelmed by their environment and social programming. In my canoeings up miles of silent, tree-lined riverways, or my wanderings through miles of changing forest and mountain scenery, it was inevitably my curiosity about what unique natural phenomenon or event lay around the corner that drew me incessantly onward and fired my curiosity for all the unusual things of life.

Since Dad was a teacher and headmaster of private schools in the Baltimore, Maryland, area throughout the rest of the year, I attended the schools where he was employed and was given the best of elementary education. He then sent me off to preparatory school and to my first year of college, telling me that my first year of college was on him but future years I would have to provide for myself.

Dad's Boston training had instilled in him the concept that it was as much who you knew as what you knew that increased your chances of survival and success in the world at large, and so I was also taught to dance, excel in sports, and be socially amenable amongst the well-to-do. I can't say that it didn't help. I probably owe more than I know to my early training. I can say this, however: I never felt that I belonged anywhere. I had a foot in each camp with no desire to land in either one. What it produced in me was an enigma which somehow had to be resolved.

Montana was obviously also one of those enigmatic individuals, and I was curious to see how he had resolved the inconsistencies in his own life. He had surely not taken the path I had, but I wanted to know where he was coming from in his journey, and wither his journey was leading him ... if he knew at all.



In the final analysis, I knew it didn't matter at all—that we're all headed to the same destination—but I also knew that no two journeys are ever the same. Montana's journey was not one that many would choose to take, would be equipped to take, or would survive if taken. Whether it was a journey in fact—or a journey in words—I will never know. If you ever wonder your- self, try making up a story like this one in your head!

Over the following weeks Montana and I would occasionally go out for breakfast together. On one of those occasions, Monty started talking about his early life—not all at once—just a little at a time.

"I had a terrible time with my sister," he said," she was bad ... always doing stuff and then swear up and down it was me that done it. Like, Dad had a jar of change on his dresser and she was always taking a quarter or fifty cents for candy or cigarettes. One day Dad confronted us both with his missing change and Gracie, she swore it was me did it. That was about all I could take from her so I started to put a beating on her. Well, Dad he hauled us apart and said if he ever saw me lay a hand on my sister again, he'd go upstairs and get his shotgun and that would be the end of me. I was 16 and figured there was no justice in that household so I went upstairs, put a few things together, and quietly walked out the door for good. I knew where I was going, and it wasn't to any friend's house for sure ... at least not the kind of friends welcome in my parents' household."

"Now, you have to realize Dad loved motorcycles. He was a contractor, and when he wasn't doing construction work he was on a Harley or a Honda or a Kawasaki somewhere out on the desert kicking up sand, making bikes do things they weren't designed to do. When I was barely big enough to walk, I had my own bike and I guess there was enough of my father in me that I soon got to doing motocrosses and other crazy stuff—stuff like teasing the Las Vegas cops.

When I was 12 or 13, I'd go roaring through town at about ninety or a hundred miles an hour—no muffler on the bike—looking for patrol cars to buzz late at night. I knew where they hung out—at hamburger stops and the like—so I'd roar around the block, they'd jump in the patrol car, turn on the gumball machine light, and the chase was on. I'd make sure they didn't lose me, but far enough away so they couldn't see who I was. No license plates on the bike, you know. Soon there was two—sometimes three—patrol cars, but I always stuck to the same part of town where I knew I could slip in past the gated community guards and squeeze out through the back gate or down the golf course. I even had a jump at one point where I could roar up the side of a golf course sandpit at 40 m.p.h. sharp and get enough lift off the sand pit to jump the five-foot high adobe wall around the development. I'd land headed downhill on the bank on the other side that sloped down into the main drainage canal. Then, lights off, I'd come roaring back to a



block or two from my parents' house, slow to an idle, turn my lights on at the driveway, punch the remote garage door opener, and slip quietly into the garage before the door was halfway up. With another punch of the remote button, the garage door reversed itself and closed. I'd walk into the house calm like I was just coming home from the store, open the fridge, and pull out a can of pop. All the time I could hear police sirens screaming a few blocks away."

"It got to be a lot of fun ... for me anyway. They did a real study on me—even set me up one night so I had to take the wall jump. They'd blocked off all the other roads, and there was a police jeep waiting for me at the bottom of the drainage canal. The minute I came over the wall, the jeep headlights went on and I could hear shotgun blasts. Boy, that got my adrenaline going! I went straight for the jeep and flipped my headlight on bright. I had to get past them so I could get to my escape route, an entrance to one of the main storm drains just big enough for me and the bike."

"I'd been through all the storm drains and sewers on my dirt bike and knew which ones were shallow, deep, or had nothing in them at all. Anyway, I was a real mess. As I was coming out of the tunnel I saw the reflections of rotating red lights above me, so I shut the bike down and out-waited them. Then I pushed the bike two blocks to home and washed myself and the bike down with a garden hose. I put my clothes in the washer myself, but Mom still wondered what stank in the laundry room. She said it smelled like the sewer had backed up. She was almost right ... except it walked through her door!"

"Like I said, I love bikes and I was always going down to the local motorcycle shop to watch the guys build their own bikes. I got to know the guys real good and I kinda liked them. They weren't exactly the crowd Mom and Dad ran with, you know, like the bridge, golf, country club set that I thought were all brain dead and just waiting around to die. These guys were alive! Most of them had spent time in prison for one thing or another, but they knew how much freedom really meant and how to walk that thin line between the law and prison. What I'm sayin' is that they'd figured out how to not get caught—and that's something I wanted to learn a lot more about."

"So when I left home, I threw in with them. They had a clubhouse—if you could call it that—nobody knew who owned the place. It was a dump, but the desert wind and cold couldn't get in and that became my new home."

"The club members were all "old" guys to me—me being 16 and all—but I was kinda like a mascot to them. They always had some whiskey for me, and some kind of woman. I don't know where either came from, but there in the dark it didn't much matter. And I never went back to my old home. I just plain didn't belong there."



"Like I said, I loved bikes, and I soon got to love building them. Somehow we always had a good supply of parts. I was never really quite sure where all the parts came from—at first anyway—but anyone in the club could build up any kinda bike he wanted and sell it and get good money for it. The only real problem we had was with serial numbers on engine crankcases and bike frames. For some reason or other—mostly the other—we couldn't use the old serial numbers when we registered our new-built bike. It stands to reason, you know, if you got a new bike you got to have a new serial number for it and we had one guy in the club who was a real crackerjack at grinding off old serial numbers. He'd build up a new serial number pad with a welder, file it down so it looked like new, and then he'd strike in new numbers. Man, he was good! We was good too. If your bike turned up missing, you'd never recognize what it turned into: wild paint colors; artistic designs; chopped frames; extended forks; and all kinds of crazy handlebars."

"We sorta kept the insurance companies in business, you know ... and a lotta guys on the streets got to buy new bikes with their insurance money. You gotta keep things in balance, you know! We always figured a bike was meant to be rode, not parked, and if it was parked the guy that owned it didn't really care much if it disappeared. Now you know why we travel in packs and never go far from our bikes!" and he laughed with a twinkle in his eye.

At this point in Montana's story the waitress brought our breakfast check and, since it was my turn, I paid it this particular morning. As we moved outside the restaurant, Monty lit up a cigarette and casually asked me:

"Wasn't you lookin' for a Sony laptop computer?"

The question took me somewhat by surprise because a week or so before, when Monty was in my motor home, I was explaining to him what I did with my sound and video editing computers, and had casually remarked that I was going to buy a laptop, like a Sony, with a firewire connector built-in. That, however, was my only mention of a laptop to him.

"Yes," I replied. "You remember that?"

"I don't miss much," he said, and I later learned how true that statement was!

"I put it out to some of my friends and got a call on it last night. A fellow needs some money for food for his kids and he has an almost new Sony he'll sell for \$600.00. Interested?"

I thought for a minute. It sounded more like a deal I couldn't refuse..... but maybe one I'd better refuse!

"Monty," I said, "I don't want to mess with any stolen stuff at all. I have a healthy respect for the law, and though I'm adventurous with my life in other ways, that's not one of the ways!"



"No, no," Monty replied. "I know that about you. This guy has a 'legit' receipt and you can talk to him yourself."

"Okay," I said, still hesitant. "We can look into it further then."

Later that morning, Monty and I climbed into his jeep and drove a few miles out of town to a mobile home subdivision. Every now and then he looked at a piece of paper in his hand and then at street signs until we pulled up in front of a mobile home that looked vacant. All window curtains were shut and the grass had not been mown for a while. Monty knocked on the sliding glass door several times. Finally a male voice from inside said:

"Who is it?"

"Mary sent me," Monty said. "We come to look at the computer."

"Just a minute."

The mobile home started coming to life. An infant started to cry ... and then a second started crying. A woman's voice tried to soothe them. A young man clad only in a pair of shorts and tattoos slid the glass door ajar and invited us in. He introduced himself and his wife, who was still in the fold-out bed there in the living room. Two very young children crawled on the floor; a third slept in the bed with its young mother.

"Can you show me the computer?" I asked.

The young man had to ask his wife where it was. After examining it, plugging it in, and making sure it worked, I asked:

"Would you mind telling me where it came from and showing me some sort of evidence that it's yours?"

The wife spoke up first:

"It's actually mine," she said. "Carl worked at a computer store several months ago and I bought it through him. I can show you the receipt. I hate to part with it, but it's the only way we can buy food for the kids.

After checking that the receipt serial number matched the computer serial number, I paid them, and Monty and I left.

"Anything else you want?" Monty asked as we drove away.

"No ... that's quite enough," I replied. "Thanks very much."

He nodded with a smile of satisfaction.

Montana's credibility had risen another couple of notches in my estimation and I was becoming intrigued with this enigma of a man whose word had proven to be accurate and without any apparent selfish interest despite his personal appearance. My curiosity became even further elevated when we arrived back at Montana's motor home. Parked in front of his space stood a brand new, white Cadillac.

"Hah! ..." exclaimed Monty with surprise. "Mom's here! Come on in and meet my parents."



I was quite surprised to meet a couple slightly older than myself who both were affable and friendly like Monty. And though Monte's father wore jeans and a shirt with a collar, his mother was impeccably dressed in expensive clothes which matched the Cadillac image. She was dressed as she had for years as a real-estate sales person in Las Vegas during its early years of growth. Montana's father had been a land sub-divider and Contractor, and his demeanor seemed slower than I had imagined from Monty's descriptions of him as a motorcycle rider. I mentioned the fact to him and he laughed: "It's amazing how much a heart bypass and a pacemaker changes you," he said.

Later, after his parents had left, I looked at Monty and said:

"Monty ... are you an adopted child?"

He had a good laugh at that!

"Nope," he said. "That's Mom and Dad!"

It was a week or so before Montana and I had breakfast together again. After eating, we took a drive out into the desert foothills outside Las Vegas.

"See that old dilapidated warehouse over there?" Monty said. I nodded.

"On any weekend, there'd be over 800 bikes out there and a party like you what wouldn't want to be at! I rented the place after I started my own motorcycle club and we had a bar that never closed."

"You started a motorcycle club?" I asked.

"Yeah ... started here in Vegas and then move down to L.A. By the time we got to L.A. we were a big club ... about two thousand members ... and these were not a bunch of pussies either. Keeping that bunch under control was one for the books."

"How did you manage it?" I asked.

"We had rules," Monty said, "And they was strict! Alcohol and pot was allowed; no hard drugs or chemicals ... and even then if somebody got out of hand with alcohol, like pull a knife on one of the brothers, he was out. They all wanted to be in, so whenever someone looked like they was gettin' a little out of hand, I'd get called and have to step into the middle of it ... and I've got more than a few knife wounds to show you what bein' in the middle of two knives and two guys bigger than you looks like."

"I took courses in psychology—and I'm not talkin' college courses in psychology either. I'm talkin' mind control, and psychic energy training, body language, how to start rumors about your power, and so on ... things like you only find in a place like L.A.."

"First thing I did was hand pick two of the biggest, smartest, fastest, quietest guys in the club for my right-hand men. I can barely read or write, you know, but I wasn't tellin' them that. In fact, I made sure they never got to know me too well ... sort of kept a distance between us ... and even more distance with the club members. But I had informers

everywhere, and I never let on. Whenever I found out someone was startin' their own brand of trouble or doin' somethin' bad for the club, I'd sort of take them by surprise and put a stop to it. Then I'd start a rumor that I knew psychic-like what everybody was up to."

"The time that really settled all the issues of power was the time one of the brothers run up to me in a big sweat sayin' two of the brothers was high on crack or something and had broke into an apartment. It was the early hours of morning and they had two young girls with them. The girls were screamin' ... sounded real serious."

"We had a sort of a secret compartment in the saddlebag of my No. 2 guy's bike where I kept a sawed-off shotgun. I never carried a weapon of any kind ... not even a knife ... not until much later when the gang wars got out of hand. I couldn't afford to get sent away for correction; I was too valuable and too happy doin' what I was doin'."

"Anyway, two of us went down to the apartment and I told my partner to stay away unless he saw a police car pull up. I went up to the apartment door and I could hear someone moaning inside. I tried the door, but it was locked so I kicked it in and what I saw would've made you vomit. Both girls were naked and covered with blood. One was dead. The other should've been she was so badly mutilated."

"Next thing I knew, one of the guys come around the corner after me and I blew a hole in his chest big enough to throw a softball through. The next shot drifted the other guy's head off his shoulders. I got the hell out of there and sort of vanished in the dark, then had one of the guys call an ambulance. We pulled outa' there in a hurry."

"Good God, Monty," I said. "How did you deal with the police investigation? Couldn't the police identify the club members?"

"We didn't have no club insignias or tattoos or anything we could be identified by. That was one of the rules. But the word did get around the club about what happened—sort of like wildfire—and that's when I become more like a legend than a leader."

"Jesus," I said, "Where you go from there? Didn't that kind of weigh heavily on your mind?"

"If you'd seen what I saw, you'd never think twice about it. I never lost a moment's sleep over it. You're an ex U.S. Marine ... what's it like to have to kill someone?"

"I was spared that travesty, Montana," I said. "Pilot's don't get to see the hell they create on the ground. What happened after that?"

"There never was any kind of investigation into those killings. The police must've figured it was just another gang murder ... which it was ... and they pretty much let the underworld take care of itself. But that was the beginning of the times when the club got to be too

serious and less and less fun. More and more guys were messing with drugs, and soon there were wars between biker clubs for territories and drug sales."

"Not much fun in that kind of life," I remarked.

"Nope!...But we still had some fun along the way ... like the Saturday night poker games. We called it "poke-her", and it was a kind of special way to spend Saturday night. Bein' from Vegas and all, we knew all the showgirls on the strip. We knew what kinda "dancers" they was, and whether they liked to earn money on the side, so to speak. Some did; some didn't; some were too expensive; and some just liked bikers. We always treated 'em good."

"Every now and then, when there was no club activity, I'd call four or five of the guys who'd been with me the longest and arrange a game of poker at the 'Garage'. The garage was a rented storage shed where we kept things we didn't want nobody to find. We always rented it in the name of some guy we didn't like, and paid cash for it. Had a big fancy motor home stored in there, a bunch of bike parts ... and a bunch of bikes up for 'renovation'. The Garage was in an industrial park so there wasn't nobody around at night and we could play music loud ... and I mean it was LOUD! Had a big round card table and chairs in the corner with a light overhead ... pool table not far away."

"We'd get there about nine o'clock at night, have a few drinks, listen to music, and play pool. Ten o'clock rolled around and the girls arrived. There was always at least as many girls as there was guys; whichever one of us arranged for the girls always arranged for that. If we come up short, too bad for the last game loser! Sometimes the girls would bring a friend or two. But the catch was this: the winner and the winner's whole pot always went to the girl the winner chose. Then it was the girl's turn. If she didn't like the guy, or the pot, she could pass. That was her game. At the very least, the girls all got free drinks for the night. Then the next game started while the first winner disappeared with his winnings. Mostly the girls were dancers because they was strong and in good shape—better shape than we was, too. Lotta times we'd ask them to dance for us so we could kinda get some idea what the winners was going to get for the money ...heh,heh,heh!"

"Didn't they work in the shows on Saturday night?" I asked naively.

"They wasn't just one show on Saturday night. In Vegas they's a show day and night, seven days a week, and two or three lineups for each different show," Montana replied.

"How much was your poker pot?" I asked.

"You had to come to the table with \$500.00. Sometimes the pot was a hundred bucks, sometimes it was a thousand. Of course, if the girl you picked passed on you because



of the pot, you could always raise the ante. It always amazed me how good lookin' some guy's got when the price went up!"

"Speak for yourself, Monty," I laughed, having seen a steady stream of women aged 18 to 40 arrive at or leave his motor home at all hours of the night. None of them appeared very attractive to me, but then I'm so particular I've spent a large part of my life alone.

"You just don't have no fun, man!"

"Too right, Monty," I said, "Too right!"

Right then I was dying to know how Montana had lived through the biker wars he was talking about, so I asked him:

"Tell me about the biker wars," I said.

"30 years ago, drinkin' and sex and ridin' up the coast highway through Big Sur and the Mendocino Coast with a couple of hundred bikes was just plain fun. But as the club got bigger it sort of took on a personality of its own, and that personality wasn't always under my control. One weekend a bunch of us decided to go up to Big Bear and have a party. The 'bunch' turned out to be a thousand bikers who took over the town, blocked off the roads, and terrorized everyone in town. I was real nervous till that weekend was over ... and it was only over because there wasn't a drop of alcohol left in town."

"When a club gets big like that, you don't know who's who and a lot of the club members was also members of other clubs. It started getting to the point where alcohol wasn't enough and drugs and money became more important than fun. Also, the guys who ran the most famous bikers club of all—and you know who that is—were far more ruthless than I was. You either did what they wanted and paid them what was due or you just disappeared. Do you realize there's some 20,000 people a year who just vanish from the L.A. basin never to be heard from again?"

"I soon learned there was a price on my own head and my two right-hand men. It wasn't just hearsay either; I could hear the nails being pounded in my coffin. One night at about 3AM I was in bed asleep when all hell broke loose. Machine-gun bullets smashed into my walls, shotgun blast blew out every window in the place, and in the morning I counted 700 bullet holes in the House. That was the end of the fun for me; those boys were a little too serious about their game and I wasn't about to die or nail myself to a cross just yet."

"That day I called a meeting of the club and told everyone what most of them already knew: it was time to move to newer places that were fun and not all so serious as life-and-death. I had a plan, mostly to save my own ass, and I asked the club members to round up as many bikes as they could because something big was going down early Monday morning."



"Come Monday morning I sent the word around to surround the L.A. police station with as many bikes as possible at 9:00 a.m. sharp. Over a thousand showed up. As they was movin' in to block off all the roads and access to the building, I pulled up on the police department's steps with a four-wheel drive pickup — backed right up to the front door— got out and pulled the tarpaulin off 17 cases of dynamite stacked in the pickup bed. The bikers all started racing their engines and blowing their horns. Some guy came out of the station, looked at me, looked at the dynamite, and his face went white with shock."

"Jesus Christ, LeFandra," he said, "what the hell d'you think you're doing?"

"I want to talk to the Chief of the LAPD," I said quietly.

"You're talking to him," the chief said with restored composure.

"I want to make a deal," I said. "Right now my life, your life, and the life of everyone in this building ain't worth any more than that stack of dynamite right there and you have exactly five minutes to get this deal closed. The deal is this: safe asylum and protection for me and two of my men. We agree to leave California and never come back for 10 years, and we agree to never ride a motorcycle or join or form a bike club in California again. I'll disband this club and we'll move to parts unknown outside of California. Deal?"

The Chief looked hard at me for a few seconds.

"Sounds reasonable, in fact that would just be a big headache off my shoulders," he replied, "but there's one problem: I don't have the authority to grant you asylum. Only the Federal Government can do that."

"The Feds started work three hours ago in Washington, D.C., and you got five minutes to get that authority," I said.

"Look, I'll do the best I can," the chief said with a flustered voice. "You don't have to fear retaliation from here; I'll be some damned relieved to see you gone." and with those parting words the Chief disappeared inside the building.

"Five minutes went by ... then 10 minutes went by and I was beginning to sweat. Bikes were starting up. Horns started to blow, and I was beginning to think the club members was realizin' that gettin' blown up was not in their game plan. I nodded my head to them and motioned for them to leave. Most of them did, but a few of 'em stayed. I climbed in the truck and started the engine, and just then a police officer came out of the door, walked over to me and said:

"The Chief's on the phone to the Governor and the Governor's calling the FBI in Washington. It shouldn't be but a few more minutes."

The guy was pretty white when he looked at all that dynamite. He sure as hell didn't want to go back in that building ... but he did! Four minutes later, the Chief came out of



the building and over to where I was sitting behind the wheel of the truck with what was actually an old TV remote in my hand.

"Your deal is accepted. I can only give you my word as I heard it from the Governor. Is that good enough?" he asked.

"Good enough for now," I replied. "I'll be out of the state permanently by tonight. I'll call you when I'm settled somewhere. If things don't work out, this dynamite'll be back."

I put the truck in gear and slowly made my way down the steps, headed for our Garage with about 10 guys riding their bikes a good safe distance behind. Once inside the Garage, I close the doors, climbed up on the boxes of dynamite and untied them. The guys were all standing around watching when I picked up one of the cases and threw it off the truck.

"Here ... catch this!" I said.

Well, you should've seen the looks as that wooden case crashed on the concrete floor, broke open, and nothing but a few desert rocks spilled out. I just smiled. I always was a good poker player!

CHAPTER 3.

A few days after Montana finished that part of the story, he stopped by my travel trailer one morning.

"Can you make a business card with your computer?" he asked.

"Oh yes ... sure." I replied. "I have some blank sheets of them for my inkjet printer. What do you want them to say?"

"Something like ... well ... I'm not exactly sure. But I want them to have my name and the name of my boat."

"Your boat?" I said rather incredulously. "You have a boat? Is it a rowboat, or a speedboat, or what?"

"No, no," Montana replied with a slight smile. "Its a 70-foot trimaran—one of the few super trimarans ever built, as a matter of fact. There's only a couple of builders who know how to make them so they can withstand the constant twisting and wave action of the ocean."

"Montana ... come on now," I said. "You live in this crummy old motor home, drive a beat-up old jeep that runs on three cylinders, look more like a biker or a trucker, and you expect me to believe that one?"

Montana just chuckled quietly, looked me right in the eye and said:

"You don't have to believe me," and after a brief pause added, "Just make me up a few business cards with my name, my phone number, and the name of the boat on it. The boat's name is the Wicked Mistress, and you know my name and phone number."

"Ok," I said, "What's the card for?"

"All these women you see coming and going from my motor home?" he said as a kind of question.

"Yes!" I replied emphatically.

"They're applying for jobs on my boat!"

I looked at Montana incredulously. It took awhile for that one to sink in.

"Jobs?" I said. "What kind of jobs ... and how many jobs are there on this boat of yours?"

"There's just three jobs: "cook, clean, and screw. They're full-time jobs with me, so we change the crew every month or so. The same crew comes back on duty every other month. I pay their air-fare to and from their home to wherever the boat's located in the world, and I'm leaving for a five-year cruise around the world in three months. Each girl gets hundred thousand dollars a year and she's paid \$5,000.00 cash in advance so she can go home anytime she gets tired of the game."

I sat there taking all this in ... and though I've been down a good many primrose paths, I'd never been down one quite like this before. I thought to myself:

"This guy is unreal ... literally! But what's he stand to gain from me? I'm retired, don't have any money except enough to live on! At the very least I've got to hear the end of this story.

Montana continued:

"The last two girls I had on the boat were smart. They were with me for over a year and they used the money they earned from me to start or buy their own businesses. One owns a car-wash business in Henderson that'll support her for the rest of her life. The other owns a beauty shop with three trained beauticians and she doesn't have to work at all. They both want to come back on the boat, but I told 'em they can't play forever ... and besides I needed a little change, if you know what I mean."

I nodded and smiled, wondering what was next, when Montana got up to leave.

"See what you can do." he said. "I need cards to give to 'perspective' crew members."

"Perspective" may be a more appropriate word in this case than prospective, I thought to myself ... but a hundred thousand dollars a year! I'm sure there's plenty of women in this town who'll take a yacht, free travel around the world, and a grizzled old biker for that amount of money for a year of their lives—especially if neither one of them seems very particular about personal appearances. So I went to work making up some impressive business cards for Capt. Montana LeFandra of the yacht Wicked Mistress. They looked pretty good so I took 50 over to his motor home.

"Fantastic ... perfect!" he said, reaching for his wallet. "Can I pay you for them?"

"Nope," I said. "The story's worth it ... and then some!" and we both had a good laugh.

"One more thing, Montana," I said. "And you might as well blow me away completely. Where the hell are you getting all this money anyway?"

"Well, I suppose I can tell you ... if you can keep your mouth shut," he said.

"Go ahead," I said.

"You remember I was telling you I left California for good when the club folded up. I sold most of my stuff, but kept four bikes—one of them the big Norton I used in Steve McQueen's movie—and some furniture. I loaded it all in a big U-Haul, towed my pickup truck, and vanished without tellin' no-one where I was goin'. Actually, I said I was goin to Phoenix, but instead I went to Laughlin, Nevada, where I could play at the casinos. I can always eke out a living at the casinos with Black Jack and the Crap tables, and it's a good thing because it took the damn government two months to process my papers and find a safe place to put me."

"Montana," I interrupted, "wasn't working the casinos a little risky considering that Vegas and L.A. are only a few hours away and bikers like casinos as well as you?"

"Well, I wasn't exactly advertising my presence," Montana replied. "I dressed like a cowboy ... tied my pony tail on top of my head under a big black Stetson hat. Wore some ridic'lous high-collar shirt, fancy cowboy boots and dress pants ... and I only went in the casinos in the morning when most bikers'r sound asleep. Still there was more than a few times I had to duck behind the slot machines or just get the hell out of the club."

"I drove a hundred miles or so over into Arizona every time I wanted to make phone calls, and finally had to quietly threaten the L.A. Police Chief again, but the FBI finally came through with the new ID ... which I can't tell you too much about because they'll use it again. Anyways, they moved me twice and we finally agreed that a small farm in the mountains of Montana close to the Idaho and Canadian border would be my new home."

"It wasn't much of a farm ... rundown old house with a few hundred acres and an old apple orchard. I set to work fixing up the old farm house. I mean I got water running inside and a wood stove working so I could have heat. It was beautiful country, but something was missing and I figured out right away what it was: women! Man ... that one was tough on me. There wasn't no women up there like in L.A. and Vegas. Them country women'd take one look at me and run the other way. I was thinkin': Do I have some kind of disease or somethin'? That was the hardest part of living out in the country."

"Plus I had a helluva time figuring out what to do with myself. I ain't no farmer! Nothing comes up out of the ground fast enough for me—except maybe oil—and there wasn't none of that for a thousand miles. I sure couldn't go back into the bike 'renovations' business; wasn't any big cities for miles and it seemed everybody in small towns knew exactly who was doin' what with who and how many times, so I didn't think I'd get away with much for long. Besides, I had to stay out of sight and out of mind. In the bike world you're a big hero if you knock off one of the big guys and live to tell about it ... and I can tell you from personal experience there's more than a few buried out on the desert that tried and didn't make their bet good."

"Anyways I took the Norton into Sand Point one Saturday and was sittin' in a bar tryin' to drown my loneliness when an old guy—that would'a been anyone over 50, and I was 35—came in and sat down at the bar next to me. He was the only one in there looked scruffier than me had a beat-up old rancher's hat on his head, muddy cowboy boots on his feet ... and smell! He smelled like he'd been rolling in horseshit! I looked at him kind of wide-eyed and sideways and said:



"Smells like you climbed up a horse's ass lookin' for a nickel!" I said.

"He took a quick look at me and when he saw I was smiling, he started to laugh, and that was the beginning of the longest friendship I've ever had. He's how I come to be called Montana."

"It's funny, you know, how things just happen in ways you'd never think of. Here I was trying to figure out how to turn a penny into a nickel a thousand ways ... but don't you know it just sits down beside me and his answer fits like a glove custom-made for my own hand. He was a horse wrangler and hunting guide in northern Idaho and his nickname was Idaho after the Idaho potato dishes he served up on his hunting trips back into the Kootenai and Kaniksu high country. He can cook anything from potato pancakes to potato bread, Elk steak stew, and Cajun Rappie pie from a handful of potatoes ... all that on a shepherd's stove in an 8 by 10 wall tent, and you never had the same dish twice. We had about ten beers together and he says to me:

"Can you ride a horse?"

"Never tried," I said, "But I can jump a Kawasaki dirt bike over a five-foot-high brick wall, and run a Harley into a parked car at forty miles an hour and walk away with only a few bruises."

"You do that for fun?" he asked, looking at me with wide eyes.

"I did some stunt work for Hollywood movies a few years ago," I said.

"At forty miles an hour I'd look more like grasshopper meat on a windshield! How the hell do you avoid that?" he asked.

"You leap for the sky just before you hit the car and you land on an air bag or in a pool of water that the camera can't see," I said.

"Oh! ... It's a wonder you haven't decided to be a rodeo cowboy," he added.

"Them bulls don't snort loud enough, and there's no air bags underneath 'em" I said.

"And besides, if I'm gonna bust my ass I want to get well paid for it."

"I guess if you can ride an iron horse you won't have any trouble with my old plugs. If you want to help me for free for a season or two, I'll teach you everything I know and you can set up your own business on the Montana side ... and I'll call you Montana so you don't forget which side of the state line you belong on. There's more game in the Purcell and Cabinet Mountains in Montana than you'll be able to hunt."

I spent a full season with Idaho and learned real quick how to stalk wild game, load a pack saddle, hobble horses, feed hungry hunters, and kill game for a hunter too drunk or scared to kill a bear for himself. We had more damned fun together that season; I've never laughed so often or so hard in my life. Idaho had this real dry sense of humor and a lot of times you couldn't tell if he was kidding or serious—until you got to know that



he was never serious about anything. He seemed to me to be too streetwise and well-spoken to be a back-country horse wrangler and I told him that one day.

"You're right," he said. "I grew up in the city just like you. I got into trouble in the city, and I left, and that's all I'll say about it. 'Idaho' is all the name you need to know."

"So we never talked about our past, but both of us knew a lot of time would have to pass before we could go back to our old world—if either of us even wanted to. It's funny how both of us coming from the city made such good hunters and game trackers. I've never known country people who ever adapted as well to the city."

"After spending a long season with Idaho, I took the few dollars I had left from my L.A. days and bought a string of pack horses and some secondhand outfitter's gear and took myself off into the mountains to learn the country, the horses, and the game. I figured I wouldn't wait for no advertising to bring the customers, so I went down to Boise, Coeur d'Alene, and into Kalispell and Missoula and Great Falls, and called every doctor's and lawyer's office I could call. I asked the secretary or whoever answered the phone if the doctor or lawyer was a hunter. If they was, I told the secretary I was the best hunting guide in the West and had pictures to prove it and was just traveling through and would like to take 10 or 15 minutes of their time so they could meet me. I must of called a hundred doctors, lawyers, contractors, or anyone else who owned a big business. I ended up with more business than I could handle, and even sent some over to Idaho."

"When you're on a hunting trip with a man you shut up and let your customer do the talking or you get him talking about his self. I learned that trick in my L.A. night courses as a way to make people like you. But that didn't work all the time! There was one particular attorney talked me around in circles. He sort-of-like crept up on me or stalked me like I'd sneak up on an Elk. I'd try to get him talking about himself and he would drop a line or two and then the conversation ended up a question for me to answer or just a comment and silence ... like he knew exactly what I was doing. After a few days he knew more about me than I knew about me, and I knew nothing—and I mean nothing—about him, except where he lived ... and he wasn't the one told me that! He never touched a drop of alcohol either, except a beer before dinner.

Anyway, just before he went home with his trophy bear—that he shot himself with one shot—he said to me:

"Montana, if you want to have money, you aren't going to get it being a hunting guide. But there's a business for sale in Coeur d'Alene that would make you a wealthy man, and I think you have a mind for it."

"What kind of business is that?" I asked.

"A pawnshop," the attorney said.

"Man ... I don't know nothin' about buyin' and sellin' junk," I said.



"That's not what pawnbrokers do," he said. "Pawn brokers are money lenders—and they're ruthless—and they have to be because the people who borrow money from a pawnbroker are usually very stubborn people who don't want to change what they're doing or not doing."

"But I don't have a pot to piss in, if you wanta know the truth," I said.

"You own a farm, don't you?" he asked.

"Well ... it ain't exactly mine," I said.

"If you're a farmer, you could qualify for a government loan of up to two hundred thousand dollars for seed and equipment ... and that will make the down payment on the pawn shop and give you money to loan. It's not exactly legal, but I think you could pull it off. What you would have to do is start making payments within a year and gradually increase them so they don't want to audit you. You should have the government paid back within five years at the latest. This pawnshop makes money! I know! The owner is one of my clients and an old friend. The risk is yours initially, but if you can make it work I may just want be a silent partner later on so you have more money to lend."

"But how do I get that government loan? I don't know nothin' about borrowing money legally through banks and stuff?" I asked.

"That's one of the things I do," he said, "...for a fee that you don't have to pay me until the loan comes through. We can make a paper farmer out of you in a New York minute!"