

Chapter 9

Several days had passed since Weylin had been put on notice by the board. During that time, he painfully erased several of Cassandra's messages from his answering machine. The feeling of guilt was so powerful that it required all of his rationalizing abilities to avoid returning her calls. Vincent's warning, and that of the board, takes precedence, he told himself.

Wednesday morning found Weylin at his desk, reviewing the vineyard's buyer agreement that Charlie had faxed earlier that morning. He carefully examined the document looking for evidence of the actual principals but found only the name of the holding company wherever reference to seller appeared. He picked up the phone and dialed Charlie direct.

"Basso Investments," a sexy, throaty voice crooned.

"This is Weylin McCain, is Mr. Basso available?"

“Just one moment,” she said.

“Weylin, I guess you got the contract?” Charlie remarked.

“Yes, but there is still no mention of the principals.”

“Why is that so important. There’s nothin’ unusual about buying from a holding company, it’s a legal entity.”

“Yeah, I understand but I’d feel more comfortable dealing with a person and a name.”

“Well, that ain’t gonna happen.”

“Alright, what about the bank application? Any word on that?”

“I got a verbal OK on that yesterday and the written confirmation should be here this morning. Don’t worry, it’s in the bag, all I need is your signature on the original contract. If you say the word, I’ll send my secretary over with it, she’s a notary.”

“What about the name change?”

“The seller’s Italian lawyer has been in contact with ours, the paper work is ready to be filed as soon as the funds are transferred.”

“OK, send her over.”

He hung up the phone with one hand and buzzed the intercom with the other.

“Martha,” he said, “get me the legal department.” While waiting, he took a deep breath and looked about the office that he had come to call home. The walls were painted a soft white and were decorated with copies of the old masters. A modern tapestry covered couch sat at the back of the room and two honey colored leather chairs faced the front of his rosewood desk, the same desk that he had supported himself against in the course of one very wild sexual encounter with the prior CEO, Macy Collier.

The buzz of the intercom shattered his reverie. “Legal on one,” Martha chimed.

“What’s the final decision on the Cassandra statement?” Weylin inquired.

“It’s been written but it is our opinion that you should not be involved in its release.

We will make certain that it is leaked to the wire service in such a way that it does not immediately appear to be a form of damage control,” the legal director advised.

“Who’s going to believe that?”

“We’ve minimized the relationship aspects and emphasized the fact that you had no real knowledge of her business and that you had not visited her warehouse. That is true, is it not?”

“Yes, thank God. I never did visit the damn place, in fact, until I read about it in the newspaper, I didn’t even know the address.”

“Good, keep it that way. No further contact with her or her attorney’s, should they call.”

He’s the third person to tell me that, Weylin commented to himself, as he put down the telephone receiver, his stomach reminding him that it was lunch time, and headed for the executive dining room.

Although his pangs of hunger had reached a peak as he approached the dining room, the sight of Franklin Dobbs seated at a table near his usual, gave him pause. Oh crap, he’s seen me, he said to himself, as he contemplated returning to his office to peruse a delivery menu.

“Won’t you join me?” Dobbs asked, as Weylin approached his usual table near the window.

“I don’t have enough antacid,” he murmured under his breath, adding, with a feigned smile, “how nice of you to ask.”

Weylin sat opposite Dobbs and examined the day’s menu but couldn’t take his eyes from the spectacle that sat across from him. Dobbs was methodically picking away at a Greek salad while apparently experiencing tactical difficulty dealing with the olive pits. With no place to appropriately dispose of them, he covered his mouth with his right hand and spat them out; one pit hit the floor beneath his feet but a second rocketed across the table striking Weylin in the forehead and landing on his soup spoon. “Excuse me,” Dobbs said, without the slightest sign of embarrassment.

Weylin was about to make a conciliatory response but the morning’s stress caused him to respond with uncontrollable laughter as he noticed several large chunks of feta cheese clinging to Dobbs’ moustache. In response, Dobbs did something entirely uncharacteristic, he began to laugh as well. The laughter subsided; Weylin placed his lunch order and focused on the tablecloth.

“I trust you have dealt with the problem we discussed at the board meeting?” Dobbs inquired.

Weylin, stifling a giggle when he noticed that the cheese was not about to give up its nest in the black moustache, swallowed hard. “The legal department,” he replied, “has taken care of it and suggested that I distance myself.”

“Good, then perhaps we will hear no more of that,” Dobbs responded, as he pushed back his chair and left the table with Weylin staring after him, thinking, I hope those chunks

hold on for dear life for the rest of the day, he deserves the humiliation.

As Weylin left the dining room, his lunch hardly digested, he was intercepted by Martha. "I thought I should prepare you," she warned.

"For what?"

"There is a scantily dressed young lady waiting to see you; said she has some papers that need your signature."

He ginned. *Sexy voice*, he thought to himself, I always wanted to have a look at the person that goes with it. Martha returned to her desk as Weylin escorted Charlie's secretary into his office and closed the door.

"Nice to meet you Dr. McCain. Charlie said to have you sign these contracts and afterwards I'll notarize them if your secretary can be a witness?" she said, with her head cocked.

Trying hard not to stare at the pointy braless chest peeking through the thin red silk blouse and the long shapely legs barely covered by her minuscule tight black spandex skirt, he gestured for her to place the documents on his desk.

"Just sign wherever you see a red X."

As Weylin flipped through and signed several copies of the many page contract, Charlie's secretary gazed about the office and in doing so, jostled a pile of mail causing it to fall to the ground. Her quick movement caught his attention but not as acutely as the vision before him. As she bent to retrieve the mail, with her back to Weylin, her micro skirt rose to

an awe inspiring height, clearly revealing her lack of underwear. Try as he may, he could not avert his eyes.

With a toothy grin, she rose, adjusted her skirt and replaced the mail; he picked up his fallen pen and went back to the task at hand, thinking, and Charlie claims his days are boring.

As he was escorting the secretary from his office, a tall suited man pushed his way in with Martha in tow. “I tried to announce him but he wouldn’t wait,” she pleaded.

“Can I help you?” Weylin asked, as the man entered the office and closed the door while flipping open a badge wallet. “Special Agent Simon, FBI,” he barked. “I have a few questions I need to ask of you.”

“Do I need my attorney?” Weylin asked, a chuckle disguising his obvious concern.

“That’s your decision,” the agent said, unemotionally, “but I don’t think it’s necessary.”

“OK, go ahead, but make it quick, it’s a busy day.”

“Yeah, I know, everybody gets busy when we’re around.”

“Well?” Weylin asked, as Simon looked around the room.

“Cassandra Bannister, she’s your girlfriend, right?”

“She is a social acquaintance, that’s all.”

“C’mon, doc, you two have had your pictures taken at all kinds of charity functions, I’d guess that you know each other pretty well,” he said, winking at the same time.

“That, my friend, is none of your business, so, why don’t you get to the point.”

“Alright, I’m not here to make an enemy. Just need to confirm what we believe to be true, that is, that whatever your relationship was,” he winked again, “that you had no knowledge of her business dealings whatsoever.”

“You have my word on that.”

“OK, doc, we may want you to say that in court.”

“If necessary, but if at all possible, a deposition would be more workable given my busy schedule.”

The FBI agent rose without another word and left. Weylin followed him out of the office, stopping at Martha’s desk. “Any more dragons for me to slay?” he asked, his words dripping with sarcasm.

“No sir, I’m sorry.”

“OK, it’s four o’clock, I’m going back into my office, check my e-mail and then I’m going home,” he said, as he turned, making a mental note to record the day as one to remember, in more ways than one.

Weylin eased into his desk chair and opened the lid on his laptop computer. It was on and connected to the net. He scrolled through the fifty or so e-mail messages that had not been filtered out by his spam blocking software. Most were from vendors and customers but one seemed out of place. A large, hand drawn happy face adorned the upper half of the page, beneath it was a message that read, *Encountered traffic on the way to the Art Information Forum. They are very interested in your work and have taken a personal interest in you.*

Max Bites

What the hell does that mean, he wondered, and who is Max Bites. He shut down the computer and left the office.