

THE SOUND OF FIST STRIKING JAW MAY NOT HAVE REVERBERATED around the interrogation room, but the recipient felt the blow rattle the inside of his skull. “Ouch.”

“Ouch? Ouch is all you can say, Harper?” The speaker, the third man in the brightly light room with its easy to clean wall tiles, moved to stand inches away, so close the smell of tobacco was discernible upon his breath. “Do you understand, we’re not pussyfooting around, my friend? Give it up, Harper, or Knuckles, here, will loosen one or two of your front teeth. Do you like the nickname Knuckles? I thought it up myself. Rather good, don’t you think?”

“You’re a double douchebag, do you know that Midnight?” Harper was addressing his onetime friend, Kurt Mitchell. Elven years ago, they had conspired together to cheat at cards, winning the pot in a ten million dollar poker tournament by exploiting Harper’s ability to read the other player’s minds. And then Mitchell had betrayed him in an attempt to keep the winning all to himself. Nevertheless, Mitchell had paid the price of betrayal, or so Harper thought, by being thrown off a bridge into the icy waters below. Somehow the traitor had survived, and now was standing there gloating that he had the upper hand.

“I told the FBI, the Camp Commandant, and I’m telling you; I

refuse to use my mind-reading ability to interrogate the prisoners locked up in this wretched place. Beating the shit out of me isn't going to change my mind."

Mitchell laughed. "Roger, Roger, Roger." Harper hated anyone but his wife, Julia, from addressing him by his first name. "We're not here to instill in you a sense of patriotism. What I require from you is the number of the Swiss bank account where you keep my money."

"Your money? How do you figure it's your money?"

"Because you stole my share of the poker winnings. I simply want to collect my dues," Mitchell replied. "With interest of course,"

"In your dreams, Midnight. In your dreams."

Mitchell nodded to Knuckles, a brute of a man over six feet tall, weighing over three hundred pounds.

"Fugh," Harper screamed. "Yuv boke muh jaw."

In response, Mitchell grinned. "Don't insult my man. He's a professional. He hasn't broken your jaw, Roger. Just dislocated it a little; that's all. Do the honors, Knuckles. We can't have our friend speaking funny; now can we?"

There was a cracking sound, followed by more screaming as Knuckles popped Harper lower mandrel back into place.

"Don't be such a baby," Mitchell counseled. "Do everyone a favor and tell me what I need to know before Knuckles becomes impatient for his cut."

"What's he going to do next; waterboard me?"

"Roger, Roger. I wouldn't dream of such a thing. However, Knuckles does have a chemist friend, who is rather good at administering very unpleasant injections. It will take a day or two to set up. After that, you won't be able to resist. You'll be singing like a canary." Mitchell looked at his wristwatch. "Still; I can't stand around chatting with you all day. Time for lunch. But first, we'll get you back to your cozy little cell. Remind me, before I leave, to tell the chef to liquidize your meals for a while," he added with a chuckle.