

# The Lady At The Ranch

## **A Travel Into Nothing**

I finally decided to use the Interstate 5, not along the coast, not the ocean, but the farm land. So I started my Sunbeam, let the motel behind me and headed towards the interstate. But I took not the direct way, drove past West Lake Park and through Korea Town, but not further on, the Rose Garden and Santa Monica. I turned round, China Town and the Dodgers Stadium, Elysian Park and the Los Angeles River. And then the Zoo, to say goodbye to a young giraffe - through the Valley to the mountains. It was interesting how easy it was in fact to leave, to let the "civilization" behind you, how much the countryside easily changed, with millions of people behind you and a steep ascent in front of you, the mountains in the morning light.

The mountains in the morning light, only the summits touched by the sunbeams, the rest of them in a shade of cool. The brown mountains with only a sparse vegetation, a few bushes, a few small trees and a lot of brown soil. Nevertheless it was a wonderful sight, calm and inviting and I thought about to stop, to climb one of the mountains, towards the sunbathed top, towards the morning sun, towards life. But then, if you had a closer look, you became aware about how much this nature was hurt. At many places you could saw the deep cuts of erosion.

Every year it became hotter and hotter with less and less rain. And then, if one of the few heavy rainfalls came, the ground was not able to keep the water, droughts and floodings, a dangerous combination, not to forget the wildfires. Every year they became more and more severe, more and more people were affected. Or should you say, that every year more and more people settled in areas endangered by wildfires all the time? And still the discussions about, how much this was a human fault, as if nature would need the humans and not the humans nature. There would be a time this mountains will be no longer, new mountains will arise. This will be with or without the humans, earth not needed them.

Then Santa Clarita, again civilization, but much more human sized then what was behind me. I saw the many roller coasters of the Six Flags Magic Mountains amusement park and thought for a moment whether I should stop there or not. But I just started with my trip and more mountains waited for me. On the other side, why not stay here? Only a few miles from the big city, so much differently all appeared - but I had the feeling this would be not far enough.....

San Francisco, really? I thought about to stay in one of the smaller cities between the two big ones. Or, why not more northern than the city by the bay? I had no distinct aim. And I had no plan about the travel as such. I started to drive, to drive till I would stop, maybe a motel, maybe I would continue with my travel the next day, maybe I would stay, stay for one or two days, maybe for longer, maybe forever – on the road.....

Again the brown, sparse vegetated hills, but the summits now more lightened. Again I thought about that I should climb one of the hills. But it was obvious that you would underestimate the distance, as you always underestimate distances in this large country. I would need hours to reach the summit, meanwhile it would become hotter and hotter with no real shade, with only a bottle of water – no clever idea! But soon I would reach Castaic Lake, the Castaic Dam, an impressive monument, a nice place for at least a rest, after a not very long time on the road now. And beyond the mountains the flat farm land waits, my first aim. There I would rest for the first time, looking for a place to spend some time, to stay for the night. I was not interested in to make as much miles as possible a day, time was not my problem.

I looked at the many trucks on the road, what they transported, from which company they were. So much goods from on place to another. I thought about all the food the farmers produces on the other side of the mountains, the many fruits, the almonds, the cattle, all for the people in the big cities – I caught sight of Pyramid Lake. I decided spontaneously to leave the interstate, to cross the interstate, to stop at Pyramid Lake. I passed the Vista Del Lago Interpretive Site, down the road to the lake, to Vaquero Beach.

## **Pyramid Lake**

Pyramid Lake, one of the water reservoirs in this area. In fact, also water from Pyramid Lake filled Castaic Lake. I stopped at the parking lot that was nearly empty, only two other cars stood there. But I saw nobody and decided to walk around a bit. I saw a small path along the lake shore northwards, how empty the lake was.....

Every year less and less rain, even in the rain season clear blue skies all the time. Maybe nice for the tourists, but a disaster for the people who live here, a disaster for nature. Really a disaster for nature? What should this mean, a disaster for nature? Nature would change, but it would be still a nature. The vegetation would change, but it still would be a vegetation. The fauna would change, but it still would be a fauna. As said, nature does not need the humans.....

It was astonishing how empty the lake was, at a time when the water should be near the highest stand at least. It was easy to see how many yards were missing and it was devastating. It was a sight you would expect in summer, but it was winter time, the time the lake should be filled with water, the water the people would need during summer time. Water restrictions would be the consequence again, more and stricter, discussions about the rich and their gardens, about the farmers and their need for water. But come on, in a country where some think, that it's a privilege for the rich to have health care, to have the access to good education, that things like these are no fundamental human rights, who would think already, that access to water shall be one – Chinatown.....

I walked around and looked at the bushes and trees, enjoyed it more and more to be alone here, among the vegetation, near by the water. My shoes became dusty from the dry soil, but I liked it and thought about how beautiful the night sky would be here, far away from the artificial city lights. I sat down and looked at the water surface, the rays of the sun now nearly hit the water, no sign of waves. Something drifted in the water, somewhat to the right of me, it was not small, down in the water, humanly shaped, like a human body – I jumped up!

I ran to the place of the lakeshore where the object swam in the water, but the water surface was so low. Therefore I tried to reach the water, but it was not easy to manage it, not to fall into the water. But it became obvious now, it was a human body, face down, obviously a female body, a woman with long black hair, she appeared not that old, dressed with jeans and boots and a white blouse. It did not look like the body had been laid long in the water – I took my cell phone and called the police.....

## **The Lady In The Lake**

It took a while, till first the fire department and then the police and an ambulance arrived. In the meantime I looked at the body in the water and got the opinion that the body had been at least for some time in the water. The skin of the hands showed it the most. One or two days, I thought. This would mean that someone missed her maybe and the police would have a missing person report already.

She looked like a country girl to me, with her boots, the jeans and the white blouse. But maybe that was only a stupid thought, the farm land ahead and in my head. On the other hand, I saw her walking down the road, in one of the small towns, in a diner or bar, at a farm. I had no real knowledge about the life at a farm, only images in my head, maybe not that wrong, maybe only stupid stuff.

I showed the firefighters the body and they started immediately to prepare their equipment to recover the body. The police and the ambulance arrived and I had to talk with one of the police officers. I told him why I was here, that I had walked around and had discovered the body. Another police officer came to us, looked at his colleague and nodded with his head. He tried to suppress his emotions as he said with a shaky voice: "It's her.....". They both walked away and I stood alone, not knowing what I should do. Should I see it as positive that they knew who she was, or in a negative way, that she was from here, that a mother and a father, maybe a husband and children, will get the

message, that she was dead, that she had been found, dead in Pyramid Lake. Another police officer came to me.

“You’re on a trip?”

“I’m on my way to San Francisco, I’m from Los Angeles.”

“We need your contact details. You want to continue your trip?”

“I’m not sure. I think I look for a place to stay for the night. I’m not in the mood to continue my trip to be honest. You know who she is? Sorry that I ask, but I’m a private detective.”

That was a bit of a lie, because they had seized my license and I had not tried to get it back. But maybe this was only a detail.

“Mr. Maurer, your name is even known here. Also we read newspapers and see the news. But to answer your question. Yes, we know her. Her name is Hannah, Hannah Foster. She’s the daughter of Daryl Foster who’s the owner of a farm near Wheeler Ridge. Hannah is missed since four days, now we have found her, you have found her.”

“That’s sad. Sorry, that I’m so curious.”

“You not have to apologize, vocational disease? But have you seen anything that would help us?”

“I fear not. As I see it, the body has lain in the water for a shorter time, I think not for four days, but at least one or two I guess. There were no footprints or so at the path, also at the lake shore. I not think, that what ever happened, happened here. The two cars were here before I arrived, not sure if this is important. No, I fear, I cannot help you.”

“The cars belong to three fishermen. We have found them more south at the lake. Can you give us a message when you know where you will stay for the night? And also when you will continue with your trip?”

“Sure. I think I will drive a bit more north, not back, till the next city. There I will stay for the night.”

“Okay, this would be Wheeler Ridge then.....”

## **Wheeler Ridge**

Wheeler Ridge? What should one say about this.....place? Not really a city, not even a town and in the end, even no real village. Two places to spend a night, good for travelers, and some places to eat, also good for travelers. A shopping center and a larger outlet, good for everyone, and a bit industry, good for locals who not wanna work on a farm. That it was!

On the other hand, around a mile more to the north you would come to the junction of the Interstate 5 and the Route 99 - new possibilities? The old Route 99 passed through Wheeler Ridge, and some severe earthquakes happened in this area, the last in 2005. Apart from this - farmland, farmland with a lot of almond trees.....

I decided for the cheaper alternative to spend the night, also because I could walk from there to a diner that looked not bad. So I let my Sunbeam stand at the car park and walked to the diner - after I had took a long shower, had new clothes on, and had called the police. After I was placed I decided for the rip eye steak with onion rings and for the clean conscience a salad, coffee and a fresh orange juice. I cannot say that the meal was no good, but I thought about Gus’s, rip eye steak with rice and beans or guacamole or fries and salad and roasted bread, not to forget the soup of the day.....

But now I was no longer in L.A. and that was good so - with a dead body in the Pyramid Lake? That was not what I had expected from my trip, to find a dead body. I had left the big city because of all this violence, and I meant with this not only murder cases, all this hypocrisy, this fucking Hollywood swindle, this white lie. Yeah, it was California, the state where everybody is happy all the time - like the white surfer kids in the 50s and 60s. Like the porn starlets in the million dollar houses at the Hollywood hills, white cuties fucked by large black dicks.....

But why all this complaining? Why should be here no crime? A little paradise? The reality was no sentimental novel, song or movie about the wonderful and peaceful countryside idyll. The life of the people here was no idyll, and it became harder and harder. I thought about a sheriff, walking through deep snow in the mountains, no, no idyll - maybe on the picture postcards.....

I decided to pay and as the waitress stood in front of me I asked her spontaneously.

"You know Daryl Foster's farm?"

"Sure! Step out and look at the fields and almond trees all around you, they all belong to her farm. Her farm is one of the largest farms in this region. You know what happens to her daughter?"

"I was at Pyramid Lake as they found her."

"That's a very sad thing. We all hoped that she maybe ran away.....but that's awful....."

"Why she should run away?"

"You're very curious?"

"It's only because, that I was at the lake as they found her. I stopped for a break."

"Where you from?"

"Los Angeles.....I'm on my way to San Francisco."

"That was an early stop?"

"It's not my intention to arrive as fast as possible. And I drive a classic car, as old as I."

"You found her?"

"No. The police was already there as I arrived. But why everybody talks only about Daryl Foster? Mr. Foster?"

"He died some years ago. Cancer.....and now her daughter....."

"Her only daughter?"

"Yes, now she's alone on her large farm."

"Thanks.....but I think I have asked enough now and I'm tired. Breakfast is good here?"

"Very good!"

"Then I will see. Should I stand up early enough, then I will have breakfast here."

"Also our lunch is very good - you will continue your travel tomorrow?"

"Oh yes, why I should stay....."

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I found no sleep, thoughts in my mind, too much thoughts. So it came, that I was happy as the world outside the window brightens up again and a new day begone. I stood up, had a long shower and a short walk to the diner - always this enormous breakfasts! But they served me three eggs, sunny side up, with two slices of toast and a piece of butter and a bowl of fresh fruit, thereto hot coffee and fresh orange juice. I thought about, whether I should continue my travel or not. But I had found her.....at least I should wait till I would had some information. Was it a crime or maybe an accident? And if it would be a crime? No, I was no longer a private investigator, the police would do the job. I decided to walk a little bit.....

I walked down the South Wheeler Ridge Road and had not to walk very long till the first almond trees. They looked interesting, all the brown mountains afar, the brown soil of the fields, the brown dust on my shoes and the long rows of the low green trees - they looked at bit misplaced, but also inviting and I had the impulse, to walk between them, to run between them. And I touched one of the green leaves as a car came slowly nearer. A breathtaking red 1959 Buick Electra 225 Convertible, one of the cars you never will forget, after you have saw it once. And also the woman behind the steering wheel - without any doubt, Daryl Foster. She was dressed in a simple but elegant black dress with a knee-length skirt, a white collar and white cuffs, black flats, a pearl necklace and a red-golden watch, a golden bracelet and a wedding ring - she not even gifted me a glimpse.....

Long I gazed after the rear end of the car, styling of a long gone time, an innocent time for some, but also a very shameful time with astonishing cars and ladies in elegant dresses.....

I decided to walk back, to continue my travel. Whatever had happened, the police would do the job. Thirsty I passed by the diner again, why not a last coffee before I would leave? To my surprise the waitress from the last evening was now there.

"A short night for you, not the evening shift today?"

"Only the evening shift would be cool, but I have to stand in for someone - double shift!"

"Oh, that's not nice. I hope for you, that it will be no stressful day at least."

"Here at the interstate every day we have a lot of work - breakfast?"

"No, already done. I thought I come in for a last coffee before I will leave. But, maybe I'm a bit to curious again, but I saw a woman in an old red Buick - Daryl Foster?"

"Absolutely! A very interesting woman - or?"

"Yeah, she still wears her wedding ring?"

"Ah, you looked carefully! Yes, she's still married with him, she was never interested in to find a new husband."

"And now she also lost her only child."

"Yes, you've seen the sheriff's press conference in TV this morning?"

"Oh no, I missed it! Do they know now what has happened?"

"No, and some of his statements were very evasive."

"You mean with this?"

"That it's "maybe" a crime. But he not answered the question, if no crime what then?"

"Maybe an accident?"

"Well.....she was a difficult child, not really what her mother hoped for - I mean someone who will run the farm later."

"But such a life is not for everyone - more interested in the city life?"

"Oh my gosh, no! She was very introverted, some say that not even her mother knew her. On the other hand she was very generous towards men, when she was young and her father still lived. They had a lot of trouble with her at this time. But as her father died - from that time on, she nearly stayed at the farm only. It was very rare that one saw her. And then she suddenly disappeared a few days ago, till yesterday. It's awful!"

"And her mother? What did she do, after her husband had died?"

"She ran the farm alone, Hannah was definitively no help. But she managed it very well, she even expanded the farm. But now, from year to year, every year more problems with water, every year more discussions.....but she managed it very well."

"Is she from here?"

"Men! She not looks like a farmer's girl - or?"

"In her old car, the clothes and the jewelry she wore? No, not at all. More like a Hollywood diva from past times."

"Men! You should see her on a tractor! Don't underestimate her! The people here respect her, she's a good boss and always friendly. She's from L.A.!"

"Really! From L.A. to Wheeler Ridge, why not, maybe not the stupidest thing you can do?"

"You can live here, in a place like Wheeler Ridge. L.A.? Why one would like to live there?"

"Culture, many things you can do?"

"Yeah, three jobs, to make ends meet? This is no life! L.A., for the rich it's a wonderful place, but to someone like me? I have two children - L.A.?"

"It's not stupid what you say. But then....."

"You left L.A.?"

"Yeah, but.....I think it's like a drug. You know that it's not good for you, but....."

"You will return one day?"

"Hope not! But now I'm here, on my way to San Francisco."

"Do you really think that San Francisco is better than L.A.?"  
"Even more expensive than L.A.! I'm not sure what my aim should be....."  
"You have no aim?"  
"No."  
"Then stay here? Then this place would be as good, than every other place."  
"The beginning would be no good one."  
"You mean, because you were at Pyramid Lake as they have found Hannah?"  
"I've found her....."

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After my coffee I was back in my room, prepared to leave, as I got an surprising phone call.....  
"Hello, I'm Daryl Foster. I think we have saw us this morning?"  
"Well, I'm surprised that you saw me?"  
"A man who's obviously very attracted by an almond tree, even here you see this not every day....."  
"The trees are a bit baffling. Their green leaves in contrast to the rest of the land. But they look very beautiful."  
"Have you ever seen them while blooming?"  
"Strange that you ask, only on pictures - or? I cannot remember that I saw them blooming one time, indeed, in reality? Why you ask?"  
"Only because.....then they look much more beautiful than now - but you think that they not belong into this region, that they are a waste?"  
"What that topic concerns, I know more crucial examples of wastage. Almonds are an important commodity for California. No, I think this discussion goes the wrong way."  
"Really? You're from the city, they have all the time a problem therewith, to accept our position."  
"I'm no longer in the city - why you call me?"  
"I had a meeting at the police department this morning. They have told me, that you have found Hannah. They also told me, who you are and that you should be still here, because you not have informed them, that you have continued your travel."  
"That's right, I'm still here in Wheeler Ridge."  
"How long you plan to stay here?"  
"I'm in no hurry....."  
"I would like to talk with you."  
"They have told you, who I'm? Maybe I should say, that I'm no longer a private investigator. I've no license anymore."  
"I'm not interested in you as a private investigator, our police is very competent! You're the person who found Hannah."  
"That's still right, but I fear I've no valid information for you."  
"Anyway, would it be possible for you to meet me?"  
"Sure, when it would help you."  
"Our police has a high opinion of you. I think it would be good to talk with someone who's not from here."  
"Where and when you want to meet me?"  
"Here at the farm for dinner at 8pm. Someone will pick you up."  
"Okay, then till eight o'clock....."

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I thought about what to do till 8pm, still some hours time to do something. I switched the TV on, but no new news about Hannah Foster. Therefore I did some research about Wheeler Ridge – and in fact, a short Wikipedia article. I used Google earth to get some impressions about the landscape and

the farmland, I looked up for information about almonds and almond trees, about the discussions and conflicts about water. Two hours later I decided for a short walk and then for a light lunch at the diner. Carolyn, so her name, saw me entering the diner.

"Still here?"

"Yes, I have to stay a bit longer. I have an appointment later."

"The police?"

"No, but Daryl Foster."

"Well, you waste no time!"

"She called me – would it be possible to talk with you?"

"You wanna be prepared?"

"In any case! It's not meant in a bad way, but I take this seriously. I think it would be good would I have some background knowledge about the situation here, about Daryl Foster and her daughter."

"When you're ready with your lunch I can have a break."

"Why you smile in this way?"

"You know why....."

I had a New York Steak with salad only, well fried and tasty. After I had finished it up, Carolyn sat at my table with a cup of coffee.

"What is it, you're interested in?"

"I'm not interested in gossip. But can you give me some information about Daryl Foster? You said that she's from Los Angeles."

"Yes, her parents lived in Venice, both were involved in the film business. Her mother appeared in some smaller roles in major productions under her maiden name, but never had a break through. Natalie Turner?"

"No, sorry, I've no picture in mind."

"It's not that important. But that was the world Daryl raised up. But obviously she found no favor in it. It's said that she liked it to drive around in the mountains, the desert and the farmland. Thereby she met her later husband Howard Foster and she decided to become a farmer's wife. But not much is known about this."

"The red Buick?"

"It was her mother's car."

"How old is she? And Hannah, how old was she?"

"Daryl? Guess!"

"That's always a stupid game. How old was Hannah?"

"Twenty-five."

"That's a trap?"

"Yes, this is also a part of the story. He was older than her, fifteen years. She was twenty-two as they married. It took a long time that she became pregnant with Hannah, and she should be their only child."

"That's now a mathematical problem? Twenty-two plus twenty-five equals forty-seven? Plus a longer time? She's over fifty?"

"Well, surprised?"

"Yes, I have to confess, that I'm very surprised. Can you tell me something about the situation after Mr. Foster had died?"

"An outstanding widow with a beautiful daughter and a large farm – what do you think?"

"You said that Hannah was "generous" towards men before her father died?"

"She was a rebel. But everyone has it's own theory about it – especially the men!"

"But she not tried to leave the farm?"

"As far as I know it? No, but now the gossip would begin."

"Okay. If I understand you right, there were at least some men who were interested in Daryl, in Hannah or in the farm, or all of it?"

"Some think you need a man to run such a farm. Also Mr. Foster was not happy therewith to have a



daughter only. After his death the situation for Daryl was not easy, till she showed everybody that also a woman can run such a farm, that she needs no man for doing this.”

“And apart from the business?”

“I hope it sounded not, as they not had been happy couple. All that’s known is that they loved each other very deeply – I think she simply decided not to marry again.”

“And Hannah?”

“Oh, before her father died she was a "good catch"! The only child? But after her father died she nearly disappeared. Again, more gossip than facts.”

“What do you think? Maybe no crime, maybe no accident – what else?”

“Gossip?”

“Well…….”

“There are rumors that she was depressive.”

“Suicide?”

“Before her father’s death? There I would say yes, but today? But as I said it, they lived very secluded.”

“And now the farm? A bad situation for Ms. Foster.”

“I think that’s not important for her at the moment!”

“Not for her, but maybe for some “men”?”

“I think they keep their feet still for the moment. But I understand what you mean. Yes, I think that will become a difficult situation for her.”

“Why she not should sell the farm?”

“I would say that this is not only a farm for her?”

“I understand…….”

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I was back in my room to prepare myself for the evening. I took my phone…….

“I’m Mr. Maurer, I’ve found the dead body of Hannah Foster in Pyramid Lake. Would it be possible to talk with a responsible officer?”

“A moment please…….”

I had to wait for a short time…….

“Hello Mr. Maurer, I’m Sergeant Todd. We’ve talked with each other at Pyramid Lake – you wanna leave?”

“On the contrary, I got an invitation.”

“Ms. Foster?”

“Yes. She has talked with you about me?”

“Not only with me, but also with me.”

“You have a high opinion of me? That’s what she said…….”

“You’re interested in what we found out so far?”

“Yes, but don’t understand me wrong. I’m a bit unsure because of the meeting. I mean it would be a different situation if it would be a crime or an accident, you understand…….”

“Sure. And suicide?”

“Are there indications?”

“We talk about an ongoing investigation?”

“She told me, that she’s not interested in me as a private investigator, that she wants to talk with me because I found her daughter. As I said, I’m unsure how I should behave. I think you have informed her about the latest stage of affairs. I could ask her, but I think it would be very difficult for her to tell me. Suicide would be a disaster, I think.”

“Would it be okay for you, when I inform her about your call?”

“Absolutely!”

“Okay. We found a place at the lake, where maybe that happened, what happened. It’s up a steep slope, but we can not decide so far, if this place is in fact connected with Hannah Foster or not. Also

it would be possible that this is the place of a crime as well as of an accident.”

“The autopsy? If it’s possible that you can say something thereto – no details of course!”

“Assumed that the steep slope is involved? All her injuries would fit thereto, but we cannot answer questions like, whether she’s fallen or whether someone has pushed her. Both, and more, would be possible so far. We simply need more time.”

“Sure. It’s roughly only one day ago, that I’ve found her. But if I understand you right there are no obvious signs of a crime? At the slope, no traces of another person? Was she alone?”

“No obvious crime. At the slope? That’s a bit a problem.”

“Because?”

“Chumash Island?”

“You mean the island in the lake?”

“Yes, you need a boat to reach the isle, but we found none. Not at the isle, no drifting boat at the lake. Yes, we found other traces at the slope. It seems that she arrived at the isle with at least one or two other persons – but that not excludes an accident for example.”

“Was she still alive after she was fallen in the water?”

“Yes. Water in the lungs. Maybe an accident and she was unconscious as she had been fallen in the water.”

“At least denial of assistance, maybe negligent homicide – if not more!”

“Yes.”

“Any idea who was with her?”

“Not at the moment.”

“She knows all of this? Ms. Foster.”

“Sure.”

“That not relaxes me. I fear this will become no nice dinner.”

“Oh, you have an invitation for dinner?”

“Yes. But I think it will become a very sad dinner.”

“I will be fair with you, I’m a relative of the late Mr. Foster.”

“Then you’re also a relative of Ms. Foster.”

“Yes, I’m the son of Mr. Fosters brother.”

“He had a brother!”

“Yes, “had” in a double sense. My father died short after my birth.”

“Todd?”

“My mother, she also is no longer. My father adopted her name after the marriage. Two brothers, sometimes no good constellation. But to be fair to you again. After his deaths, Daryl and I developed a close relationship.”

“Then you should know Hannah very good as well?”

“Hannah? She was always something special – you should talk with Daryl about it.”

“Can you answer me one more question?”

“Sure.”

“What does she expects from me?”

“Don’t worry, be yourself. And yes, I’ve a high opinion on you…….”

## **The Lady At The Ranch**

At 7:30pm I was ready to leave, as ready as possible at least. I had only a traveling bag with me with some clothes, nothing special. But I hoped that my outfit would be okay for her and I waited to be picked up. Outside it was dark, a tiny moon, and I decided to wait outside, to look at the stars for a while.

I stood at the parking lot, and even when the parking lot was lightened, the stars shone bright. I walked towards the edge of the parking lot, the dark mountains in a distance, the Milky Way above

them. It was very different to the city - no sirens and a fresh breeze. I wasn't sure how long I stood there watching the stars as a car entered the parking lot – I smiled! It was the Buick, but not with her behind the steering wheel this time. But also this driver was a surprise.

“Sergeant Todd? I'm surprised to see you.”

“You expected Daryl?”

I entered the car, but he not drove away immediately.

“No, not her, but definitively also not you. Nice to see you again, Sergeant Todd.”

“Call me Greg. Nice to see you again, Peter?”

“Sure, Peter. Will you join our dinner?”

“No, I would disturb you only.”

“Maybe you would give me safety?”

“You're uneasy about to be alone with her?”

“I would not say “uneasy”, but I'm still not sure how I should behave. It starts with my clothes, I have only some t-shirts with me. I found nothing to buy.....”

“.....ah, don't worry. As I said, be yourself. She will be not interested in your clothing – this is not L.A.! She's interested in your person, she needs someone to talk with. You're the one who found her daughter.....”

With this words he started the ride and we left the parking lot. We stayed at this side of the interstate and drove towards the mountains. We passed by fields, brown fields in the winter, and some pumpjacks. After around two miles we turned left, again fields and plantations, almond trees. We talked nothing and I looked at the moon and the Milky Way, now visible in its whole glory. I looked left and right but saw no sign of any house or so – he noticed my search.

“This here is only farmland.”

After we had driven northwards for around a mile, he turned right. No longer fields, the landscape started to become more hilly now. On the right hand only soft hills, but on the left hand they were steeper. We passed two mailboxes, some houses on the left side on a hill, but obviously not our aim. He looked at me.

“Sorry that I not talk that much. This is not our aim.”

“It's okay for me, I like the silence.”

The landscape opened up again after a further two miles and just as it opens up, a fence to the left and right of the street, a row of mailboxes and a sign: Private Road - Keep Out - No Hunting - No Trespassing. The end of the public road.

“Around a mile and we are there.”

In the distance one could see lights and a few fields and plantations. Green almond trees and also some with grapevines. Shortly after, we reached an accumulation of maybe eight till ten houses – our aim. He stopped the car in front of the largest house. It was a relatively low-key building, not small, but also no huge house, but with a wonderful patio and columns. In one way it looked like, as one would imagine a typical farm house, but on the other hand it seemed reduced to the most important. The door opened and she stood in there.

“I wish you a nice evening.”

He looked at me, he not would come with me.

“What will you do now?”

“Driving home to my wife – the house there is the house were I live with my wife.”

“You also live here – yeah, why not.”

“You not have to be a farmer to live on a farm.”

“Then I wish you and your wife an nice evening also. Will you drive me back, later? I have forgotten to ask how we will arrange this.”

“We will see. But now you should not let her wait, you not learn this in the city? Never let a lady wait.....”

“Yeah, that would be inappropriate.”

I walked up the five stairs up to the large patio and the front door where she stood. She wore the same dress in which I had saw her this morning, it looked as beautiful as before. But instead of the

pearl necklace she wore a filigree gold necklace, the same watch, obviously the wedding ring, but an additional on the other hand – a beautiful ruby. And this time she had her long light blond hair not pinned up, instead she wore them loose.

“Nice to see you, Mr. Maurer.”

“Nice to see you too, Ms. Foster and my sincerest condolences. Sorry for my outfit, I not thought to get an dinner invitation during my trip.”

“Formality, nothing of importance! You can decide, dinner inside or on the patio?”

“Patio, definitively the patio.”

“Fine, I prefer the patio also. Will you follow me?”

We walked around the house, on the patio and behind was a wooden table, laid for two.

“Good that I decided for the patio.”

“Also inside we would had found a place for us. But it’s a nice evening – what you are looking for?”

“I only thought about.....L.A.?”

“Oh, you miss the pool behind the house? No, we have no swimming pools behind the houses here. What you wanna have to drink?”

“I saw grapevines?”

“Yes, we have some. But it’s more for us, we’re no vineyard.”

“Then vine?”

“Yes, would enjoy it.”

We had a nice dinner, she had cooked it mainly with products from the farm. And we had a conversation about trivial topics. It was obvious that we both were insecure, now sitting in two comfortable chairs, looking at the night sky.

“What does you produce on your farm? I saw many almond trees, but also a lot of fields.”

“Almond as you have seen, but also many other foods. Lettuce, tomatoes and strawberries for instance. We have some cattle and calves. We produce some milk and a bit of diary products. The milk and the diary products are for California only. The fruit and vegetables we sell nationwide, the almonds we export worldwide - more or less the normal Californian products. The Californian agriculture produces more than four hundred different commodities.”

“California, isn’t it an irony that California produces so much of this commodities?”

“Well, forty billions of value, one third of all vegetables nationwide and two third of the fruits nationwide – why an irony?”

“The soil is so fertile here, but water is a huge problem. With more rain the whole state would be a green wonderful garden.”

“Yes, water is a huge problem. We have started with pistachios a few years ago, not everyone likes this.”

“Oh, then maybe some of the trees I’ve seen are in fact pistachio trees?”

“Yes! For instance the plantation nearby are pistachios.”

“Oh, I thought almonds, but the same problem. You need a lot of water for both of them.”

“Yes, but as you said, the soil here is very fertile. I think you can do more stupid things with water than producing food – or?”

“Swimming pools behind every house, behind every rich house at least. But the Californian agriculture had a decline in sales as far as I know?”

“Yes, six percent the last year. Agriculture is no easy business.”

“Also some oil?”

“A bit, it’s California.”

“Yeah, isn’t it funny in L.A.? Pumpjacks all around you all the time, well hidden behind fences and walls, even inside buildings. But they are there all the time, L.A. is build on an oil field. Why you left Los Angeles, if you allow me the question?”

“Why you?”

“This city would kill me. But I think this is nonsense, because what should be the alternative?”

“You’re on your way to San Francisco?”

“Yeah, I know. This is definitively no alternative.”

“Depends on, why you leave Los Angeles?”

“Not to end up in a city, where living is even more expensive than in Los Angeles. Why you decided for a life here?”

“I’ve fallen in love with a farmer.”

“Your parents were involved in the film business, you mother worked as an actress – a reason?”

“The L.A. film business? Hollywood? This is hypocritical crap only! Have we to talk about this? What should I miss? Exclusive restaurants and clubs, places I have to be, to show myself, to present me? No, therein I could see no future for me. I drove around looking for my own future – and now I sit here with you.”

“And I have to agree that it’s very nice here. Should we talk about your daughter?”

We had some moments of silence, but it was no embarrassing silence, it was a cozy silence and I had the feeling that both of us not wanted to disturb the silence. But then we had emptied the bottle.

“Some more wine or a cocktail?”

“A cocktail, but not with too much alcohol?”

“Shall I mix us something, without?”

“Sounds good!”

She left and came, after a surprising short time, back with two large glasses.

“Coconut milk with some additions.”

“Delicious, tastes very good and interesting, very refreshing. There’s a bitter component in it, and it is very creamy – fantastic!”

“Hannah loved it very much, a own creation.”

“Why you wanna talk with me?”

“I’ve talked with Greg about you.”

“What does he told you?”

“About some of your cases. You have a colorful past, some very spectacular cases.”

“I not would say, “spectacular”. I made a lot of wrong decisions over the last years.”

“We all make wrong decisions.”

“But not everybody causes the death of others.”

“Do you think, you caused the death of someone?”

“At least could people still be alive would I had made different decisions.”

“Retrospectively? That’s an useless endeavor.”

“I’ve the feeling that I did wrong decisions only.”

“You’re very integer they say.”

“Also this can be stupid and negative.”

“What do you think, what happened at the lake?”

“I’ve only a limited knowledge about the results of the investigation so far. An accident maybe.”

“A murder maybe?”

“I think it will need more investigations to decide this?”

“A suicide?”

“Not looks like one.”

“There are rumors.”

“I think I’ve heard something in this vein. As far as I know, lived Hannah very secluded after her fathers death. But I think there’s a good chance that the investigations will lead to a result. Do you think there are indications for a suicide?”

“No, not today. In her youth she had a lot of problems, she talked about the reservoir sometimes, about drowning herself therein. Around a mile down the street you will come to a larger water reservoir. She never talked about Pyramid Lake – no, never it was a suicide! An accident? I don’t know what would be harder to bear. She was not alone, she was still alive after she had fallen in the water – an accident? I think that would be more difficult to accept then anything else.”

“Even more that a murder?”

“Sounds a bit creepy? But what’s the alternative? That somebody let her die, somebody who would had been able to rescue her, that it not had to happen that she’s dead now? Wrong decisions?”

“Certainty, I understand that you need certainty about what has happened. But as far as I can see it has the police found good evidences. I think there are good chances to solve the case.”

“Yes, and then? Hannah was on this isles with whom? She only knew people from here, the people I know also.”

“You fear that the person, or the persons, who had caused this does live on the farm?”

“This is the only solution I think. The point is that Hannah not talked with me about that she had met new people or even found new friends. I think it’s not possible that she would have made such a trip with unknown people. I saw her the last time in the morning, I had to drive to Bakersfield for some business reasons. In the evening she was no longer there. She had said, that she will look after a new plantation where we have some problems with pests. No one saw her after I left the farm, I was the last who has saw her. We even are not sure, about when and how she has left the farm, with what aim. It’s nearly a mystery.”

“Sounds a bit like a kidnapping to me?”

“Also Greg said this. But this would lead thereto that it was long planed, that the kidnappers waited for a good moment and that they live on the farm – no good idea!”

“Yeah, that would be an awful solution. I think Greg checked this already, none of the people from the farm has disappeared?”

“It’s winter time, we have not that much workers at the moment. Most of them work for many years on the farm. During the summer we have a lot of seasonal laborer, then many new workers are here. But now, in the winter? I know most of them for many years, especially the people, who are commonly here at the houses.”

“Yes, that’s a problem. So you were the last person who saw her? Then she disappeared, then the occurrences at Pyramid Lake, then I found her. Sorry for the question, but have they told you how long she was in the water?”

“Two days. For four days she was missing. A gap of one to two days.”

“That not makes it easier. It’s late.....”

“You can stay here in one of the guest rooms when you like.”

“Then nobody has to drive me back, but tomorrow?”

“I would drive you back when you wish it, now or tomorrow. But as far as I know it you have no distinct aim at the moment?”

“That’s true.”

“You can stay here for some time when you like it?”

“As your guest?”

“I would like it at the moment to have somebody around me I could trust.”

“The police lives nearby.”

“And Hannah is dead.....”

“Sorry, that was impolite.”

“No, but Greg has to work. And there are no indications that I’m endangered. I thought it would be a good solution to ask you.”

“As you said it, I have no distinct aim.”

“What’s your fee?”

“I need something to eat and to drink, the rest is okay. Should I act as a new worker for the farm?”

“No, you will be my shadow, and everybody should be aware about it.”

“Okay, you really fear that someone you know is involved in it.”

“Yes. You’re really a millionaire?”

“I own something, that’s worth that much – and you?”

“All my money is invested in the farm. Yes, the farm, all the land, the houses and car pool, all that is worth a lot. But it’s no money at the bank.”

“Okay, I agree. My car and my things?”

"I give you keys for the houses on the farm and some cars. You can use them then. Tomorrow we will settle everything."

"Would you show me my room?"

"We can sit here a bit longer, if you like? Your room is in the house here. I wanna have you near me."

## **At The Farm**

The next day I stood up early. Well, early for my lifestyle habits. She had stood up much earlier, had had her breakfast already, and waited for me sitting on the patio. Today she wore a simple black knee long skirt and a black sweater, no jewelry, only her watch and the ring at the left hand, the long hair pinned-up.

"Breakfast before we go?"

"I'm not that used to breakfast, but a cup of coffee?"

She stood up and came back with two cups.

"I thought about your situation during the night."

"And what's your conclusion?"

"Either Hannah had secrets and not told you everything, or she had been kidnapped. What about the first possibility?"

"Apart from that you can never be sure about anything in the end, no! You know, this is a farm, we not live in a city here. It's not very easy to keep something as a secret at such a place."

"But I think she not stayed at the farm twenty-four hours every day?"

"More or less. But more important, we normally knew what the other did or where he was. For the reason alone because that we run this farm. It's a large farm, everything has to be organized. And at a farm you have no weekends. I see no possibility for secrets, at least not in that way."

"Internet, social media?"

"Greg has checked everything but found nothing. Again, we spent most of the time together. I not wanna say, that it would had been impossible for her to have a second, a secret live, but it would had been very difficult for her. And she would had to expend much effort therein to keep everything as a secret. No, I think this possibility it's very unlikely."

"Kidnapping?"

"Why? Money? I not wanna say that I'm poor, but the money is the farm. We gotten no ransom demand? And the kidnappers?"

"I see this in the same way as you. Would had it been a kidnapping, then the kidnappers lived or still live on the farm, here with you. I thought about an accident. Maybe it was spontaneous, maybe she decided to drive around, with no aim. People do this sometimes. Maybe she met the people in doing so, with whom she was at Pyramid Lake later? Can you see this as a possibility?"

"Not really. Not today."

"Did she has a relationship to someone?"

"No."

"You?"

"No."

"I think that there's something we overlook at the moment. I think that there's a logic solution. We will find it, but no now....."

"Then we should have a drive."

We drove to Wheeler Ridge, through the fields and plantations and talked not that much. We not used the Buick, the farm had more useful cars for that. At the parking lot she stopped near my Sunbeam.

"That's your Sunbeam? Have heard of it, really a beautiful little car."

"Yes, is there a place at the farm for it?"

"You can park it in one of the garages. When you need a car at the farm you can use this one. I will

give you the keys of the car and the houses when we're back on the farm. A valuable car?"

"I'm not sure if the Sunbeam or the Buick is more valuable."

"I think the Sunbeam. But I think even the Sunbeam is not worth millions, you said that you own something worth that much. I hope I'm not too curious."

"No, not at all. It's a ring, a very special ring. Unfortunately the ring lays in a bank safe in San Francisco, therefore I cannot show it to you."

"Never mind, I thought only about the possibility of a kidnapping. I would have some reserves on the bank, the Buick would be worth some, but why no ransom demand?"

"We need further investigation."

After we had stored away my traveling bag in the sunbeam I asked her: How about to drink something in the diner? To my surprise she agreed and Carolyn welcomed us.

"Ms. Foster, my sincerest condolences. Mr. Maurer, nice to see you again."

"Only a short time here and already a regular customer? You have settled in very fast, as I see. "

"You said that everybody shall be aware about that I'm here now, at your side."

"That's right, and a diner is a very good place to show up."

"And what's your plan now? I follow you all the time?"

"No. I think it would be interesting when you drive around the farm also. Talk with the workers, stay at the houses, be here and there. I will tell you when I think that we should be together."

"So, my aim is to create confusion. You hope that somebody will react, maybe to abscond - or maybe more?"

"I think you're able to protect yourself."

"I thought more about you."

"I feel secure, with you at my side."

"As I said to you, I made wrong decisions. I have not the feeling that I was that much successful in the past for my clients."

"I'm not your client, I not pay you, at least not in that sense – or? I pay you no fee. I provide you only a place to stay and food."

"Not sure whether this will help – you pay the bill?"

"Sure, I'm your boss....."

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Back at the farm I parked my Sunbeam in a garage and moved into my room. Then I met her at the patio again.

"Here are the keys. This one is for the car. This is the key for the house here. Then I give you this key, it's a master key for all buildings as warehouses, garages and so on."

"What are your plans for today?"

"Not much, at least for you. I will give you a map of the farm. Maybe you wanna walk around here a bit, or drive around a bit....."

".....that the people here become aware of me, that I'm here and maybe for a bit longer. I tell then, who I am?"

"Yes, everybody can know who you are and why you're here."

"You're very offensively. What will you do?"

"I will have a meeting with our lawyer – Hannah's last will. You can call me whenever you wanna, whenever you have a question. You also can call Greg. I will be back around 4pm, we can meet then when you like it."

"I will try to get some impressions about the farm till then. Where I can get something for lunch?"

"There would be different opportunities. Do you think you will be at lunchtime here?"

"I think I will study the map first and walk around a bit here, later I will drive around a bit till our meeting at 4pm. Yes, I think I will be here at lunchtime."

"You can use the kitchen here or you can eat with Greg's wife."



"Sounds good. She works on the farm?"

"She became mother last month. At the moment she stays at home and cares for her child."

"It will be okay for her?"

"Sure, maybe Greg will be also there for lunch. Whenever he has the opportunity he has lunch at home, with his wife and the baby. I will tell her that you will come."

The map puzzled me more than it helped me. I understood more and more that such a farm was a very different place to such a city which I had left. I saw the fields and the plantations, the areas for the cattle, different groups of buildings, but I could not understand the organization behind it. I thought it was the same as when you hand a map of L.A. to someone for the first time. First it was even not easily understandable what the city as such was and not. Crenshaw a part of Los Angeles? And Koreatown or Santa Monica? A city center – Downtown? L.A. the rich white areas? For most of the tourists yes, but in reality? But then in the end, all was so easy, you only had to open your eyes, walk around and look – I decided to walk around a bit to look.....

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It was 11am as I stood on the patio at the backside of the house, which meant that I would have two hours till my lunch with Greg's wife and maybe also with him. I looked at the large but empty corral which I had saw already yesterday, but we had not talked about it. The farm was in fact a very large one and it produced many different goods. Obviously it was not easy to manage such a farm, but she did it with success – but now. She was alone now, no children who would be there to continue, selling the farm? I walked around the house to the front and looked at the seven other residential houses, all a bit smaller than the one I stood in front of, but all build in the same style. I thought that in this houses the core workers would live, people who work the whole year on the farm, people who work in executive positions. Maybe related with Ms. Foster like Todd, but not necessarily. All appeared like a small little town to me - I couldn't believe anymore that it was a kidnapping.

I could understand her, that she felt insecure, that she wants to have somebody near her. Therefore I was now here and she in Bakersfield? Hannah had written a last will? I had to ask her, and not only about that. Why had she asked me? A good reputation, not really mine. But that would have time. Later, when she was back in the afternoon.

I looked around but couldn't saw anybody. It was winter time, not that much to do at a farm now, compared to the summer. I thought that it was a calm atmosphere, the group of houses, the trees and bushes, the arrangement. Not everything in right angles, no blocks, all looked more friendly and human. The air smelled different, scents I wasn't sure about their origin, beautiful scents. I looked at the huge tree in front of the house, an old tree, an apple tree if I wasn't wrong. I thought about how the tree would look like, spangled with countless blossoms. And later with wonderful red apples?

The front door of the house on the other side of the small road became opened, a woman with a baby in her arms appeared - obviously Greg's wife. She smiled at me and I crossed the street.

"Good morning, Ms. Todd. I'm Mr. Maurer. Ms. Foster said it would be okay to have lunch with you and Greg."

"Good morning, Mr. Maurer. Sure it's okay. And I think Greg will be there also. He called me that it looks like he will have time today to have lunch at home."

"Lunch at 1pm? That's right?"

"Yes. What will you do till then?"

"I think I will have a walk. It's the first time for me that I'm on such a farm. Not much people here at the moment."

"Also during the winter there's a lot of work to do. Most of them are on their way now."

"I see, on such a large farm one have to do a lot all the time."

"You have to think about the animals only. Winter or summer, you have to care for them. The

plantations, also there is always something to do, and that's only a small part of the works that have to be done."

"Yeah, I understand. You work on the farm – or maybe better "worked" at the moment?"

"Neither nor. I'm a police officer like Greg."

"It's okay that you laugh. But you both live here at the farm?"

"Well, the private detective at work. Just since a few years. We lived in Lamont before. We decided that I stay at home till my little baby girl is a bit older – than it will be Greg's turn."

"What's her name? Sorry, I'm not used to babies."

"Charlotte – you have no children?"

"No, not until now at least - but I think I should not longer hold you back from your work. I will walk around a bit till lunch time."

"Then until then, Mr. Maurer."

"Till then, Ms. Todd."

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I started to walk around a bit, aimlessly I looked at the houses. A lot of different vehicles parked in front of the house rightmost, apart from the main house it was the house nearest to the corral. Two large cattle trucks, two large pickup trucks and other cars, suitable for off road. I thought about whether I should drive around a bit, but then I decided to walk to the plantation I had saw yesterday, arriving here. Pistachio, no almond trees – maybe it would be no stupid idea to learn something about the differences. So I left the houses, walked along the road and realized that the distance was larger then I thought. But after thirty minutes on a dusty road I had reached my aim, the pistachio trees. At the first moment and from a certain distance they looked, at least for someone like me, someone who was used to the city life, very similar to almond trees. But now, standing in front of them I saw the differences and was sure, that from now on I would be able to separate the two kinds of trees.

But both had in common that their verdurous leaves marked a hard contrast to the brown mountains and hills, to the brown fields and soil. But without any doubt they looked pretty in my eyes and I loved the sight. I loved the air and the bright blue sky with the soft white clouds and had to accept that this were very naive thoughts. Apart from the question about what had happened with Hannah, this was a very kitschy view on the life at a farm. You can be happy everywhere, you can be desperate everywhere – yes, true in any case. But maybe a place like this gives you other possibilities to be happy, to live a life without all this stupid and hypocritical jabbering, that dominates the cities.

A car drove down the small street alongside the plantation and stopped, a man of South American decent got out of the car.

"Good morning, Sir. Can I help you?"

"Good morning, Sir. I'm Mr. Maurer, I'm a guest of Ms. Foster."

"I'm Mr. Flores, nice to meet you."

With this words he came to me and we shook hands.

"I'm one of the foreman. You're interested in pistachio trees?"

"I confused them with almond trees yesterday. I thought it would be no stupid idea to look for the differences between both."

"Yes, when you're not used to them it's easy to be confused. You're from the city?"

"Yes, I lived the last years in Los Angeles. I'm on my way to San Francisco at the moment. You know why Ms. Foster asked me to stay here for some time?"

"You're the private detective from L.A., heard that you had some very spectacular cases."

"That sounds a bit like I would be a kind of private dick for celebrities. But to be honest, I'm no private investigator anymore."

"But you're here because of what happened with Hannah?"

"In a way yes, but I do not investigate in this case. This is a task for the police."

"You're no private investigator anymore? Interested in to work on a farm?"

"Well, I don't think I would be a good worker. Well, it's a bit like holiday on a farm, nice for a certain time. But to live there, to see the daily life? That's something different, as you would walk down Hollywood Boulevard and you would think that you would know Los Angeles now – that's a mere joke."

"If it's allowed to ask, you're not on vacation here?"

"Sure, it's no secret. I've found Hannah's dead body in Pyramid Lake. Ms. Foster asked me, after she had got information about me, whether I would stay here for some time."

"But not to investigate?"

"She said that it would give her a feeling of security would I be here."

"Do you think she's in danger?"

"What do you think?"

"No investigation?"

"Only a conversation, you not have to answer."

"It's difficult for all of us at the moment. She disappeared suddenly and four days later her dead body was found. You found her dead body then. As long as it's not clear what happened at this days.....it's a difficult situation."

"The days after she had disappeared and till I found her. What happened at the farm during that time?"

"Ms. Foster was very concerned. We tried to figure out what happened at the morning after Ms. Foster had left the farm. Then we searched after her. We patrolled on the farm, the towns around here. The police searched for her, but no sign of her. We all know, the longer someone has disappeared.....you've met Greg?"

"Yes."

"It was also very difficult for him. He tried everything, but found no hint. More and more tensions came up, then you've found her. I not know what would had happened when she....."

"To say it outright, do you think that someone living here is involved in the case?"

"I hope not.....that's all I can say."

"Oh, it's late. I have to walk back, lunch waits."

"You can drive with me."

"Also lunch?"

"No. I'm on my way to one of the water reservoirs."

"There's a larger one more to the west? Ms. Foster had mentioned something."

"Yes. You know it?"

"Not sure....."

"It's said that she, Hannah, tried it at least one time. But that's long ago."

"Hannah, what do you think?"

"No kidnapping, nothing that's connected with the people here at the farm."

"Why you're sure about this?"

"I'm not sure about it, but it would be a disaster. Much more than it's a disaster anyway."

"What do you think will happen with the farm?"

"I think you should ask Ms. Foster. After the death of her husband many thought that she will sell the farm. To say it clear, some hoped that she will sell the farm. Some were very interested to buy the farm, but she not did it. Many laughed about her, the girl from L.A., the daughter of a mediocre actress? But then she showed everybody what's in her. She made the farm to one of the largest and most productive in the whole state. And she developed a new relationship to her daughter. Before her father's dead, Hannah made and had all the time problems. But then she started to work together with her mother – and now this? It's a shock for all of us."

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"Thanks for giving me a ride. Can you stop in front of Ms. Foster's house? I've some time now to

refresh me a bit before lunch.”

“Sure. Here we are.”

“Will I see you later again?”

“How long you think you will stay?”

“I’ve no definitive idea.”

“I think so, I also live here. But now I have to drive to the reservoir.”

We said goodbye and I walked into the house while he drove away. I had a quick shower and changed clothes, then I walked to the house on the other side of the road. I just entered the stairs to the patio as the door opened and Greg greeted me.

“Hello Peter, nice to see you again.”

“Hello Greg, nice to see you again too.”

“You had a ride with Anthony? Mr. Flores?”

“Yes, I met him by the pistachio trees. We talked a bit and I drove back with him.”

“Fine, you will meet more and more people now. But come in, lunch is waiting.”

We walked in and the wonderful scent of meat and vegetables became more and more intensive. We entered the kitchen area where Ms. Todd waited for us.

“Hello Mr. Maurer, how are you?”

“Hello Ms. Todd. Fine, and you?”

“Okay, this is no office. Patricia, this is Peter. Peter, this is Patricia. Let’s have lunch.”

We sat down at a nicely laid table with a bowl on it, the source of the wonderful scent.

“I’ve only prepared a stew. I not knew early enough that we will have a guest so that I could cook something more adequate.”

“No, that’s absolutely okay. It looks very beautiful and it smells fantastic. Cooked with fresh ingredient. There’s nothing left, one could still wish.”

“Self cooked food is not that common in L.A., as far as I know?”

“Well, there are two major problems. Many you have two or even more jobs to be able to pay the bills. You not have that much time to cook at home then. And then is processed food from the supermarket, and even fast-food, less expensive then the fresh food that you would have to buy to cook it at home. That’s very stupid and makes no sense, but unfortunately this is the reality. Especially a reality for those who have less good payed jobs.”

“That would be nothing for me. We both hate it when the job gives us no time for a real break and you have to eat something on the way. Especially Greg loves it that I stay at home now and he has the opportunity to come home for lunch from time to time. Not to talk about dinner.”

“Dinner when I have no night shift.”

“You said that your colleagues envy you for the nice things I’ve cooked for you to take them with you?”

“That’s true, sorry that I not mentioned that – you’re interested in the coroner’s report, Peter?”

“Would it be okay for you to tell me something about it?”

“To be honest? I would be interested in your opinion.”

“Sounds as there were puzzling results?”

“Well, two results are very disturbing. First she was dehydrated, extremely dehydrated. It looks like as she has not drunk anything for days, before she died. And also she has eaten nothing.”

“That would consort with a kidnapping. The second point?”

“The water in her lungs. It’s definitively no water from Pyramid Lake.”

“Wow, that’s.....but you not know from where the water is?”

“I’m also here to take a sample.”

“The water reservoir?”

“Yes.”

“That would consort with a suicide. You know whether she tried to commit suicide there, some years ago?”

“No, not exactly. We moved to the farm after Daryl’s husband had died. You have to ask her, I will ask her. But maybe we should wait till we have a result. It’s no fast procedure, to say without any

doubt that two water samples are identical, but it can be very easy to show that two water samples aren't identical."

"Assumed that the water samples aren't identical. There are many reservoirs, lakes and channels in this area."

"Yes, therefore we need an exact analysis from the water in her lungs first. This can take a while. But now, as a first step, we have to wait for the result concerning the sample from the reservoir."

"I understand you correctly. It would be easy to show that the water samples aren't identical. But to say that they are identical isn't that easy."

"As a rule, yes. If you ask me, then I don't think that the samples will be identical. I don't think that she died on the farm. Then not to forget, the days before she died. Nothing, or nearly nothing, to drink and nothing to eat. Sounds not as she had been on the farm all the time."

"No, sounds more that she had been captured all the time. What disturbs me is Chumash Island."

"Yes. She was dead before she arrived at the lake. Difficult then for her to walk up the slope – something is wrong!"

"Maybe this place is not connected with the case?"

"But we believe it more and more. For instance we found fibers from her clothes there. But it also looks more and more like a trap. Some specialists for footprints work on it. They cannot say exactly at the moment what happened there, but they are convinced that someone tries to fool us."

"Someone, not several people?"

"For some reason they think that we deal with one person and her dead body."

"Someone carried her dead body up the slope? Wow, that would be hard work! Why not simply throwing her into the lake?"

"No idea at the moment. Sorry, I have to leave."

He looked at his watch and stood up.

"What will you do now?"

"Maybe I should help your wife with the dish washing?"

"She would like it."

He left and I stayed with his wife.

"The baby?"

"She sleeps at the moment. She's a good girl!"

We cleaned everything and I had forgotten to ask Greg about Hannah's last will. But maybe it was better to ask her about it. Also I had not asked whether he had informed Ms. Foster or not. But without any doubt he had. We were ready around 2pm and the baby decided to sleep no longer - lunch for her. Therefore I left the house.....

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I drove around with the car for which Ms. Foster had given me the key, but not to explore the farm, more because I had to reflect about the new information. I waited for the evening, when she would be back from Bakersfield. But she had sent a message that she will not arrive before 6pm, she said not why. Therefore I had plenty of time, and I "used" it to drive around with no distinct aim. Suddenly I stopped for no reason and walked up a smaller hill. And so I sat on top of a smaller hill, on the dusty and brown ground, and looked at.....and looked at nothing.

I tried to order my thoughts, but not with that much success. Wasn't now, apart from the exact circumstances, everything obvious? Someone had kidnapped her, three days she was controlled by the perpetrator, she got nothing to drink and eat, then he drowned her, not in Pyramid Lake, but brought her dead body to Pyramid Lake. He used a boat to reach Chumash Island, carried her up the slope and threw her into the lake – what a story was that?

Should this story be true, then it would give a key element that would give everything a meaning. And obviously that key element was the perpetrator. I had to talk with Ms. Foster.

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She arrived on the farm at shortly after 7pm, obviously not in the best mood. I sat on the patio at the front side with a cup of coffee.

"A cup of coffee for you, Ms. Foster? You look stressed."

"No, I need a shower and new clothes most. And maybe we should stop with this formal talk. I'm Daryl."

"With pleasure. Shall I make something to eat for you?"

"No, I'm not hungry. But a cup of hot coffee after the shower would do me good."

With this words she entered the house and I waited some time till she appeared again. A bit surprising.....

"Not suitable for you?"

"No, but it's the first time that I not see you wearing this black dress."

"I hope it's not too difficult for you to see me in such clothes."

"Not at all. I have no problems with blue jeans and a white blouse."

"I need something less formal now."

I walked in to bring her a cup of coffee. She looked very beautiful in her jeans, the blouse, no necklace, no watch, no make up, the hair still a bit wet.

"Thanks, that's what I needed most now."

"It was a hard day?"

"Obviously."

"Your not in the mood for a conversation?"

"Depends on the topic."

"Hannah of course."

"You mean her last will and such things?"

"Well, you not hired me as a private investigator, but it would be not bad would I have some knowledge about some circumstances."

"Wow, why not simply saying what you're interested in?"

"I not wanna offend your feelings."

"That would be very difficult at the moment. But this is not because of Hannah or you."

"But because.....if you like to talk about it?"

"After the death of my husband everybody thought I will be not able to manage the farm alone. And now, after Hannah's death? They cannot wait at least a short time to ask me what I plan to do with the farm. This sucks!"

"As far as I know the farm is very win bringing. I can imagine that many are interested in to buy the farm."

"But maybe they should wait about what my plans are. When I decide to sell the farm, then they can come and ask. But till then they should keep silence, at least till Hannah is buried!"

"The vultures lose no time."

"You're not interested in what my plans are?"

"I think it's simply too early to have definite plans. This is a very emotional time for you now, it would not that clever to decide something now."

"Well spoken! You've spoken with Greg?"

"Yes, and as I see he has informed you."

"Sure. What do you think about that Hannah not drowned in Pyramid Lake? That she not had drank and ate for days before she died?"

"This definitively points to a kidnapping. It would be important to find out where she drowned. But can I ask you something before?"

"You can ask everything as long as you not necessarily expect an answer. But please, say it straight ahead."

"The water reservoir down the street. Did Hannah try to commit suicide there?"

"Yes."

"Would you tell me something about it?"

"It was the time as Hannah was a rebel. She wanted to live in the big city – the glamour of L.A.! I not allowed it, and she did everything to hurt me. She tried to show me that also a farm can be a bad place, not only fucking Los Angeles."

"You let L.A. behind you because you had seen the hypocritical world of Hollywood and the glamour industry. But L.A. has also other sides."

"Says the man who's on his way to San Francisco, who not knows at the end what his final aim should be, because, according to his own words, this city would kill him wouldn't he leave it? You are a funny guy.....!"

"We both know that Los Angeles is a sick city, but that not has to mean that Hannah would had done stupid thing there."

"She was a naive fourteen year old girl! This city would had given her no chance. How many young girls come into this city every year for the big dream? I not have to tell you what happens with them – or? Yes, one or two will live the dream, but even they have to pay an enormous price for it. But all the others?"

"And Hannah?"

"She was a cute young girl. Especially during the summer we have a lot of workers who work for us during the harvest."

"But this not leads to a suicide."

"It was the summer she became fourteen. I tried to keep her under control. What should I have done, chain her up? She liked it to tease the male workers, and I think not only to tease them. But later the year, she changed suddenly, I feared that something had happened – you know? But she not told me anything."

"You feared that someone had raped her?"

"To say it openly, she had sex with at least some of the workers. I thought about to send her on a boarding school. Then it happened."

"Can you give me details?"

"It was a late summer evening, a balmy night. One of the workers saw her walking down the street and he followed her. As she had arrived at the water reservoir, she stripped naked. He watched her, he thought that she will swim and that maybe later.....but then something happened. She walked into the water but not started to swim. He thought in the first moment that she maybe dives for a moment, but she not appeared again. He realized what happens and luckily he not run away, but rescued her. He also informed us immediately. He told us the truth, why he was there, but that was not important. Without him she would had died in this night."

"Who rescued her?"

"Anthony."

"Mr. Flores?"

"You know him?"

"Yes, we met at the pistachio trees. We had a short conversation."

"I saw that he's a person I can trust in. He worked hard and especially since after my husband's death he's a very important person for the farm."

"He's one of the foremen."

"He's much more. He's responsible especially for the cattle. They are an important factor for our farm."

"He lives in the house next door?"

"Yes, he lives there with his family."

"Wasn't it strange that he works on the farm now? I mean strange for Hannah? And what happened with Hannah?"

"We decided that it would be the best for her to spend some time in a sanatorium. As far as I know you have some experiences with this."

"Yes, and I can say that's not the best memory I have. Hannah?"

"After my husband became cancer, and that it became obvious that it was too late, too much metastases, she asked if she can come back. We agreed and she was a total different person now."

She started to work hard for the farm, she learned a lot about farming, but also about how to manage a farm. And then, after his death, we managed the farm together.”

“And very successful obviously. You thought she will succeed you?”

“Of course.”

“No man in Hannah’s live?”

“No man in my live - you not always need a man.....”

“Yeah, that’s a message more men should hear. But why she has written a last will?”

“This last will she has written before her attempted suicide. She had sent it to a lawyer. She never told me it, maybe she had forgotten it. Now that she’s dead, he has informed me.”

“Will be her last will a problem?”

“No, not at all. I’m the universal heir.”

“Wow, this has to be a very emotional moment for you.”

“Yes, the little rebel, the little cute rebel and her mother. You’re convinced now that it was a crime?”

“Obviously. Someone kidnapped her, held her captive and murdered her. I think that she knew the murderer. I think that maybe you also know the murderer, but I’m not sure about that. Greg?”

“He think in the same way.”

“If he not asked for it. You should write a list with names that comes in your mind. Names connected with Hannah, names connected with you and names connected with both of you. Greg should check them. Then it would be important that you think about whether something special has happened at the farm during the last time. Maybe it looks not important at the moment, but write a list also. Also this list would be important for Greg.”

“So your not interested to start your own investigation?”

“Not in that way at least. I can not do more at the moment than the police. My feeling tells me, but it’s only a feeling, that no one from the farm is involved. Okay, live is strange sometimes, but an important fact for me is that she not died at Pyramid Lake. This three days, obviously she was not on the farm during this days.”

A police car came slowly down the road and stopped in front of us. It was Greg who came back from work, back to his wife and his little child.

“Hey, how you feel Daryl? Peter.”

“Better now. News?”

“Yes. The sample from the water reservoir definitively not matches with the sample from her lungs. But I think that’s no surprise. We have sent a sample of the water from her lungs to a specialized laboratory to get a profound analysis. Also we’ve started to collect more samples. It will take a few days till we get the result from the laboratory. And then our specialist for footprints. He’s very sure now that someone has tried to fool us, but not in a very clever way. He has reconstructed the following. First, someone carried her up the slope. We have deeper footprints from men’s shoes. From time to time he laid the body on the ground, obviously to recover somewhat. At the top he let roll down the body the steeper slope, to fake an accident. Then he walked down the slope again, not so deep foot prints. Then it becomes interesting. Obviously he changed shoes and he walked up the slope again with women’s shoes. But he was an idiot. It seems that he had forgotten his shoes because we have a last track down the slope, somebody walked barefoot down the slope! We have some nice footprints from this track. Interestingly his shoe size is larger then hers. Also, Hannah wore her shoes as we found her. He had an additional pair of women’s shoes, shoes that were very similar to hers, but not identical, and three shoe sizes larger, but two shoes sizes smaller than the men’s shoes. This opens up some room for interpretation. Howsoever, the tracks overlay themselves, that’s the key to reconstruct this.”

“So this points thereto that we have a perpetrator who’s able to carry a body up a steep slope. But who’s maybe not that clever. Or, that he maybe is very clever and maybe he is a she. Or maybe it’s not a single perpetrator but a couple. But the shoes. Even when it would be a couple, matching shoes?”

“Yes, we search for a shoe shop that sold matching shoes the last days. But three days time for it.



They could have been bought in Los Angeles for example, even online, but it's a chance. We also analyze the traffic surveillance at the moment. Maybe we find something that's helpful."

"Thank you Greg. It was a long day for you. Enjoy the rest of the day."

"You also Daryl, Peter."

"Yeah, spend some time with your wife and child."

"I will."

He parked the car at the back of this house and we were alone again.

"What you're thinking about?"

"The kidnapper, the murderer. The connection between him and Hannah is the key."

"You still think it's a single person and a man?"

"Now more than ever."

"I will do my homework, but now I'm a bit tired."

"You wanna go to bed?"

"No, why? I will find no sleep. I'm simply not in the mood to think about it longer."

"That's understandable."

"Do you like it to be here, on the farm?"

"Well, it's nice to sit here, the quietness. But it's no easy job to work here, to spend your daily life here."

"You think you wouldn't be a good farmer?"

"My problem is more, that I'm not sure about it at all, in what I'm good in."

"Private investigator?"

"That was a silly idea from the beginning. This is no option for the future."

"You're rich and you have a lot of opportunities."

"You have also a lot of opportunities. You could sell the farm. You would be also no poor person after that. You would have a lot of opportunities."

"Selling that what my life is? No good idea."

"And the future? You have no heir?"

"I'm old but not that old. There's no reason for a hurry. I have time to decide this."

"That's true. Maybe it's good to have something in your life, that's a basis for your life."

"You have nothing?"

"What?"

## **Almond Trees**

Daryl had to do office work today and I decided to drive around on the farm. It was not my idea to investigate in the case, that was the police's task, I wasn't sure about why I should stay for longer on the farm. I was sure that it would be only a matter of time till the police would solve the case. Who ever had committed the crime, he had left too much evidence. So, why I should stay on the farm?

But I had to confess that I liked it to be on the farm. Such a short time now, the Sunbeam in the garage – it was a strange thought for me, to think about that I would open the garage, would enter the Sunbeam to leave the farm, to drive to San Francisco. It appeared surreal, but maybe the surreal thing was, to be here? I thought about the almond trees, this symbol for all the conflicts about water and farming, this so wonderful trees. But I was no farmer, almonds I was used to in desserts and cakes. And yet, sitting in the car that Daryl had gave me, driving through the fields, it was a feeling like this would be the place, the place that could be an aim.....

It was so different to the city, the city that offers you so much. Every day, and much more every night, you could choose – whatever you would wish, the big city would offer it. But was this really what you wish? But what I should do here? What would I wish? I had no idea.....

I had left Los Angeles because I couldn't deal any longer with all this sophisticated hypocrisy, with

all this hustle around money, with all this violence, with all this faked glamour facades. But to drive to San Francisco? Sure, this city was very different, but in the end? I couldn't longer listen to the party people at night: Is this our Uber? No, I think not? But we wait since ten minutes now. Oh, that is our Uber – what a shit! Sure, why you should reflect about that Uber is shit, that it's shit to be a driver for Uber? No, San Francisco can't be the aim. But what should be the aim then? Yeah, it would be a nice illusion, living on a farm like this, working on a farm like this – and then? Then everything would be fine? Who should believe this?

I stopped at a field and looked at the brown soil. What would grow there in summer? I had no idea, salad maybe, or strawberries? But whatever, something would grow, food for the people here in California, food for the people in the whole country, for people in the whole world. Producing food, without any doubt much more useful than producing money at the stock market or with “deals”. This was something real, not something that existed only hypothetically. But this would mean that you would have to work hard to do so, the mentality of a gambler was not expediently. The problem with water. Yes, this was a problem. But shouldn't it possible to support farming, to support the production of food, more than the so useful movie industry, the Hollywood glamour world? But maybe this was too naive, no, this was not too naive, this was not naive at all! Why was it okay that the rich and the celebrities had always enough water for their pools and gardens? The food production? What was more important? L.A. would give you an unambiguous answer.....

I sat in the car again, drove around the mountains, should I drive back? But what should I say to Daryl? That I wasn't sure why I should be on the farm any longer? That I would like it, to be on the farm longer? That I would like it to be.....

The night began, for hours I had driven around now, had not eaten anything, the bottle with water was empty since a longer time. But I wasn't hungry, nor I was thirsty. The only thing that I was, was, that I was unsure about my feelings. I thought about Alexandra, my impossibility to trust her. I thought about Minh and Kishana, Lizzy's mom – Cecily? It was good that I had left L.A., but now? In one way I was a millionaire now, but selling the diamond would be disgusting. The Sunbeam? I was no car enthusiast, therefore why not. The money would give me enough opportunities to create a meaningful future for me. Here on the farm? Why not?

I stood on a hill and looked down, the houses of the farm, lights in the windows, the night had begun. I saw the light in Daryl's house, in Greg's house, Mr. Flores' house, the other houses – could be one of them my house? A strong desire smote me, the desire to have a house, a place you would call your home. And maybe, even you wouldn't live alone there.....

I opened my eyes and saw the blackness of the large water reservoir. Hannah, I nearly had forgotten her. Why she had to die? What had happened in the days between her disappearance and her death? Why Pyramid lake? I was sure that the police would solve the case, that they would catch the murderer. But would this help Daryl? In the first moment she appeared very strong, but I had the feeling that this was not the reality. First her husband, but then Hannah was there for her. Now Hannah, who was now there for her? Greg maybe? What was her future now – compared to her situation was mine a very comfortable situation. The woman I not had trusted, had made me a millionaire, what an irony. In the end she gave me the possibility to do something that would have a meaning, it was on me to do so. But, always but.....

I decided to drive to the water reservoir, the place Hannah had tried to commit suicide. What would had happen when Mr. Flores not had followed her? Who knows? And whatever his reasons had been to follow her, he had rescued her in the end. Maybe the reasons to do do something are not always the important thing, but the result? But that was now really somewhat naive. But the point was, you cannot know what your actions will cause, and that was all the time a problem for me. Especially because I had the feeling that I always did wrong – the action as such and what the action causes then.

I arrived at the water reservoir and looked at the black water. It was a calm mood, the water laid motionless, inviting, inviting like a beautiful bridge. I sat down and looked at the stars, like

sparkling diamonds on a black velvet blanket they appeared. I took a deep breath and had tears in my eyes, but even when this was a time to make a decision, this was not the moment for.....

## **The Distant Lights**

I sat and looked at the distant lights and felt that someone stood behind me, but I turned not around. So I continued looking at the stars.....

“Sorry, do I disturb you? I saw you driving down the road and guessed that you will be here. I walked down here.”

“No.....it’s okay.....”

“Sorry, I should let you alone.”

“No, maybe it’s better for me not to be alone at the moment. It’s only because.....”

“You not have to talk about it, maybe we have not to talk at all.”

“Maybe, but sometimes it’s possibly better to talk about things, at least I feel that way. Maybe we should talk more, at least to talk about such things, not always about this rubbish, we talk most of the time.”

“I will listen to you.”

“Yeah, would it be that easy as it sounds. It’s only because.....well, the last time.....”

“The last time you looked at the stars?”

“Yeah, the last time looking at the stars, not being alone.”

“Together with a woman?”

“Yeah, Santa Monica Beach.....”

“Alexandra?”

“Yeah, Alexandra.”

We not spoke for a while, looking at the stars, looking at the black surface of the water, the stars reflected in the blanket of the black water. In a moment I felt the impulse to touch her, but that would be inappropriate, everything felt inappropriate at the moment. I had no idea how I should behave, what would be appropriate.

“Would you allow me to ask you something about Alexandra?”

“Yes, sure.”

“It’s a very personal question.”

“You have the right to ask.”

“Do you think so?”

“As long as I have the right not to answer the question, yes of course.”

“Then I will ask my question – you loved her?”

“No.”

“This answer surprises me somewhat, to be honest.”

“I not trusted her, I was unable to trust her. You cannot love somebody you not trust.”

“As far as I know there are still many questions unanswered concerning this case. Maybe you did it right?”

“Yeah, I did it right. What I did was ridiculous, I acted like an idiot. I wished she had pulled the trigger as she pointed the gun on me. With that what she did she shames me. Trust, only a little bit of trust, but I was unable to.”

“I feel that you feel uncomfortable with my presence. I should leave.”

“No, please stay. It’s only that I wish that this story will end in another way this time. I’m sick of it, sick of all this.....crap around me.”

“Will you leave, will you continue your travel?”

“Where to go?”

“San Francisco maybe? You would be able to live a calm life.”

“San Francisco is rubbish. Sometimes I think I should look for a place far from everything. I see a mountain scenery covered with an unbelievable amount of snow. And I live in a small wooden

house, all alone, no other houses in this clime. The funny point about it?"

"Yes."

"In my youth I loved snow, but now I hate the cold weather. Now I lust for the sun and the warmth the sun bestows you. It's a very absurd thought."

"Maybe it's a thought with a deep truth."

"Rosebud? The past is the past and the present creates the future, what a spectacular thought. Why we are unable to handle life? Maybe our ideas about life are wrong? Maybe I should find my place where I can be alone."

"At least I will not let you alone now, at this place."

"What do expect? I'm a failure concerning this, you can believe me. I'm a failure concerning many points, always the others have to pay the price. I'm not good for my clients – yes, maybe I should leave this place, it would be better for you."

"No, please, not stand up. I feel secure because you're here. You talked about trust, I trust you."

"I'm no private investigator any more, I've no license anymore, I even own no weapon anymore. You trust me? You know my record – it's not that recommendable to trust me."

"Some see this in a different way. Yes, I trust you - did she loved you?"

"Alexandra?"

"Yes."

"How should she had been able to love me?"

"In which way do you mean this?"

"I not trusted her. Can you love someone who not trusts you? I made it impossible for her to love me."

"And.....the car and the ring?"

"Revenge? You know, the moment that she pointed the gun on me? I was convinced about that she will pull the trigger. That was such a misinterpretation! The big private dick and his capability of drawing conclusions!"

"I think that she loved you, and that she trusted you."

"That makes it not really better for me!"

"No, not at all. But as you said and even when it's a worn out phrase - the past is the past. The present will create the future. And maybe also this is a worn out phrase - the future is not written now. I believe in this."

"And your future? Still open?"

"Sure, I can continue to run the farm, I can sell the farm, it will be my decision. I'm privileged, I can decide, and it will be my decision."

"You seem to be very strong, also Alexandra appeared very strong. No happy endings, only in this hypocritical Hollywood movies."

"I'm the daughter of a L.A. actress! I'm raised up in this world. But now I have found my place here."

"It's difficult to say this, but....."

"Now, after Hannah's death? After my husband's death?"

"Yes. I would not have the strength to continue, at least not at this place. But you're really plan to continue in running the farm. You're a woman of strength."

"I'm not alone. There's Greg for example, his wife and their little daughter. All the people who live on the farm, who are part of this farm. I'm not alone."

"And I wish to live alone in my wooden house in the mountains surrounded by a huge amount of snow only. Maybe.....once she said something about the ring, about the diamond's color...."

"What?"

"That the diamond has the color of children's blood."

"That's a very odd comparison....."

"Well, in a way not that much. But what irritates me today is, that when I look at the ring today, then I think about, that in a very surreal and confusing manner the color of the diamond matches surprisingly, in a very harmonic way, to all the blood that was all around there, after she had put the

gun into her mouth.....”

## Cozy Days

The police did their job and they did it well. Still they weren't able to solve the case, but the feeling was there, that it will be only a matter of time. They got many hints, had some ideas, the only thing what still was missing was, the one evidence who would give the initial spark. As said, I had the feeling that it will be only a matter of time. And I? I still stayed on the farm, still not really sure whether this was meaningful in any way. On the other hand, where I should go to? San Francisco? That would be a joke, what should I do there? Simply sitting in the car and driving? It was obvious that what was, would come to an end now. What was so far, was the past. The future had to be different, whatever, different, simply different. I thought about to ask Daryl whether I could stay on the farm, maybe I could work for her? But that was nonsense! I had to find my own place even when I had the feeling that there's no place at all in this world for me. I had bought me a weapon again, you know what kind of weapon, in my backpack the weapon was. But that would be no solution, but in a strange way it was calming to know that this weapon was there, that I would be able to use it whenever I would wanna do so. Cozy days surrounded me.....

“Good morning, Mr. Maurer.”

“Good morning, Mr. Flores. But call me Peter.”

“With pleasure. Anthony.”

“Anthony, what are you planning to do?”

“I have some work to do at the almond plantations near Wheeler Ridge.”

“Can I come with you?”

“Of course? You wanna talk with me?”

“I have nothing to do – you mean the almond trees very near to Wheeler Ridge?”

“Yes. Ms. Foster not needs you?”

“She's not at the farm at the moment. Yes, it would give me the opportunity to talk with you, but also to go to Wheeler Ridge to do some thing there - I need your advice.”

“An advice? You not want to talk with me about Hannah?”

“No, I have no questions about her. I not investigate in this case. I need an advice because I'm not sure how I should behave, what I should do.”

“Then, jump in.”

We drove to the almond trees and spoke not that much, at least we spoke not about my thoughts. It was a wonderful morning, the morning sun on one side, the moon on the other side, the almond trees in front of us.

“What you have to do?”

“They have to be cut. I look if we start with it this week or maybe we wait a bit longer.”

“Daryl said that you're the man for the cattle?”

“Yes, that's my special range of duty on the farm. But you have to be able to do various things on such a farm. I also look after the almond trees and I'm involved in the expansion towards pistachios for example.”

“Do you like the working and living at the farm? I mean you live also here. In a way the farm is your world.”

“I think that's a bit too much said. You need not that long to reach Bakersfield for instance – and if you need it, also Los Angeles is not that far. I was never attracted to, to live in a city.”

“A city offers you a lot, think about culture.”

“Many people think the city would give them work and a place to stay. Culture? How many can afford a ticket for a concert in the big city? How many can afford a place to live in the big city, not to talk about a house like the one I live in? I have a good income, but even with my income it would be difficult for me to make my living in Los Angeles. I have a job, I'm able to live with my wife

and my children in a nice house, surrounded by nature. I not say that's an easy life, that we have no problems, but compared with the situation in a city like Los Angeles? Culture? When we like to do it we can drive to Bakersfield or Los Angeles to attend a concert or an exhibition. But at the end of the day we will be back here again, and I enjoy it. What you wanna ask?"

"I thought about to stay here – I mean, not exactly here, but in this region maybe. I'm tired of Los Angeles, San Francisco? But I not know what I should do. I thought about that it should be possible to find work on a farm, to start a new life. But I'm no young man anymore, not sure about whether this is not only nonsense."

"With your English car in the garage and your ring in the safe? Have heard that you're no that bad private investigator?"

"This you can see very differently. But the point is that I think about what I should do with the rest of my live. What I've done the last years makes no sense anymore, but I fear the consequences, to be consequent."

"Does the thought to become a farm worker makes sense?"

"Not at all. But I like it to be here, it calms me down. I like the nature around me. I would like it, to stay here, but that's a very naive view on it – I'm aware of that. Nevertheless, I have problems to make the decision what I should do."

"I should give you an advice?"

"No, I know that I have to find an answer for myself. You will stay here for some time?"

"Yes. I have to check the trees. I think I will need some time for it."

"I will walk to Wheeler Ridge. If I need longer don't wait for me. There're enough opportunities to find my way back to the farm."

"Then have a nice day, Peter."

"Also, Anthony."

I walked to Wheeler Ridge, a bit longer than half an hour later I stood in front of the diner. I entered it, what else I should do than to drink a coffee? Carolyn was there and greeted me.

"Nice to see you again. You're still in town?"

"Yes, I'm still at the farm. Not so much customers today?"

"Still early. In a hour it will be a bit different."

"Yeah, your right. Still not noon. You live in Wheeler Ridge?"

"No, I live in Arvin. Why you ask?"

"You like the life here? You never thought about to live in a large city? Bakersfield or why not Los Angeles? You will find a job as waitress there without any doubt."

"No way! Even if they would pay me better – you lived in Los Angeles, or?"

"Yes."

"It's unbelievable what you have to spend there for the simplest condo. Some people need one or even two hours to reach there working place – one-way! Not to talk about the stress during the rush hour every day. Why I should be interested to live there?"

"Obviously many wanna live there."

"Yeah, chasing after their dreams? Yes, the city promises you a lot, the city pretends a lot, but the reality?"

"But sometimes some dreams come true."

"And the price therefor? Who talks about all of them, whose dreams become destroyed, about all the people, who become destroyed? Yeah, some dreams come true – I have no deep insight, but what I can see not gives me the impression that I wanna become a part of this, name it Hollywood glamour. You have talked with Ms. Foster about that?"

"It's because I enjoy my time here very much. Not in that sense, because I not work at the moment, it's more like a vacation for me at the moment. But it's a good feeling to have left the city behind, I only not know where to go."

"Stay here. Some say that you're not poor. It should be possible for you to find a place for you here."

"Have you ever had the feeling, that you know what's not good for you, but you not know what's good for you. That you hope for a change, that you long for a change, but that you fear this change, because you're not sure about what will be after the change? That you have a dream, but that you're not sure whether this dream should come true or not? I simply not know what I should do, what I should hope for, what the future should offer me. I hope therefore that something will happen, something that decides on my behalf."

"Some call this life, your life will go on. I have decided as a young woman to marry, now I live with my daughter as a divorced woman. Life will go on. I only think, that you shouldn't let your life pass by, in a passive manner. Maybe the ones who go to the big city and try to live their dreams are heroes, maybe they are only victims of an awful system – I decided to live here."

"You're unhappy with your decision to marry early? I'm old now and I never was married, I never had what you would call a relationship."

"Don't look back, what has happened has happened."

"And your daughter? What will you tell her?"

"Take your time, a life lasts long, there's no need for a hurry."

"And the big city and the dreams the big city offers you?"

"Think about whether this is your dream. If you're sure about that it's your dream try to realize the dream. But if you discover that it's only told by others, that this should be your dream, then be careful, don't let them fool you. Try to find your own way."

"Do you think that Ms. Foster found her way?"

"It's difficult for me to decide this. At least in a way I think, yes."

"And you, if you allow me to ask this, do you think you found your way?"

"Today yes, at least as far as it's possible for me."

"I think you helped me a lot – do you think that's never too late?"

"Well, in Los Angeles they will tell you this, as they will tell you that you can achieve everything, when you only try hard enough. But that's what they say in L.A. Here I would say that you not should wait too long, because when you wait too long then it's always too late."

I was back at the farm, late afternoon and found a message from Daryl - she would be back for dinner. Therefore I prepared something to eat for us and waited till she arrived.

"Hungry?"

"Somewhat."

"I could offer you a salad. You wanna have some meat thereto or something else?"

"Cheese?"

"How about cheese gratiné, with in butter fried fruits with green pepper?"

"You surprise me....."

"I'm a single, I have to cook for my own."

"Sounds good – on the patio?"

"Table is laid, I need fifteen minutes then we can eat."

"Then wait a bit before you begin. I will need a shower and new clothes."

"Bakersfield?"

"Yes, Hannah was my sole heir. I have to make some changes. You stayed here?"

"No, I was mainly in Wheeler Ridge. But we can talk later."

Half an hour later we sat on the patio and ate our salad.

"Well, surprising, but very interesting taste. You're a very good cook."

"I know some nice recipes, that's all."

"What did you at Wheeler Ridge?"

"I drank coffee, walked around, did a little shopping – nothing special."

"Is it boring for you to stay here?"

"No, not at all! It's nice to be here. I only not know how I can help you now."

"You help me therewith that you're here. You help me therewith that you have prepared this nice salad and that we sit now here and talk. I would be alone in the house now, I not wanna be alone

now.”

“You could go to Greg, you could eat there. Or they would come here?”

“Greg has it’s own life. I not wanna strain them in this way. I would not ask you to stay here when you would have.....you said, that you have no distinct aim at the moment.”

“That’s true, at the moment I have no distinct aim, no aim at all. But I think I should try to find one.”

“Maybe you can find one for you in this region?”

“I thought about it. But I’m not sure if this life, to live at this area, all this nature, this small towns – I’m not sure.”

“Bakersfield is not that far away?”

“Second time today, or third time?”

“Who?”

“I met Mr. Flores, and in Wheeler Ridge. Sure, life has it’s difficulties also here. But it’s puzzling that the people I meet here are not that much interested in to live at other places than here. Bakersfield maybe, maybe a city like Santa Clarita, but Los Angeles? Whereas I know many people who are unhappy to live in Los Angeles, not to say that they hate it. But that’s not that new for you.”

“Maybe you’re surprised, but from time to time I drive to Los Angeles. But you’re right, I cannot consider to live there, to work there. You can stay here if you want to.”

“And what I should do? I only know a few good recipes.”

“If they are all that good like this one, it will be by far enough.”

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"Good morning Daryl, breakfast?"

"Wow, that’s a nice beginning of the day."

"Coffee or tea? I can offer both."

"Coffee for me. Eggs?"

"Tell me your wishes....."

"Let’s see.....Eggs Benedict? Huevos rancheros? I’m not sure....."

"Sunny side up with with ham or bacon?"

"Over easy for me with ham."

"Five minutes and I will serving - orange juice?"

"Of course, the full program!"

"No problem, will you wait in the meanwhile at the patio?"

"I suppose that everything is prepared there?"

"Of course. I think I should be useful in one way at least."

"Is this a job application?"

"Well, in the light of the fact that I have none.....?"

"Fantastic breakfast. I really think I should take you into consideration for the job."

"I only had to use the things they were already there. Cereals, fruits for a fruit salad, oranges for an orange juice, eggs and ham, tomatoes and cucumbers, cheese and so much more. All in a very good quality from a very good farmer. I only had to finish everything - what are your plans for today?"

"Considering this? I think about whether I should skip work for a day to spend it in Bakersfield?"

"Fine for you. Should I do something special? Preparing dinner?"

"I think, I will have dinner in Bakersfield. Maybe you would like it, to accompany me?"

"For dinner?"

"You know Bakersfield?"

"Actually.....I never was there."

"Wow, L.A. is not that far? You know that the ninety-nine traverses Bakersfield?"

"Have heard of it. Yes, I get more and more the feeling that I was occupied too much with the large



cities. Apart from that, I think Bakersfield is not that small?"

"Depends somewhat on your standard. You know that Bakersfield hosts a university?"

"Yeah.....not really. Maybe it would be good for me to spend some time there. Especially with a good guide, who could show me everything, you should have seen while being in Bakersfield?"

"I agree totally with you! Let's spend the day together in Bakersfield. Not L.A., but maybe that's no mistake....."

".....no beaches!"

"Yes, no beaches. But living here, on the farm or in Bakersfield? If you need a beach, the ocean is not that far away. Bakersfield has way over three hundred thousand citizens - no that small city I guess. Maybe this is a nice aspect to live here? Bakersfield is not far away, Santa Clarita as well. The ocean is not far away, and if you need it, also Los Angeles. But you can be for your own here, when you like it. It's a bit difficult to do this in Los Angeles. And yet still, more people consider themselves as lonely people in a city like Los Angeles, than elsewhere."

"Yes, many expressed this in various ways. There's no place where you can be more lonely than in one of this big cities."

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"And? Your impressions about Bakersfield so far?"

"It's definitely a place where you can have a good living. But in way you can be happy and unhappy at every place. But you're right. I see nothing that you would have to miss would you live here. You showed me a nice place"

"Should we have a rest for a coffee? It's still a bit early for dinner, even when we've left out lunch after this wonderful breakfast."

"Coffee is always an option."

"You thought about your future?"

"The police makes progress. Still the puzzle is not completed, but I think there's a good chance that they will solve the case. I'm not sure, there's this uncertainty....."

"Uncertainty about the future, your future?"

"The uncertainty about making decisions. Not all my decisions in the past were good decisions, not to say, that they were a disaster."

"All of them?"

"At least the most important of them."

"And now you think again, that you have to make a very important decision, and you not know how you should behave?"

"Yes, obviously."

"Unfortunately, no one can answer you such a question. You're the only one whose task it's to answer this question."

"Yes. And even when I feel in such a way, that the answer is obvious, I fear to be consequent. I'm a coward."

"I think you've your reasons."

"Yeah, still this frightening feeling that this story repeats it self. But this time the story should have another end."

"A nice park here, so much green."

"Do you like the roses?"

"Yes, they are beautiful. But in one way, I always thought that roses are in a way a bit boring. I like white and black roses very much - well, red roses.....do you like blue hydrangeas?"

"Not in a special way - why you ask?"

"Don't know, they came me to mind suddenly. I like field flowers very much, daisies - lilies-of-the-valley."

"You like the small and inconspicuous flowers more?"

"Maybe they are smaller, but when you have an eye for them, then they are no longer inconspicuous."

"I think you have an eye for the beauty of the things, most other people simply not recognize."

"Sometimes it's better not to notice, even to ignore, things. It makes it easier."

"Maybe it makes it easier. But the price you have to pay therefore is, that you miss all this wonderful things this world can offer you, like a small, but wonderful, flower at the wayside."

"Where we will have dinner?"

"I know a nice small restaurant not far away from here. I hope you will like it - oh, I got a text message, it's from Greg?"

"And?"

"They have the result of the water sample. He asks whether we can meet, it would be important. I think we should return to the farm - would this be okay for you?"

"Of course!"

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"Sorry that I've screwed up your plans, but I think this is a very important information."

"No problem at all. This has the absolute priority."

"The result of the analysis of the water from Hannah's lungs is there and it's very surprising."

"You know now where it has happened?"

"We think so. The water is contaminated with oil and aviation gasoline."

"And that leads to what conclusion?"

"I think.....we nearly passed by an area as we used the ninety-nine on our way till Bakersfield, an area with two local airports, some lakes and places to stay."

"Yes, a team is on its way to take water samples from the lakes to cross-check them with our sample. But I think we have done a major step now to solve the case. Other officers will start with interviews to find witnesses. Why you look so shocked, is all okay - Daryl?"

"No, no, it's okay. Maybe I've made a mistake - I'm not sure.....Hannah?"

"What do you mean with this?"

"Can you give me a second?"

"Of course....."

"It's.....maybe I've forgotten to put a name on the list I've given you."

"Can you give me details?"

"It's.....the name is connected to me, but I see no connection to Hannah. At least it would be strange.....I know that you said that I should put all names on the list Peter, even when they are only connected with me."

"Yes, but it's not too late to put a name on the list now. On the contrary, the police can structure their interviews much better then. The name is connected with you and this place?"

"Yes.....Greg, can I talk with Peter alone for a moment?"

"Of course....."

"What you wanna tell me?"

"We got closer to each other the last days? At least I think so - or?"

"I think so too."

"You talked about wrong decisions - I've made a very worse decision at one point."

"And this decision is connected with the name, and the place, and maybe in a way unknown at the moment with Hannah?"

"Yes.""

"And obviously you've the feeling that this decision was a very wrong decision."

"It was a disgusting decision. But I thought that in the end it would have no consequences - and now. Now it seems that this decision is the cause for Hannah's death."

"Maybe you made this assumption a bit too fast. Maybe this name has no connection to Hannah at

all. Nevertheless you should give Greg the name."

"Of course. And....."

"I think the name is enough for the moment. Some more information would be good, a picture would be perfect."

"He worked for some time on the farm. We still have his personnel record."

"That's perfect. Have you any idea where he lives today?"

"No."

"Then give Greg his personnel record. This will help them to clarify whether he was at that place during the relevant time or not."

"No questions about my decision?"

"I've made so many disastrous decisions, I would be a bad judge!"

"Maybe I need no judge, but somebody to talk with?"

"Sorry, as you can see, I'm also not good in this. But maybe I simply should shut up and listen."

"Is it an unpleasant situation for you? You not have to do it."

"I have to, open your heart....."

"It was the time when I and my husband had a lot of quarrel about how we should handle Hannah's behavior. During this time a man worked on the farm, his name was Gerald Farnham. He gained my trust, he gave me the feeling he would understand me. Later it was obvious to me, that he only had used me. It happened only one time, Paradise Lakes. I fear I can tell Greg what water sample will match."

"Maybe that's a bit too early now. But you said, that you see no connection between him and Hannah? He worked on the farm?"

"Yes, but at this time Hannah was not on the farm. Or at least very seldom. I'm not sure how often at all he had a chance to see her, not that he would had a chance to talk with her. No, he was occupied therewith to fool me."

"Well, I do not see that you did something, that was such wrong?"

"We talked about trust before? Betrayal is no good basis to trust somebody."

"Can I talk with you, Greg?"

"Yeah."

"I can give you a name. Daryl will give you more information about the person as such later. Will this be okay for you?"

"You mean, I will get no background information?"

"Not at the moment. For the moment it would only be important to see, whether this man was there at Paradise Lakes, or in this area, at the relevant days. Furthermore you should analyze as fast as possible a water sample from the lake around the airport. I think it will be easy to find out whether the man, his name is Gerald Farnham, was there at the relevant time. Daryl will give you a picture of him."

"She has a picture of him?"

"He worked on the farm for some time."

"Shouldn't I know him then?"

"No, Daryl said that he worked on the farm before you and your wife moved to the farm."

"Okay. Then we will do the first step, to see then what will happen."

"Thanks, Greg."

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"I will tell you what we have ascertained so far. Gerald Farnham was there at the relevant time. A fast analysis of the water from the lake around the landing strip resulted, that it matches the water from Hannah's lungs. At least so far, as a quick analysis can show this. But the probability therefor is eighty percent - therefore....."

"Have you further information about him, without any doubt he's the suspect now."

"Yes and yes. He's our suspect now. What I can say is, that he started a career as small-time criminal after he had left the farm. In the last time he was suspected to be involved in more serious crimes. Among others.....blackmailing - any ideas, Daryl?"

She told him what she had told me. He listen to her without saying anything.

"No comments?"

"I'm a police officer, no judge."

"And as a friend? You're still a friend?"

"As a friend? As a friend I have not to judge upon you, I have to help you. But at the moment I have to find Hannah's murderer. The question is, why Hannah and not you? It would make sense when he would had tried to blackmail you - but Hannah? And why he should killer her then? We still have not all pieces of the puzzle, but we're near to a solution, and were're near to him."

"You know where he is?"

"He stumbled into a police check two days before. Unfortunately the warrant had not yet been published at this time. But the police took notice of him because of his criminal record."

"Where was it?"

"New Mexico, near the boarder to Arizona. Traffic surveillance recorded him also, yesterday, near El Paso. It looks like that he tries to escape. I hope that his aim will be not somewhere in Mexico."

"At least it seems that he stays near the Mexican border. Do you think that he knows that the police knows his name, that's he's a suspect of murder now?"

"Depends a bit on whether he did it or not? We will get him!"

## **Not Again!**

"No new information about Farnham?"

"No, but they have found the car he had used. Obviously he has changed his car."

"Then he has at least a hunch about, that the police searches after him."

"Or maybe he's only careful, as a murderer?"

"I'm a bit puzzled about that he still stays in the States. Why he not crosses the boarder?"

"Maybe he fears to be caught?"

"Yeah, the boarder control.....would be interesting to catch someone who tries to run from the States to Mexico and not vice versa! Maybe this will be a part of our future in the States."

"Greg is optimistic about, that they will catch him. It's definitive now, that the water samples match completely. But still there's no obvious connection between Farnham and Hannah?"

"It will come to light when they will get him. What will you do today?"

"I don't know. We still haven't had our dinner in Bakersfield so far?"

"That's true."

"And it was very nice to look at the stars with you....."

"That would be the program for the evening - till then?"

"A trip to L.A.?"

"L.A.?"

"Why not? It's a long time now that I was in L.A."

"Not long enough for me....."

"Come on, even L.A. has nice places - but we not have to go should you don't like it."

"Why not, Santa Monica Beach? An Italian ice cream at the pedestrian area?"

"You surprise me, Santa Monica Beach?"

"No stars there during daylight."

"Lunch?"

"Union station?"

"Union station?"

"Café Crepe - my special is a Caesar Salad with a bowl of bananas and strawberries above it. But

also the other dishes are very delicious.”

“That sounds as you’re a regular customer there. They will like it to see you again.”

“Think so. I like their triple Americano there.”

“You got me. Santa Monica with ice cream, pedestrian area and beach. Lunch at the Union Station – anything else?”

“I think that will be enough for the time we have. We have to be in Bakersfield for dinner.”

“The Buick or the Sunbeam?”

“It’s L.A., the Buick of course!”

“Then the Buick for L.A., and later the Sunbeam for Bakersfield.”

“That’s an enormous program! We should start…….”

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“You like it, to be here – or?”

“Yes. It’s wonderful to look at the ocean, standing here. The first time I stood here……isn’t she simply gorgeous?”

“She?”

“Everything beautiful is feminine - she will be my grave.”

“I’m not sure…….”

“Oh, not in that sense – at least……my ashes shall be spread over the ocean, to become a part of her, after my death.”

“That’s very romantic.”

“And you?”

“I haven’t thought about it. Together with my husband, together with Hannah……what else?”

“Yeah, sorry, that was heedless.”

“No, not at all. You were often here?”

“Yeah, as often as possible. I like it to be among the people here, at the pier and at the beach - it’s a better mood here as at Venice beach for example.”

“Should we walk a bit? I haven’t that often the opportunity to walk in the sand.”

“Then we should do it…….”

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“Is it a problem for you, to sit here with me in the sand?”

“Still no stars.”

“And many people around us!”

“Yes. Very different than on the farm. It’s very easy there to find a place for you own alone.”

“L.A., here I see no chance to be alone – not in that sense at least, in the other sense…….”

“Thirteen beaches, funnily this is my thirteenth beach. No, it’s very easy to feel lonely in this city. At least when you’re searching for more then shallow relationships and amusements - daughter of a L.A. actress.”

“Yes, on the farm you have not that much friends, but they are friends that will be there for you, when you need them.”

“Like Greg and his wife at the moment for you.”

“And you…….”

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“Italian ice cream, always something delicious. I saw a Café Crepe around the corner?”

“Yes, also here in Santa Monica. But I like the atmosphere of the Union Station, it’s something special for me to sit in this outstanding beautiful hall, drink something, eat something, read the L.A. Times……I did this from time to time as I lived in this city.”

"We should go back to the car."  
 "Why, the Metro station is no five minutes from here."  
 "But.....why not?"  
 "Believe me, with the Metro we will be quicker! And I like it....."  
 "Yes....."  
 "We will pass the place where I lived – more or less."  
 "Places of memory?"  
 "Memories, but no good memories."  
 "I spoil the mood - let's walk to the Metro station."  
 "The Rose Garden....."  
 "Exposition Park?"  
 "Yes."  
 "I was there one time with my husband, a very nice place."  
 "Yes, very nice. But that's the past – let's have a trip to Union Station!"

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"The Caesar Salad with the fruits on top is really a very good combination. They should put it on the menu. Peter's Caesar Salad!"  
 "I could make one for you, when you like it?"  
 "I would enjoy it. It's really a very wonderful place, this wonderful hall."  
 "But you're not for the first time here?"  
 "Well, I normally not used the Metro, and I lived in the Hollywood hills. I have no distinct memories about this place. You can live your whole life in this city and miss the most wonderful places, also an aspect of L.A."  
 "You know the public library downtown?"  
 "I know the building from outside, have saw it."  
 "Next time – okay?"  
 "Yeah, next time. We should have a ride back."  
 "Yes, a long way till Bakersfield."  
 "First to the farm, to change cars."  
 "Yeah, first to the farm....."

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"A real nice restaurant."  
 "You like it? I like most that it's not that formal."  
 "Yes, I like this too. Nevertheless, and not that you not looked beautiful before, but your not that formal evening dress looks very beautiful."  
 "Thanks. You also look not that bad."  
 "Ah, I'm a man! Men are boring. Women have so much more possibilities concerning clothes and such things."  
 "Jealous? And as a woman I can tell you, that I would like it, that I would have more other possibilities. Clothes and jewelry - very fine! Jobs and to be taken serious - well!"  
 "That's true, I only can agree with you. You've decided to run the farm further on?"  
 "And you? Can you imagine to live on a farm?"  
 "Actually yes, but I fear I would screw it up."  
 "Maybe you should try it?"  
 "I screwed up too much in my life."  
 "You should not underrate yourself."  
 "Some women and a teenage girl in L.A. will see this a bit different."  
 "Not everything what you did was useless."

"Says the man in the park while looked at the young boy, standing at the stairs."

"But this was L.A.! I can tell you that's possible to leave this fucking city behind you!"

"The city maybe, but your past?"

"And my past? You not trusted Alexandra, maybe this was no mistake. I betrayed my husband, that was definitively a disgusting deed. So, who's the traitor?"

"Two times I had the possibility to pull the trigger, two times I had the obligation to pull the trigger. One time I pointed the gun at myself, the other time at one of this assholes who ruin this world with their arrogance and hubris! Both times I wasn't able to pull the trigger!"

"Maybe this is simply a fucking thinking! Why always this fucking gun shit? Aren't there no other possibilities than always violence? Is this the only solution: To pull the trigger?"

"The problem is that someone else pulled the trigger, had to pull the trigger - as my representative! The problem is that they have to pay the price now, which I should have to pay! Maybe you could argue now, that the first example is a silly metaphor only, but unfortunately, the second case we talk about is the real thing. Lizzy's mom? First degree murder - death row! And why? Because I was a coward! I not pulled the trigger! She had to do it! I'm no good companion for women!"

"I fear, that you stick too much in your private dick character. This is no dumb Hollywood movie. Shouldn't we think about, that all this would had not to be happen, when there wouldn't be this fucking Hollywood system. And "Hollywood system" is a metaphor now! Why was it possible that "he" did what "he" did over this long time? Why nobody talked about it - it was an open secret! And when eventually one said something on time, they swept it under the table! It's a men thing - or? As a men, especially as a white, rich, religious, conservative man your a good man by nature. Everything someone says in a negative way about you has to be a lie! Especially when it's said by a woman - not to talk about that she's maybe an Afro-American or Latino woman, that she's poor or maybe that she shows emotions and feelings. But the man is allowed to do everything, allowed to act in a way no one else would be allowed in. Maybe we should change this, maybe we should talk about this and not that much about this gun shit?"

"That's fine and good said, while everywhere this shit happens. You lived long enough in this fucking city to know that there will be some nice talking and in the end nothing substantial will have changed. You as a woman, as a mother? When Hannah's murderer will hear the verdict, this will help you - or? But what when nobody is really interested in to find the perpetrator? What, when you know that a lie is a lie, but nobody is interested in it? Yes, you're right, you're absolutely right! But that would require that it's not only a hollow promise, that Lady Justice is blind. Sometimes she has very sharp eyes, sometimes she sees just only, what she wants to see."

"Maybe you should look for a place where you can find your inner peace."

"Yeah, maybe. But I fear this will be no place on earth."

"Also not.....will you stay a bit longer?"

"At least as long as the case is not closed - if it's okay for you?"

"Yes, of course. I'll pay....."

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We sat on the patio behind the house in two very comfortable rocking chairs and looked at the stars. It was late, the next day has begun already, some fluffy clouds at the sky not disturbed us. From time to time an animal of the night could be heard, we not talked that much. The time moved on, between the rocking chairs a small table with two drinks on it. Empty since a longer time, but neither of us felt the motivation to ask about two new ones, neither of us felt the motivation to disturb the silence. But then, suddenly, Daryl moved her head and looked at me.....

"Which of the constellations up there is your most favorite one?"

"The Swan - it's astonishing how good the stars match with a swan. The small head, the long and thin neck. Then the massive body and the short tail. And finally the enormous wings. But what affects me the most is, to see the swan flying trough the Milky Way towards the galactic center. And yours?"

"The Orion."

"Yes, also very beautiful. You have a special relation to this constellation?"

"Yes, as a little girl. The window of my room pointed towards south. In winter, when I lay in bed, the Orion fitted exactly into the window. It was, as that he would looked at me, but not as a spy, as someone who was there to protect me. And after a while I could see also his two dogs, also there to protect me."

"Yes, the stars always fascinated people throughout the time. Have you ever seen Saturn through a telescope, with your own eyes?"

"Yes, a breathtaking sight. I know that this little cloud up there is in fact a whole galaxy like our own."

"Andromeda, far away but still visible. Do you know that our galaxies will collide in some billion years?"

"I think I've saw something about it in TV. It has to be a spectacular sight, when Andromeda will span over the whole sky. You can see two Milky Ways at the sky then."

"But unfortunately in some billion years."

"Isn't it incredible, time and distances? When you look at the night sky, everything here on earth becomes so marginal. Millions and billions, that's so much beyond everything that the human experience offers you."

"Well, in L.A. you can find people who own billions. But maybe they have lost the overview of what they own. You know the North America Nebula?"

"You're kidding me?"

"No, absolutely not. Apart from that also a California Nebula exists, but who is a bit a fake in the sense that it's simply a roughly rectangular shaped nebula, the North America Nebula has in a very striking way nearly exactly the shape of North America."

"Really?"

"Yes, the most concise region is the area around the Gulf of Mexico. Hey, and amateur astronomers use some stars to find the nebula who they call "Little Orion", because the look nearly like the big Orion."

"Now you're kidding me!"

"No, I will show it you later. It will be easy to find a picture in the Internet. But I'm still not at the end."

"If this is not true.....what else?"

"Next to the North America Nebula is the Pelican Nebula. The largest part of this nebula looks like the head and the beak of a pelican. The body and the wings are also there, but not that matching."

"I'm really looking forward to see this picture."

"And, come on, I'm still not at the end."

"Hey, with what you wanna top this story?"

"The nebulae are laying in the constellation of the Swan, near to the tail. Also the Little Orion is there. Your favorite constellation is, in a smaller variation, a part of my favorite constellation - maybe....."

"Yes?"

"Maybe.....you should not move you head now, maybe you should act as if you still look at the stars with me, maybe you should not think that I talk stupid nonsense now."

"And what should I think?"

"That I've seen something moving behind the cattle fence on the opposite side. It's a person, and I think this person has something in his hand and I think it's a rifle."

"Who should.....Farnham?"

"Would be stupid on one hand, but who else? But I think at the moment this is uninteresting. I tell you what we will do."

"You will tell me....."

".....I'm the private dick! I'm here to protect you, that's why you hired me."

"I not....."



".....not now! I will stand up very fast now and in the same movement I will knock over your rocking chair. When you lie on the ground you will crawl to the door – okay so far?"

"And you?"

"I will be behind you."

"You will shield me?"

"Don't be too optimistic, you know that I've a knack for screwing things up. I will count 1-2-3 and then I will start - okay?"

"Yes."

"1.....2.....3....."

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I jumped up, grabbed the armrest of her rocking chair and.....even she was surprised from it, suddenly laying on the floor! And exactly that was my idea, to surprise and confuse our source of danger. Immediately she started to crawl towards the backdoor, I did the best to present me as an aim. No, I wasn't sick of my life, in this moment I was more alive then ever! But I wasn't his aim, to shoot at me, would not help him much. By no later than with his first shot all the people around us, in the other houses, would become aware that something happens - they would call the police. Therefore, it would be stupid to shoot around without an distinct aim, the aim he was returned for. She reached the backdoor and opened it, I stood behind her - then this bloody idiot began to fire. One.....two.....three times - a fucking pain fulfilled my left lower thoracic region. The lung? Hopefully not penetrating. I looked down, fuck blood.....

"Are you okay?"

"Yeah, move on! Are you okay!"

"Yes....."

She crawled through the backdoor, I was behind her and closed the door. Why he stopped to shoot? Maybe because he was a lousy shooter? Three shots with a rifle from this distance and only one hit? Wow, maybe you should exercise more.....

"You're really okay?"

"Yes Peter, but he hit you! - Looks not good....."

"I'm not dead. But the other two bullets? They not hit you? And the penetrating bullet?"

"No, I'm unharmed....."

".....upstairs, in my room!"

"Would this be clever?"

"Yes, I'm not sure whether he will silly enough to come in. The police will be on it's way, we can entrench in my room so long."

"Without protection? I've a gun....."

".....I also, upstairs."

"I thought that you no longer own one?"

"I bought one a few days before - upstairs please!"

She helped me with the stairs, obviously my wound was more severe than I thought at the first moment - blood on the floor and the staircase.....

"I hope that an ambulance is on its way also."

"Sure, we only have to wait....."

We reached my room and left the door ajar, so that we would be able to hear what happened outside. I sat on the bed, she stood in front of me and looked at me.

"Do you think he will come in?"

"If he's no idiot? No. But obviously he's an idiot, therefore.....?"

"What's your plan?"

"My backpack. Can you give me the gun that's inside?"

"Wouldn't it better that I take the gun?"

"No, you will hide behind the cupboard....."

".....I'm no coward....."

".....you're his aim! This is a wooden house? I would fire through the door and the wall, would I be in his stead."

"And you?"

"I will use the table as shelter. I will wait, whether he will be stupid enough to enter the room, then his stupidity will come to an end - was this the backdoor?"

"Yes, that means that he's inside now. It will be easy for him to follow us, the blood on the floor and the staircase."

"Would you be stupid enough to enter a room with people inside who will await you?"

"No."

"But I hope he's in fact that stupid - give me the gun.....please....."

She grabbed the backpack and opened it.....

"Wow, are you serious that you plan to wave around with this monstrosity?"

"It's.....it's a symbol."

"For whatever this symbol stands.....well, are you sure that you're capable even to hold this monster - you're not looking like Clint at the moment?"

"I only have to wait whether he will enter the room or not, that's all - he not went upstairs so far?"

"No, we would have heard him, the staircase creaks."

"I can hear nothing....."

"Maybe he....."

"Whatever, we can wait....."

"Stop! Drop your weapon, kneel down and hands up!"

"Fuck, that's - no.....?"

"That's Patricia! Greg has night shift today, I know it....."

"Why the fuck she comes in!"

"She's a police officer....."

".....she's the mother of a toddler!"

"And a police officer....."

"Stop, this is my last warning....."

"Help me, we have to....."

One.....two.....three shots - than nothing anymore.....

I jumped on my feet, as good as I could, and tried to ran to the door - Daryl was faster.....

"Let me! I've the gun!"

She stepped aside and I stepped out, on the corridor, looking down the staircase. Farnham stood at the foot of the staircase, he had a gun in his hand, no longer a rifle, pointing to his right - he also looked in this direction. I did the same - a body lay on the ground.....Patricia, I pointed with my gun on him.....

"Drop your gun, Farnham!"

"Oh, come on, look at you! Maybe I should tell you, that she's not dead, not so far. I think she has still a chance - if you not screw it up....."

"And what would you propose?"

I felt Daryl behind me.

"Oh, my beautiful queen....."

".....fuck you, Farnham! You will pay for that!"

"At the moment, I've the feeling, that others have to pay for whatever. I would say that I will leave the house no, very slowly, and then you can help her and try to rescue her. And to be honest, Daryl, it looks like as your partner would need some help also - hey, big cowboy!"

"Stop this useless talking! Leave!"

"With pleasure. Bye, sweetheart....."

"You cannot....."

"....not now, the police will get him!"

I did not know, whether he had heard my words, whether I was a stupid idiot again, whether he was

a stupid idiot, whether this was his plan, regardless of my words, but.....

With a sudden movement he pointed the gun on me, ready to pull the trigger, ready to kill me, kill Daryl, kill Patricia.....

I had no idea, whether I awaited this, whether even in my condition I was able to react that fast, no idea what it was. Suddenly, in a fraction of no time, my mind was totally clear, everything happened in extreme slow motion. I saw in his eyes, saw his hand moving, grabbed my fucking big gun with iron will, ready to plunge all the rounds into his body - I pulled the trigger, first, gave him no chance!

That was my wonderful plan, but - why this fucking gun? The recoil, even of the first shot, was too much for me, the gun became torn out of my hand and I heard it falling down the stairs - I was such a loser! An awful pain hit my body, I nearly passed out, dropped on the floor, blackness surrounded me for a moment. I had only one thought - maybe my bullet had hit him! Maybe Harry has not been a that stupid choice? It was no fun to be hit by such a bullet, even by one - maybe.....

But if not, I would be responsible for the death of two more persons - I not counted me.....and started to open my eyes.....

I looked down the staircase and I thanked the God in whom I not believed in! Farnham laid at the foot of the staircase, a big red patch decorated his belly area - I had hit him! But he was not dead, he moaned - his gun? He had dropped it, the gun laid out of his reach - the situation was clarified!

"Daryl.....?"

"I'm on my way, I will look after Patricia. You will stay here till the ambulance arrives!"

"I can't, Farnham is not dead. I not see my weapon!"

"Down there, he cannot reach it, also not his own weapon. Please, stay here."

I heard her walking down the staircase, reached the handrail of the staircase, and followed her as good as I could. It was still a somewhat unclear situation - no risk anymore! As I reached the foot of the staircase, I sat down on the first step and looked over to Daryl. She cared for Patricia, she moved, a good sign, even when I could not see her injuries. Then I looked at Farnham - he looked at me and smiled.....

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Déjà vue - back to the beginning, but this time it was different. History not repeated itself in a simple way, this was a myth. Sometimes the circumstances were very identical, but apart from the "very" and not "absolutely", the constantly recurring effect was, the closer you looked at the circumstances, the more you could see the differences. I sat and waited till the police and the ambulance would arrive. Hopefully not only one ambulance - Patricia, how severe were her injuries? I tried to look into her direction as Farnham addressed me.....

"You're her new lover?"

"I'm not interested in your trash-talk, save your breath, you will need it."

"As I see it, you need it more then I - I thought I can give you some insights?"

"I know that you had an affair with her, therefore....."

"Yeah, with "her".....fear your days as good lover are gone, good hit!"

"I'm a private dick from L.A., and I did my job. The rest the police will do."

"You're a private dick? Hey, not interested why I did it?"

"No, you're an idiot, why I should be interested in your thoughts?"

"Well, at least I was not unsuccessful - looking at you, looking at her....."

He tried to point with his head towards Patricia, in what he was not very successful in.....

"You are a total loser, your aim was to kill Daryl, and she has not a scratch! I would call this a total failure."

"Maybe, but I thought that I've fucked first the mother and then the daughter, why not killing first the daughter and then the mother."

"I'm not interested in your shit."

"But I! You hadn't an affair with Hannah, you not even knew her!"

"Don't fall for his trick, Daryl. He would tell you everything, he knows that he failed and that this is his end."

"But I've a right to know why he killed Hannah!"

"Yes, you have. But believe me, his injury is not deadly, the police will have all time to question him later."

I wasn't sure whether she would believe me this. But I thought it would be better that she would hate me later, would he die, than to risk anything in this situation.

"I would agree with you, that your injuries are more severe than mine, but I think, even when I would appreciate it, that it's not cut and dried that I will survive this....."

He looked at Daryl.....

".....I fucked her and I killed her, and I enjoyed both!"

"DARYL!"

What a fucking pain! Not long now I would be able to manage it, not to lose my consciousness.....

"Daryl! Believe me, he knows that he failed! This is only a fucking play! Why this nonsense at Pyramid Lake? Let the police do their job, let Greg do his job!"

"Give me only this question. Pyramid Lake is a good key word. There you tried, that all looks like an accident or something like that. Obviously you tried to escape to Mexico, but now you're here? Several days Hannah was your captive, but whatever your plan was.....yes, I agree with you, Peter. I only can come to the conclusion, that everything was the action of a loser."

"Well, the things not developed in a way I thought, I had to improvise....."

"....like a real loser. And now we should wait the moment till the police arrives."

Daryl turned around to look after Patricia again.....

"And I fucked Hannah, she got pregnant, I payed for the illegal abortion in Mexico, and I thought I could blackmail her therewith now."

Daryl turned around again and looked at him, in her hand my fucking gun? Had not saw that she had picked it up?

"He's dead anyway, no reason to do something stupid!"

I tried to stand up, realized now that I sat in my own blood and failed.

"This is his only chance now to compromise you!"

"Nothing left....."

"The farm.....maybe I.....?"

"Maybe you....."

She lowered her hand slowly.....

"It was a pleasure to fuck you both, and it was an absolute pleasure to me, to fulfill her wish to drown, and to press her head under the water. But uppermost I would had liked it, to shoot you as my last trophy."

I had not to look that carefully, to see her hand raised again, and even if I thought that she would not be that stupid to fulfill him his last wish, I had the impulse not to chance it. But maybe I should had trusted her, but I decided to jump up, to bring my body between her and him, that I would try to grab the gun, trust.....

I wasn't even able to "jump up", I raised up a bit and moaned heavily, lost my balance totally, tried to grab the gun and missed it totally, and with my whole weight I crashed into Farnhams lower body - not again this shit should happen! From afar I could hear the sirens of the police and the ambulance, what I heard not was a shot, and now it would be irrelevant, should it be only one ambulance.....

## **Hospital**

I woke up in the hospital - ICU - a lot of stuff around me, an empty head inside of me. I realized not to be dead, but it meant nothing to me. Would had been the insight, to be dead.....the sun shined.....

Nurses and doctors came and looked after me and I had no feeling therefor whether this was a singular moment, or a series of events. I felt like an empty husk, why they made such a hustle around me? My only wish was to sleep, deep and long, to wake up in another land without all this shit. Would my health care plan cover all this, came me to mind? What a wonderful country we were that this could be a question? I wished to fade away, no longer all this struggling for everything. Well, knowing that I was privileged. A man on the street would not need to think about such questions - no, would be the answer! Happy dying in a happy country.....

Patricia? Daryl? I realized that the nurses and doctors talked to me, but that I knew nothing to say - what should I say? I thought about, whether I should ask about Patricia and Daryl, but I felt no motivation to say something, only to close my eyes to sleep.....

Rain outside, the people around me were happy about it. Hey, this is the Sunshine State! No, I not confused east and west coast - who would be interested to live in Florida? I heard them talking, about the fires, the dead, the disastrous devastation, but now there was hope that all would end. Yeah, I also hoped that all would end, but.....this cheap saying: He had other plans with me.....

A nurse at my bed, she said something to me and I answered her - not knowing her question, not knowing my answer. A doctor came to me and told me something about my health situation, I not understood him and nodded with my head. Why I wasn't allowed to sleep?

"Do you think he realizes you, doctor?"

"Not really, he will need more time."

"And the police?"

"Has to wait! He's not in the condition to answer questions."

"And visitors?"

"The police wants to talk with him first. If you have gifts, lay them on the table to the other ones."

I moved my head a little bit and looked at a table at the wall. Presents and flowers, a wrapper with Yves and Elizabeth on it, wonderful flowers - with love from Daryl, Patricia and Greg.....

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"Do you really think, that you're in the condition to answer the police some questions now?"

"Absolutely! It's fucking that no one is allowed to visit me before they have spoken with me. Let us satisfy them that I can concentrate on more meaningful things."

The doctor looked at the nurse and told her that the police officer could come in to ask me his questions. A man stepped in - well, this is Hollywood country, and he looked like if he would came directly from the latest police show on TV. He grabbed a chair and sat down near the bed.

"I'm police detective Columbo, I have some questions to you."

"I'm all ear....."

"Are you sure that you're in the condition to answer me questions?"

"Absolutely - an interrogation?"

"No, there are some unclear points about what has happened inside the house."

"I think you will have asked Ms. Forster?"

"Yes, we have. But we would be interested in your memories about what has happened."

"Just because....."

"I not can follow you....."

"Come on, I'm no fucking idiot! Wouldn't there be something, why then nobody is allowed to visit me? I see it so, that we have two possibilities. We play with open cards, or I fear that my health not allows me to answer your questions."

"We have time, I can come back later."

"Well, you know, my lung. And then maybe I have to make a phone call, my lawyer. In fact, I feel a bit weak at the moment....."

"Okay, I ask you one question and you answer it. Then....."

".....I will listen to your question and then I decide whether I wanna answer it or not. Don't try to play games with me, you're still wet behind the ears. I know that Patricia is alive, but unfortunately

no details. Daryl? An interesting question or?"

"Why do you think so?"

"Patricia, Daryl and I - not that much choice."

"Mr. Farnham?"

"You mean the murderer and blackmailer?"

"Yes."

"You're still to green - ask your little question."

"Well, you can remember that you tried to stand up, and as a result you fell onto Mr. Farnham?"

"Yes, that was a very simple question!"

"Okay, that was the preparatory question, ....."

".....then you have two questions?"

He looked at me in a very annoyed manner, exactly what I intended. I wasn't absolutely sure about to what this should lead to, but I had a suspicion. I had to be very careful, but I had a joker, my health. Ever time I could finish this. The only reason why I played this game in that way was, to get as much information as possible, to decide then what the best strategy would be.

"Come on, playing games means also, not to show too much emotions, at least not your real emotions - ask your question!"

"What was your motivation to stand up?"

Wow, come on! He looked at me, as if I should be totally shocked about his little question. In fact he gave me the information I needed, needed to see how the wind blew.

"I sat on the first step of the staircase, I lost a lot of blood. This idiot - Farnham - started to address me. I was not interested in his fucking talking. Everything was cleared so far, Daryl cared for Patricia. I waited for the police and the ambulance....."

".....do you allow me to interrupt you? I mean this would be my third question?"

"I've a good day today....."

"Thanks! Why you were not interested in his talking? I mean, maybe he would give you some insights?"

"He knew that he was behind the eight ball, that this was it for him. No good source for the truth."

"You mean you not trusted him?"

"Why I should trust a bloody murderer?"

"But he was injured severely. Maybe the last possibility to get some insight information."

"I thought not that he was deadly injured. At least he would have some chances to survive. It would be the task of the police, your task, to interrogate him. I had some problems with myself, to be honest. I sat there, on the staircase, in my own blood - I had other concerns than his chatter."

"And Ms. Forster?"

"Cared after Patricia."

"Wasn't she interested in his talking?"

"Not sure, to be honest. I had some problems not to pass out. I don't think that I realized much of that what happened around me."

"That brings me again to my question - the second question. What was the impulse to stand up?"

"Still I'm not absolutely sure, maybe I wasn't longer interested in his chatter - I know that I had the impulse to look after Patricia."

"What Ms. Forster did - or? Why not simply asking?"

"I'm not sure how much blood I had lost, but definitely enough, to have a clear mind and act in a rational way.....?"

"Okay,....."

".....okay, now it's on you to narrate a bit. You would not ask me that questions without a purpose. Farnham is dead - or?"

"Yes."

"He died because I fell onto him?"

"Most likely. The coroner couldn't say it in an absolute way. The injuries from the bullet were severe, but not necessarily deadly. At least he still would had lived, as the ambulance arrived - the

rest.....?"

"And now? Manslaughter through culpable negligence or something like that?"

"Well,....."

"You were interested in what Ms. Forster did - why?"

"Why you're asking?"

"Maybe because.....I'm not such an amateur, than you obviously think?"

"Would there be something, what you should tell me about Ms. Forster?"

"You're greener than green - you asked your little questions and I answered them. Now it's your turn - why you're here?"

"Ms. Forster told us a very fascinating story....."

"Fine for you, but not that much meaningful for me, as long I have no idea about her story - or?"

"Allow me a last question - I mean you're a pro?"

"I listen and you learn....."

"Did Ms. Forster cared all the time about Ms.Todd?"

"As I said, I'm no good witness. I hope so! I not have seen how severe her injuries were, but without any doubt she needed help."

"Okay, my turn. Without any doubt your action caused or quickened the death of Mr. Farnham. Most important for as is the "why", why you acted like you acted. Maybe it was an accident? Well, without any doubt you had severe problems, you were no longer of clear mind, you had problems to realize everything. But then you have a history. Elysian Park, also there a man died under doubtful circumstances after a gut shot. Well, and then we can continue. What should we mention? Azusa maybe? And then your goodbye from L.A.? The girl and the woman - death row? And the big bang at the end? You know....."

".....I know that you're still beating around the bush."

"Ms. Forster told us, that she had pointed your gun on Mr. Farnham and that this was your motivation to stand up."

"Apart from that, that this is nonsense - and....."

".....maybe I'm a youngster, but....."

".....believe me, I not underestimate you. And now I have a question for you: What should be the motivation for her to say something like this? Okay, maybe I caused his death - and? As you said it, there's no doubt about, that I was fuzzy-headed at that moment. Why she should invent such a story?"

"What would your proposal?"

"I think that somebody told her a stupid story about what can happen with me, would there be no distinct reason for my action."

"And what, when there're indications that her story is not that stupid?"

Now we reached the point which I feared the whole time. How much I could trust my memories, how much I could trust my senses I still had in that night. I was sure that I had heard nothing, but could I trust in that, could I use this as the basis for my strategy. One word would be enough to kill everything - she fired at him! And it would be not important whether she had hit him or not, the problem was that it was enough that she had threaten him. She would be the initial point then, for everything that would had happened afterwards.....

Trust, why I had not trusted her, that she would not do such a stupid deed? Because this was a extreme exceptional situation? But now it was too late, I had to play the game. Everything would be no problem, only a shot would be the end.

"Okay, then let us become serious. What indications?"

"How about fingerprints on your gun?"

"She not told you that she handed me the weapon in my room?"

"She did it."

"Then I see no problem therein that her fingerprints are on my gun?"

"In which way she handed you your weapon?"

"She took it out of my backpack, and then she handed me the gun."

"At which parts she touched the weapon?"

"I not looked at her at that moment, I fixed the door and tried to hear whether the backdoor opens or not. As everybody would do it I guess - it's a very heavy gun."

"And that is?"

"I would hold the gun at the grip. And then I would hand the gun over, maybe in the open hand, or I would hold the gun around the cylinder. I'm sure that I grasped the gun at the grip."

"So, for you it would be no surprise would we find fingerprints of Ms. Forster at the grip and maybe at other parts of the weapon?"

"Absolutely not."

"You're up to date with forensics?"

"I think so?"

"Fingerprints on top of each other?"

"No problem today to separate them."

"And more - or?"

"Make it easy, no time for trivia questions."

"It's no problem today to say which fingerprint is above the other. And guess which fingerprints are above yours?"

"You not would invest all this effort if the answer wouldn't be: Hers."

"Exactly! Any ideas?"

"My problem at the moment is, that I not saw that she touched or held the weapon after I had dropped it. We have not talked about what all has happened in that night, I think Ms. Forster's statements satisfied you, apart from the point we discuss now? You know, about what I'm talking?"

"Yes, you can continue."

"She walked down to help Patricia. For a moment I was confused. I had saw his weapon, out of his reach. But I could not see my weapon. I shouted, that I could not see it. Daryl answered me, that she would see the gun, that also my gun was out of his reach. I tried to go downstairs in this moment. Maybe she touched the gun again and moved it, to be sure that he wasn't able to reach it."

"But you not saw it?"

"From the moment on that I dropped the gun, I not saw it again."

"I would understand to push the weapon away with my foot, but....."

".....speaks the master of such situations! You ever was in a crossfire? You react, you not analyze situations! No time for theory.....and now, what a shit you have told her that she came up with such a stupid story?"

He looked at me and I waited that he would say it.....but he didn't - she had not shot! And I had won!

Whatever she had said, I would set my story against it. That she only tried to protect me. That she feared, the police would bring a charge against me. This time it was the time for me, to stand for someone else - I looked at him.....

"That all happened before Ms. Forster reached Ms. Todd?"

"Yes, I think so....."

"Any theory about Ms. Todd's blood on your weapon?"

"First, I said: I think so! Second: Where you found the gun? I mean....."

We looked us straight into the eyes, then he nodded his head.....

"Okay, that's all for today. You will get information about what will happen next. Get well soon!"

"Can you give me an information about Ms. Todd? I mean, she's a colleague of you....."

"Of course! She will recover. She had lost a lot of blood, because one bullet had injured her carotid artery. Just somewhat, but enough, that she would had bleed to death, if Ms. Forster had not cared for her....."

He turned around and left the room. It was the last time that I heard of him, or from the police, or that someone talked about this incident.....

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"You will tell me something about my health, doctor?"

"Yes, we should talk about, what you will be able to do in the future and where you will have some limitations."

"Then start....."

"First, you had a lot of luck. Would had the bullet hit you a bit higher, then it would had hit your heart."

"Not all the time everything functions....."

"You're not happy about it?"

"Well, I meant it a bit sarcastic. Not the first time....."

"You were a private detective, can be a very dangerous job."

""Were"?"

"You know that the penetrating bullet hit your lung, and caused also additional damage."

"Yes."

"You will have some problems in the future, to provide the physical performance in which you're used to."

"In which extent?"

"We cannot say this conclusively, around fifty percent I would think."

"Well, I thought not to become a retired so fast - I need a new job."

"You should take care of yourself, don't try to do too much in a fast way. You will need some time to recover totally, to recover as much as possible."

"I'm not ready to be a pensioner. And the private dick? Never was a good one, therefore, well.....sitting the whole day at the bay and looking at the seagulls? Otis Redding? But he sat not there because he was a cripple....."

"I think you will have more possibilities than you see now."

"Well doctor, do you say this to everybody? No panic, I will be able to pay the bill, I will not end up on the street. You know what the best about this world is?"

"No."

"All the time there's an exit, all the time you can say goodbye....."

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Yves and Elizabeth, together with Greg and Daryl visited me. I would have to stay for some longer at the hospital, but the day of discharge was foreseeable. And then?

"Tell us, how do you feel?"

"I'm well, but please give me some information about Patricia first."

"She's well too. She was hit by two bullets. One hit her shoulder, the other gazed her neck and injured the carotid artery. It was mainly the shock that caused her body difficulties. Without Daryl's resolute intervention she would have had no chance. Either she would have been bleed to death, or the shock would had killed her. Daryl saved Patricia's life - without any doubt."

"Will she be able to work as a police officer again?"

"Well, first she has to recover completely. Then we have a baby! But yes, she will. It's important for her, to be in duty later again."

"That's good to hear!"

"And you.....private dick....?"

"Not with this body obviously. But it was obvious before, that this will come to an end now. All what happened in the past, it seems as this was the climax of all. Whatever will come, it would make no sense anymore, to continue in a way as before."

"Distinct plans?"

"No, there's too much unclear at the moment. I have to see what the next months will bring. But come on, it would be ridiculous would I complain. Sure, I will be limited in some ways now. But I will be able to pay the bills without bankruptcy, I will not have to live on the street. Maybe I have to sell the car.....but come on, I've still friends....."

"Back to L.A.?"

"Oh Elizabeth, if I know something, than that L.A. is my past. I'm not sure about my future, but I'm sure about what my past is. That means not, that I would not enjoy it, to come to L.A. from time to time."

"We would be happy to welcome you from time to time - tacos 3<sup>rd</sup> Street?"

"Don't be insincere! With your wife maybe! Gus's?"

"They have good steaks and burgers - Long Beach?"

"Every time - yeah, not with Alexandra....."

"No, but maybe as a foursome anyway?"

"Maybe....."

A silence cropped up and I felt that Daryl looked at me. We would have to have a conversation, but not now, not in this situation.....

"The police is satisfied now? I mean concerning the death of Farnham."

"Yes, what means no. Not really satisfied, but obviously they see no real possibility to charge somebody with a real chance of success."

"Farnham is dead, everybody else is alive, that's the most important.....apart from Hannah....."

"Yes, Hannah. Farnham talked with you?"

I looked at Daryl.....

"I wasn't interested in his chatter, his chatter is of no importance. He was a cold blooded murderer, it's not important what he said. We should be in mourning for Hannah, and we should look into the future."

"Your car is still in the garage at the farm, and the things in your room? Should I send them to your condo in San Francisco?"

"No, why? I have to stay somewhat longer in the hospital. Then.....I wasn't sure already before whether San Francisco should be my aim. San Francisco? To leave Los Angeles to end up in San Francisco? I'm a pensioner now, maybe I should immigrate to the other coast? Miami? Florida?"

"Wow, you in Miami - hunting little runaway dogs of old ladies?"

"At least I would be able thereto even with the remaining lung. No, I'm sick of this fucking cities."

"This is a real huge country, you will find your place - I'm sure about it!"

"Yeah, an old folks' home in the countryside. I cannot decide it now....."

I looked at Daryl, she looked at me.....

"I think we have to leave - Yves?"

"Yes, I think you're right."

"I have to leave also, I have another patient to visit."

"Yeah, was nice to see you."

They left the room and Daryl and I were alone. Daryl sat herself on my bed.....

"And....?"

"And? Your plans for the farm?"

"I'm the farmer's wife, I will run the farm as long as I can."

"Not too much sad memories?"

"Memories are memories. I will have a lot to do, the future not always looks bright."

"The fires, I've forgotten. The farm?"

"We were not affected in. But every year there's less and lesser rain. If this will be the future, and it looks like, then we will have hard years in front us."

"I admire you, you're really strong. Why you not give up - if you would could call this, to give up? You could sell the farm, you would get enough for the rest of your life."

"You could sell your ring - you would get enough for the rest of your life. Maybe we differ not that much?"

"We differ very much. I always hunted illusions, had stupid ideas. To be a private dick, to live in L.A.? I created nothing, I only caused confusion - nothing to be proud of. But you decided, and you stuck all the time with your decision. And even now you choose not for the easy way - I admire you, I mean it!"

"But maybe it's a sign of weakness, not to be able to go another way, to stick with the familiar? You can put it any way round, in the end we're all weak creatures. And now, how we should continue?"  
"I will try to end my stay in the hospital as soon as possible. Then I have to come to the farm - the car and my things....."  
"Then I will wait that you will come - to fetch the car and your things to continue your travel."  
"I hope we will have time for a dinner on the patio?"  
"You're cooking?"  
"I'm a invalid person now! I'm not sure about, whether the doctors allow me to do such a hard work immediately after my release....."

## Uncertainty

"It was nice to cook together."  
"Yes, and the result was very delicious."  
"We're a good team....."  
"At least what cooking concerns."  
"A drink?"  
"I would prefer a hot tea this time."  
"I come with you....."  
  
"I hope nobody will disturb us this time."  
"Who should?"  
"Again a starry night, should we continue where we became interrupted the last time?"  
"You mean, that I not showed you a picture of the North America Nebula and the little Orion so far?"  
"Well, and the Pelican Nebula and the California Nebula - no not really."  
"You mean the "maybe"? It was a "maybe"."  
"Nevertheless it would be interesting to pronounce it. Unless, it's of no importance anymore."  
"I think it's more important then ever. But....."  
"Yes?"  
"I fear I would disappoint you."  
"Why you should? You rescued my life. You shielded me with your body, you lied for me. Why you should disappoint me?"  
"Because we talk about the time after the movie has ended."  
"I know what you mean. The banal reality of the daily live. Do you fear it would bore you, here on a farm?"  
"As I said, I fear I would be the problem. We're talking about living together. I'm not sure, I'm sure that it would be disappointing for you."  
"You not talk about sex - or? We're no teenagers, we're no actors in a romantic drama, we live here in the reality. As far as I can say, I see no reason to think about that you would be disappointing. Maybe we simply should try it?"  
"You're very straightforward....."  
"Maybe you read to much into it - you're not disappointed now, or?"  
"No....."  
".....maybe you should think about that I need a man on my side to run the farm. No kitschy bold prince on a white horse."  
"Yes, and to be honest this is my problem. The prince on a white horse, the man who plays the tough private dick? This are easy characters. To play them, you need not much acting skills. But the character you offer me, therefor you would need a lot of skills. And I'm not sure whether I have them or not. Yes, we could try it, but it would be fucking for you, would the end of all, that you have to accept, that I wouldn't be able to handle this character."

"Maybe it's a matter of weighing it up?"

"That sounds very rational. You think it would be okay for you, would I not be able to become a farmer?"

"I not need a farmer in that sense, I would need somebody with whom I can share the rest of my life."

"You know, you were married, you had a daughter. I lived my whole life alone. It would be a very different situation for me. I'm sick of being alone, I loved it my whole life. But now I'm sick of it. But I fear it's too late now. I long for it, but in the same moment I fear it. I know this is stupid."

"You need some more time?"

"You know 'The Getaway', I mean the original with Steve McQueen and Ali MacGraw?"

"Yes."

"The scene after they were in the park, after they did foolish things, after they swam fully clothed, the scene in the hotel?"

"Yes, Ali MacGraw in her wet transparent blouse with nothing under it?"

"Where Steve McQueen and Ali MacGraw sit on the bed. And she asks him, whether he would need some more time?"

"Yes, a wonderful tender scene."

"And you know how the scene ends?"

"Yes."

"And that's the problem. I'm not Steve McQueen....."

"And I'm not Ali MacGraw. And this is no movie. As far as I know was the relation - I mean the real relation - of them both not that much glamorous."

"Yeah, that's true. In the reality McQueen, Mr. Cool, was an asshole, and Ali MacGraw - why she accepted his shit?"

"Should we talk about the Hollywood phoniness now?"

"No, why I've Natalie Wood in mind now? You're right, I should stop with this L.A. thinking. I have to become mature."

"That means....."

"That I have to drive to San Francisco. I have some things to arrange there. And then - oh, I fear I have to sell my car....."

"The problem therewith?"

"I wanted to say: And then I have to sit in my car for a final ride. Well, public transport, I always had a preference for public transport."

"I think that the mean of transport will be not the most important thing."

"No, this time the most important thing will be the aim. Not the way is the aim, the aim is the aim....."

## **The City By The Bay**

The city, my city of birth, was a very different city now. No, no smoke in the air anymore, but.....the city had changed. But maybe I had changed, walking down Fisherman's Wharf. I stood in front of Tarantino's, but I felt no motivation to enter. The bridge in the background, my fucking gun in my backpack.....

But it was different this time. This time I was here to leave the city, into a bright future? Daryl was a wonderful woman, she deserved a calm future, too much had happened in her life. The loss of her husband, and now Hannah.....I felt the pressure on me.....

I doubted about that I could be the one who could be the one who would be able to to give her what she needed. Without any doubt she was a person who was able to give a lot - but I? I was not used to that that there was another person in my life. Such a relation would mean that you have to care

for this other person, that you would have a responsibility. The only responsibility I had so far was I - yes, the clients. But that was a matter of a business.....

I drove not directly to San Francisco, I made a small detour via Los Angeles. I had a conversation with Minh and Lizzy's mom, both had the same advice for me.....

Ghirardelli, there was a time when I loved their huge ice cream cups, now I hated this much too sweet disaster with much too much chocolate sauce and much too much calories. I hated this city!

I had to liquidate my household, never lived there really. From Los Angeles to San Francisco, but never arrived there. And now? From San Francisco to? It all would be so easy, would I had the self-comfort that I would be able to handle this new situation. It was obvious that I would be nothing else then a coward, wouldn't I try it - but does this helped me?

It would be unbearable to me, would I break her heart, would I not be able to be a good partner for her. But stealing away from the challenge? As if this would not break her heart.....

She would be able to give me that much - and I? The sea lions in the setting sun, I always felt attracted by water. Well, Wheeler Ridge, not that much water, maybe "the absence of water" would describe it better - Pyramid Lake?

I passed a homeless, packing his things. Little things made of wire - the bridge for instance. He looked at me and I felt ashamed, ashamed about my pathetic behavior. This beautiful Golden Gate Bridge, made of copper wire, would accompany me for the rest of my life.....