

Terminal Rock

“Howard Carter and I stood in the Pharaoh’s tomb in silent awe. All around us were incredible artifacts from a glorious age, and in the middle of the room, a golden sarcophagus. Ours were the first eyes to behold this scene in more than three thousand years! But though our discovery should have been an occasion of great joy, when my eyes fell on a golden Harp in one corner of the room, I began to weep. The real treasure was the music that had been played on this instrument—the music we would never hear...forever!”

Prof. Robert Reid Clark

University of Edinburgh

Co-Founder, The Cloister of Akhenaten, 1927

1

MINUSINSK, SIBERIA...1988

KIRA VOLKOVSKY THREW BACK A SHOT OF VODKA, slammed the empty glass on the wooden table for effect, and studied Lenka’s eyes for any sign of hesitation.

“These construction delays are costing me money, Lenka.”

The new lighting company under construction in Minusinsk would, when finished, provide a great many jobs to the area, badly needed jobs in a very troubled economy teetering on the brink of total failure. In turn, the success of the new manufacturing business

would make Kira Volkovsky a great deal of money. But Volkovsky was not merely interested in money. He made plenty of that with his illegal ventures. No, if the lighting company succeeded—and he was determined it would—Volkovsky would finally be able to come out of the shadows and live a more respectable life.

It was the dawn of a new Russia; the period of ‘perestroika’ (a mass initiative to overcome political stagnation) and ‘glasnost’ (openness and transparency in government), with the Soviet Union’s final economic collapse only a few years off. Moscow, under Gorbachev’s direction, had legalized private entrepreneurship, allowing free trade, but had so far neglected to say anything about regulations and security for their nascent market economy. With this oversight the politburo had essentially created the perfect environment for Russkaya Mafiya to expand its operations, and in so doing, generate a cadre of government workers desperate for money and eager to join its ranks.

Lenka Kozlov was just this kind of official. He was very comfortable in the Minusinsk government but changing times made his future uncertain. He was a political creature through and through and wanted desperately to play a significant role in whatever government emerged from Gorbachev’s dangerous experiment. He had tied himself to Kira Volkovsky’s building project right from the start as the government face that made the whole undertaking legitimate. He took care of all building permits and inspection reports, making sure no bureaucrat made Volkovsky’s life miserable. And he was the face and voice of the project to the local media, putting the best possible spin on it every step of the way. He had promised great things to his people and now they would know without a doubt that he was a man of his word, a force for good in their midst, an influential man with the power to make their lives better.

Yes, Kira Volkovsky and Lenka Kozlov had much to gain by the success of this new company. But that was of no concern to Gregor

Batálov, the government's building and safety inspector.

Kira Volkovsky added, "I pay you to keep zealous bureaucrats like Batálov off my back."

Lenka Kozlov answered nervously, "I've stopped his reports from going any further, but I'm afraid he will go over my head to Moscow if his discrepancy findings are not corrected."

Volkovsky rolled the shot glass between his fingers, his eyes studying the glass as if it were fine crystal, his expression that of one on the verge of an angry growl.

Kozlov's eyes moved from the tattoos on Volkovsky's knuckles to the blue-black ink that snaked up from beneath his shirt collar, some sort of reptilian tail. Kozlov did not need to see the tattooed shoulders to know Volkovsky was highly ranked in the Russian Mafia. He had taken it upon himself to review Volkovsky's prison records before deciding to do business with the man, so he was acutely aware of the crimes that had earned him his incarceration. This was no man to have as an enemy.

"His last report set the nineteenth for a follow-up inspection. That's one week from today," said Kozlov. Speaking cautiously, trying to strike just the right tone, he added, "Batálov's citation is for electrical wiring defects. Will you have those fixed on time?"

Volkovsky's mouth formed a malevolent grin. "The problem will be fixed. Have Batálov come to the site at the end of the day on Monday. I will personally take him around the building."

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THE PICKUP'S HEADLIGHTS GLISTENED off a newly fallen, light dusting of snow, lying in contrast to the older, dirtier snow pushed into a dozen small mounds around the building site. It was 6 pm and all the workers had long since left for a warm house and a hot meal. Only two cars remained on the lot: a well-used, dark blue VAZ 2112 and a new black GAZ-24-10 Volga, which told Gregor Batálov that someone important was here.

“Is this where you work, daddy?”

Batálov explained to his four-year-old, “This is one of the places I work, son. Daddy’s job is to look at new buildings and make sure they are being built properly, that they are safe for people to be in.”

This seemed to placate the little boy for the moment as his attention was drawn back to the building and the large equipment scattered around it. His curious eyes darted from machine to machine, firing his imagination with grand thoughts of operating the heavy equipment someday...when he was big enough.

“Would you like to see the inside with me?”

The boy excitedly climbed down from his seat and reached up to take his father’s hand. Together they crunched through the snow, four little tracks for every two large ones, until they arrived at the front door. Batálov went to reach for the handle, but the door swung open as if automatically triggered at their approach. Standing directly in front of him was government official Lenka Kozlov. Kozlov said hello then quickly introduced Batálov to the building’s owner, Kira Volkovsky. At the sight of Volkovsky’s large, tattooed hands and menacing face, the little boy instinctively took shelter behind his father, his tiny arms wrapped tightly around daddy’s leg. Batálov looked down at his son, smiled and patted him on the head to reassure him all was well.

“Dobriy vyecher. Good evening, Minister. You wanted to show me something?”

Volkovsky spoke instead of Kozlov. “Yes, I asked Lenka to arrange this meeting so we could discuss the reports you have filed. Please,” said Volkovsky, gesturing to the temporary lift.

As the men and boy rode to the fourth floor, Volkovsky spoke his concern over the deleterious effect Batálov’s reports were having on the schedule for completing the building. He tried to impress upon Batálov that a great many jobs would result from the project, and that delays were having a negative impact on the workers of the community who were desperate to have jobs again. Throughout,

Volkovsky maintained a stiff smile so as to mask the anger roiling inside. In the end, Batálov was unmoved.

On the fourth floor the men walked toward an electrical junction box on the wall, while the boy ran off to inspect a table saw and various other tools lying about.

“Your latest inspection cited us for violations to the electrical code,” said Volkovsky.

“Yes, the MPOT, the Occupational Health and Safety Rules for the Operation of Electrical Installations govern how your...”

“Yes, yes, I’m aware of the codes.” Volkovsky’s irritation was beginning to show. “I was simply hoping we might find some suitable way around the work that has already been done so we might avoid the cost and hassle of tearing out walls. I’m sure you know how much that kind of rework would cost, both in money and time. And then there are all those workers who are anxious for operations to begin so they can feed their families. It is so difficult for families these days,” said Volkovsky. He turned to Kozlov. “Lenka, you have a family, right?”

The tension was palpable and Kozlov was momentarily surprised by the question. He recovered and smiled clumsily. “Yes, two boys and a baby girl on the way.”

“I, too, have a son,” said Volkovsky, glancing at the boy across the room. “He is about the same age as yours.” He turned back to Batálov. “You know how it is to fret over their welfare, how we would do anything to protect and care for them, to keep them safe.”

Batálov objected, “Yes, I would do anything for my son, anything in my power that is. But it would not serve my family for me to lose my job for malfeasance.”

“No, no, of course not,” said Volkovsky. “But you must admit, if you were to withdraw your report, your action would save me a considerable amount of money. And for my part, I could show my gratitude by sharing those savings with you.”

Gregor Batálov was incensed at the blatant offer. “Mr. Minister,”

he said to Lenka Kozlov, “are you hearing this? This man is trying to bribe me—right in front of a government official! This is outrageous. I demand that charges be filed in this matter.”

Volkovsky was a man accustomed to getting his way and Batálov didn’t seem to understand that Volkovsky’s offer was actually an order. Volkovsky’s patience was at an end and he finally snapped. “Listen, you low-life bureaucrat!” He grabbed Batálov with both hands and yanked him close. “I offer to make your life better and you piss on my shoes! You’ve already cost me more than eighty million rubles and almost six months off my schedule. I’ve had enough of you! I’m sure the next petty inspector will be more amenable.”

Volkovsky spun Batálov around and with no more care than tossing an apple core to the curb threw Gregor Batálov out the empty window frame.

From across the room a small voice screamed out in horror!

Kozlov and Volkovsky turned quickly toward the boy. The terrified child stood frozen, his little mouth opened wide but his lungs too paralyzed from fear to cry out.

Volkovsky glared at the child, a hideous, frightening scowl and moved toward the boy. There could be no witnesses.

“No,” shouted Lenka in a panic and knowing full well what Volkovsky intended. “We must call this in. This was an accident. Batálov slipped and fell. That is all. The boy will say nothing.”

Volkovsky stopped and glared back at Kozlov, the horrified manager’s eyes pleading for restraint.

He looked again at the boy, grunted, and turned away toward the lift.

2

TWENTY-ONE YEARS LATER

HAMBURG, GERMANY...2009

HE HATED ALMOST EVERYTHING about St. Pauli and the Reeperbahn but this was where she spent nearly all of her nights and he needed to study her. At least she had the good sense to spend her days—when she wasn't sleeping—at the Hamburger Kunsthalle or Ballinstadt museum. Some days she would spend hours walking the cobblestone streets of the Warehouse District, or window shopping at Alster Arkaden. He knew she couldn't afford to buy anything there as she was barely making enough from her nighttime gigs to survive, but he would change all that when the time was right.

On Wednesdays and Fridays she spent the better part of an hour at St. Michaelis. Above the church's portal was a large bronze statue of the archangel Michael defeating the devil. He assumed she went in to pray but he didn't feel at ease in these kinds of places and never followed her in to find out. She, too, wasn't given much to prayer

but she did have a spiritual side. Where St. Michaelis was concerned, she mostly just liked to climb the spire to the top where she could meditate on the sweeping views of the cityscape or the harbor and dream about what her life could be. In those moments of quiet and solitude, she could almost see and hear her spirit come to life. Perhaps this *was* a kind of prayer after all.

At least one day a week she loved to spend time at the Beatles-Platz, gazing at the five metal cutout statues and imagining days gone by. The statues represented John, Paul, George, and Stuart, with a hybrid statue of Pete and Ringo. She knew their history inside and out, and if he ventured close enough, he could often overhear her explaining the statues to tourists as if she were the official Beatles-Platz tour guide. “This one is Stuart Sutcliffe,” she’d say. “He was their first bass player but he really couldn’t play very well. Most of the time he’d play with his back to the audience so they couldn’t see him searching for the right notes.” She was meticulous in her history lesson, making sure the people understood that Stuart was really an artist more than a musician but was dragged into the band because he was a close friend of John Lennon—and because Stuart had once come up with enough money to buy a bass, which the band really needed. Stuart would have preferred to use the money for art supplies and school, but John could be very persuasive. “It was Stuart’s girlfriend,” she would go on, “who actually gave the Beatles their famous hairstyle. *Her* name was Astrid Kirchherr and she was a well-known photographer at the time. Anyway, she did Stuart’s hair first, and eventually convinced the others to go along. Pete didn’t, but that wasn’t why he left the band.” She chronicled the events that led to Ringo replacing Pete Best as if she had been at their sides through the whole transition. She recounted how Stuart died early of a brain tumor and how upset John had been. “That’s when Paul became their bass player,” she would say. She would always conclude her little stories with a quote attributed to Lennon. “John used to say he was born in Liverpool but grew up in Hamburg.”

Secretly she felt the same about herself; that while she wasn't born here, it was in Hamburg that she would grow up.

There were many days when her stories actually attracted sizable crowds, who erupted in spontaneous applause when she finished. Her natural ability to draw people to her and keep them enthralled was one of the things he found most alluring about her. In the months that he had been studying her every move, this was her most consistent trait, which convinced him she was the one he needed; that and her incredible singing voice.

God, she could sing!

And it seemed there wasn't a style of music she hadn't mastered or a lyric she didn't know by heart.

At the Stage Club in the Neue Flora theatre complex, he watched her stand in with the house band every so often. She sang jazz like she was born to it. She would sing duets with the likes of Michael Bublé or Peter Cincotti, the New York piano crooner, and bring down the house. At Angie's Nightclub she sang soul like she was The Queen of Soul herself, Aretha Franklin. But it was at the Kaiserkeller that her voice seemed to reach its zenith in musical expression: Rock'n'Roll. This is where he would approach her.

Unannounced, the fantastically popular Russian band, Zeerok, dropped in to the Kaiserkeller to do a free concert. Zhenya Rock, the singer and guitar player of the band, had let the owner know they would be stopping in, so the band that was originally set to play that night was cancelled. As always, the house was packed. She would probably have been there anyway but this night she was there because Tim and Jimmy Shanks, the bassist and drummer with the band and longtime friends of hers, had asked her to be there.

He sat in the back of the club, in the shadows, as far from the stage as possible, watching.

When the manager announced that Zeerok would be the night's entertainment, the place erupted in screams and applause. As Zhenya laid down the first pulsing notes for *All About You* on the guitar,

heads began to bob and sway in time with the beat. Long hair flew from side to side and shoulders twisted and turned to the rhythm. As Zhenya finished his introductory licks, Valeria walked out from the side of the stage to join him at the mic. At 5'4" she was just a few inches shorter than Zhenya. She wore a loose-fitting blouse that hid her exquisitely proportioned figure, but one didn't need to see more to appreciate her beauty. Though only 18, she exuded an innocent sex appeal beyond her years as she seemed to fairly glide across the stage. Her graceful movement produced a gentle breeze that lifted her sandy, shoulder length hair away from her delicate cheeks. Her lavender eyes glistened and smiled out at the crowd. Fully in command of her body, it was immediately apparent she owned the stage. With the first few honeyed tones of her voice, she would own the room. When he was finished with her, he thought to himself, she would own the world.

On seeing her, the crowd, already nearing a fevered pitch, exploded even more loudly in wild appreciation. She was known all around the city.

He sat quietly taking it all in. This was incredible, unbelievable, astonishing. Even with one of the hottest rock groups around, her simple presence elevated the music to a whole other level. What the two men had assured him, what he had hoped all along might be true, he now knew with certainty.

She *was* the one he wanted.

She remained onstage for almost the entire set, then with impeccable timing, exited as stylishly as she had entered. She kissed Zhenya on the cheek, blew kisses to Tim and Jimmy, then waved her thanks to the audience and slipped out of sight behind the curtains; the consummate entertainer.

At the end of the night the manager approached her backstage where she was visiting with the band and whispered in her ear that a man was waiting to speak with her at the back of the club. She pushed aside the curtain and glanced in his direction but could not

make out his features in the dark. The manager smiled kindly, knowingly, and added, “He is a man who can make things happen for you, good things.”

As she neared his table, she smiled.

He rose to greet her.

“My name is Dmitri, Dmitri Gregorovich; my friends call me Dima.”

“Hello, Dima. I’m Valeria Kempter.”

He couldn’t help but laugh at her innocence. “Yes, my dear. I know who *you* are.” He gestured to a chair and signaled the manager to bring over the bottle of Champagne he had arranged. “I have a proposition for you, Valeria Kempter.”

“Oh?” she said cautiously.

“There are some people I would like you to meet.”

“What people?”

“Some musicians. They are the band that I manage.”

She raised an eyebrow. This sounded interesting.

“I know most of the bands that play around here. Which band is yours?”

He waved a hand dismissively. “Their former name is of no consequence. They will soon be called REVOLVER; when you join them. I want you to be their lead singer. And I can promise you this: Together, you will be the next big thing.”

3

DIMA HAD BEEN UPFRONT WITH THE BAND about his vision for their future. From the first time he heard them play back home in Russia, he sensed there was something special about them and he planned to take them all the way to the top. But they had to agree to follow his direction without question. He knew there were limited opportunities in their own country and if they were to reach a wider audience, they would need to make the scene in Europe. At twenty-five he had six years on them, which to the band seemed like a lifetime, so they happily deferred to him, caring more for their music than the business of music.

Dima had left them to their practice while he went to Hamburg to set up their first bookings. While scouting appropriate venues that would give the band a series of successes on which to build a following, he had been told of a singer who had the voice of an angel: Valeria Kempter. He had been stricken by the girl from the moment he first saw her but followed her for months to be certain his initial impression was right. By the time he approached her with

his offer, he had already smoothed the way with Tatiana and Viktor, who had handled the vocals for their group till now. He assured them their voices were excellent but that he had found a girl with a transcendent talent. He could understand their initial skepticism but so certain was he about Valeria that if they did not agree after hearing her, he would say nothing more about it and the band would continue on without her. Now they were about to hear her for themselves.

Valeria was nervous about meeting the band, especially since she was there to replace whoever had been singing lead vocals. She could imagine how she might feel were the tables reversed. What she never imagined was that meeting the band would be like coming home after a long absence.

“Band, Valeria. Valeria, the band,” said Dima.

Viktor Zhuravlev let the 6-string Rickenbacker go taut on its strap as he raised his hand to wave a three-finger salute, his flat pick pinched between thumb and forefinger. “I like it,” he said with a broad, toothy smile. Viktor was a striking figure: manly-handsome though only nineteen, his blonde hair and green eyes were perfect accents to his lanky 6’3” frame. Viktor had a beautiful tenor voice that was just made to sing rock’n’roll. But more than that, he was a world-class guitarist with long, nimble fingers that could gently caress the most languid, silky tones from the strings or fly lightning fast across the frets to scratch out the raunchiest of rock riffs. He was a great optimist and a natural born peacemaker, which in a band of highly gifted artists was an indispensable trait.

I like it, too, thought Valeria smiling back at Viktor.

Sergei Kruzhko, the bass player, was a Jim Morrison look-alike. He was 5’6” with long, brown hair that hung in a loose curl to his shoulders. A heavy smoker, Sergei was partial to dark science fiction and magazines on all the latest tech trends. He was a born pessimist but the tight friendships in the band kept him on the brighter side of the highway. He nodded to Valeria and gave what for him was a big

smile, though in reality not much more than a tight-lipped, self-conscious grin.

Valeria let her eyes slip quickly away from Sergei to drummer Shura Mostovoy.

Shura was the intellectual of the band, the soul-searcher. Like Sergei, he was a heavy smoker with a dark side, but his dark side bordered on paranoia in his more plaintive moments. Shura had a Cheshire-cat personality and was prone to asking Socratically-leading questions. He could seem unsociable, almost hostile, till he got to know someone, so it came as quite a surprise to his band mates when he offered Valeria a rather good-natured 'hello'. Shura wrote most of the lyrics to Viktor's and Tatiana's melodies.

Tatiana Eliseeva played keyboards with classical perfection but could hammer out solid rock with equal proficiency. Like her band mates, Tatiana was nineteen and looked like she was born to be on a stage or a runway. She was a long-legged 5'10", with curly, light beige-blond hair streaked with various colors to great effect. Her energy and constant laughter were contagious, and she was a great motivator for the group. When the band reached agreement on a particular arrangement or musical crossroad, she was usually the first to call out a commanding "let's do it" to kick things into gear. It was Tatiana's melodious soprano voice that Valeria was here to replace, but if there was any ego conflict for her at meeting her replacement, she didn't show it.

By prior arrangement through Dima, both the band and Valeria were ready to jump into a driving rock song that would get their juices flowing and let them scream away any nervousness at this first meeting.

"Let's do it," shouted Tatiana.

Shura raised his sticks, clicked four times to set the pace, and on the fifth beat crashed his cymbals as the rest of the band kicked into full rock mode with the Beatles' *Helter Skelter*.

Valeria charged in with the lyric like they'd been playing

together for years.

When I get to the bottom
I go back to the top of the slide
Where I stop and I turn and I go for a ride
Till I get to the bottom and I see you again

She hit the final note with so much throaty rock'n'roll raunch that Tatiana let out an involuntary scream of delight as she and Viktor chimed in with the Beatles' signature "Yeah, yeah, yeah!" and Sergei drove the bass line home.

By the end of the song the adrenaline in the room could have powered a small army for a week!

While the band looked to each other with euphoric laughter, Dima summed up the groups obvious decision.

"So," he shouted, "we have our band?"

Shura shot a drum roll and cymbal crash and everyone shouted out in unison "Rock'n'roll!"

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YEAR 1 – 2009

DIMA LAID OUT A CLEAR PATH FOR THEM. During the first two months they would keep to themselves, selecting the songs for their playlist and getting comfortable with each other as they sought their own distinctive sound. They had some original songs that weren't too bad, but for the most part they held to covering other artists' music. They played favorites from every decade of rock, from Buddy Holly's catalogue of the '50s to current hits from Cold Play, Foo Fighters, Fun, and Seether. They tried out songs from every genre—traditional, classic rock, alternative rock, hip-hop, country, Motown, grunge, garage, and world; even rap and show tunes were not off limits. They were searching for material that would be familiar but on which they could imprint their own style...whatever that was! They tended to gravitate to standard rock beats, but experimented with new sounds and riffs that put a unique twist on

even the classic songs their audiences would know.

Sergei and Shura had a great working relationship, which serviced the band's need for a strong foundation of drums and bass. As with all the band members, except for Valeria, they had known each other their whole lives growing up in Minusinsk and attending the same schools and community functions. They crafted subtle combinations of drum fills and bass riffs that gave even old songs new appeal. They had an intuitive feel for where the other was going, but when their instincts failed and their parts conflicted, they simply stopped and worked it out. Shura might say in such and such section I am using this fill, so simplify your bass part. Or Sergei might say to Shura listen to this bass line and see if you can create a syncopated accent, maybe with a tom fill or an extra beat on the kick. They would practice the section till they had it just right, at which time these two dark souls would light up in wide-eyed smiles and drive on.

Viktor and Tatiana had a similar *sympatico* for developing unusual arrangements. Each had an extensive repertoire of lissome fingerings, or selection of sounds and effects for their respective instruments. Occasionally their choices would collide, but they made adjustments with ease. It might be as simple as one of them changing octaves, or it might call for one of them to back off entirely, but as with Sergei and Shura, their egos always gave way for the sake of the music. Intuitively they knew what worked best for the art.

Though Valeria had no shared history with the others, she quickly developed a keen sensitivity with Viktor and Tatiana for the strongest vocal arrangements. She performed almost all the lead vocals, with Viktor and Tatiana on backing vocals—doo wops, echoed phrases, or intricate two- and three-part harmonies—but she graciously switched roles when a particular song seemed best suited to the tonal qualities of another. Interestingly, this willingness to share the spotlight enhanced the group's appeal; instead of having one front man, the band had three. The audiences, which invariably

had mixed attractions for one band member over another, got to hear from each of their favorites.

Their first year was spent in small venues, mostly around Hamburg, where they honed their sound and found out which songs and arrangements got the best reactions from their audiences.

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YEAR 2 – 2010

BY THE SECOND YEAR DIMA expanded their sphere of influence. Their sound—the thing that set them apart from every other group—had come together nicely and it was time to let the rest of Europe hear it. Dima had been as thorough in finding the proper venues for them as the band had been in finding their unique sound. In Amsterdam, The Waterhole was the first club to feature REVOLVER, and the band did not disappoint. From there they went on to the Showcase in Paris, London’s Fabric, and on up to Edinburgh to play the Mood Nightclub before crossing the North Sea where Stockholm’s Sturecompagniet patrons fell instantly in love with them. By the time they played Valencia and Rome and started their trek home via Munich, Frankfurt, and Berlin, they had outgrown the smaller venues and now required larger halls to accommodate the swelling crowds anxious to hear them. Media buzz alone was creating a demand for the band even where they had not yet been heard or heard of! The name and reputation of REVOLVER preceded the band’s appearance in every town.

Dima knew it was now time to get them into a recording studio. And to his mind, there was only one producer/engineer he would trust his band to: Alan Parsons.

Parsons was the best of the best and had a string of successes over a span of five decades to prove it. As an engineer, Parsons recorded the Beatles ‘Abbey Road’ in ’69, Pink Floyd’s ‘Dark Side of the Moon’ in ’73, and Al Stewart’s ‘Year of the Cat’ in ’76. In the ’80s he delivered Top 40 Hits like *I Wouldn’t Want to Be Like You*,

Games People Play, *Time*, and *Eye in the Sky*. He had no fewer than ten Grammy nominations to his credit and in 2007 won the Grammy for Best Surround Sound Album, ‘A Valid Path’.

The only question left unanswered was whether or not REVOLVER could write original songs worthy of Alan Parsons!

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YEAR 3 – 2011

THE FIRST MEETING BETWEEN the band and Parsons was January 8, 2011 at London’s Abbey Road Studios. Even before the band finished auditioning its third song for him, Alan was on the phone to Simon Rhodes, a 20-year engineering maestro at the studio.

“Simon, Alan here. I have a band you have to meet. Fifteen minutes? Perfect. See you then.”

Parsons and the band talked casually while they waited for Rhodes to arrive. The more they chatted the more he was smitten with them. Viktor and Tatiana were naturally funny and cracked him up several times with their off-the-cuff responses to his various questions. Valeria was her usual gregarious self and, beauty aside, radiated a warmth and wit that he found irresistible. Sergei and Shura...well, they were Sergei and Shura. Their dark sides were in check but they stayed to the background, preferring to soak up their historic surroundings in relative silence.

When Rhodes arrived they all continued to chat casually and get used to each other until Alan finally said, “How about we roll some tape?”

The band looked around to each other alive with eager anticipation, prompting Tatiana to synthesize their collective enthusiasm into her well-known battle cry: “Let’s do it!”

Eight hours later Parsons and Rhodes sat at the recording console in disbelief. With no more than two takes per song—and that necessitated by only a few of the numbers—the band had laid down tracks for fifteen songs, three of which were original pieces they had

only written a couple of weeks earlier.

“This is Friday,” said Rhodes. “Give us the weekend and we’ll have these mixed and mastered for you by Monday.” He looked to Alan for confirmation and got a nod. “Right, then!”

Dima went round at noon on Monday to pick up the recording masters and met with an unexpected surprise. In their enthusiasm over this new group, Parsons and Rhodes had contacted Sir Terry Wogan, and since eight that morning the three of them had been listening—repeatedly—to the recordings and brainstorming for next steps to get this band in front of the public as quickly as possible. Sir Terry, whose twenty-seven year run in the breakfast slot had built up the largest morning show audience in Europe, had recently vowed to bring back the golden age of the BBC variety show and REVOLVER was exactly the kind of talent he wanted to showcase. In addition, the three of them—Alan, Simon, and Sir Terry—had put their heads together to generate a long list of friends who they were certain would be as interested in this new group as they were. They had even contacted their various legal representatives to draw up initial contracts to put all this in motion. By the end of the month they would have arranged radio and TV appearances in more than a dozen countries.

Between February and May, REVOLVER appeared on nearly fifty TV and radio shows. In between those bookings and a steady string of concert dates, the band had found time to go back into the recording studio. In four sessions they had managed to record another two dozen original songs, of which no fewer than ten were getting regular air play throughout the UK and Europe.

Dima had believed in the eventual success of the band, but even he could never have imagined things happening this fast. In November he called the band together for an announcement. On the phone he had sounded more serious than usual, perhaps even a bit depressed, and when the band assembled he displayed a somewhat dour expression.

As he called for their attention, he said, “Listen up my friends. I have a problem that I need your help with.”

Valeria, Tatiana, and Viktor suddenly became as quiet and grim as Sergei and Shura usually were. Viktor asked, “What’s up, boss?”

“I’m afraid we can no longer go on as we have been. We need to make a change and I need you to put your heads together and come up with a list of names.”

This didn’t sound good. Was someone going to be replaced? They looked around at each other, unable to identify a problem with any of them.

Valeria finally asked, “A list of names for what, Dima?”

Dima held his serious expression for as long as he could before breaking into a wide, knowing smile. “Well, I can’t have my prized band lugging its own equipment all over America, can I?”

America? they all seemed to ask at once. They looked to each other excitedly, then back to Dima, eager to hear more.

“Well, I’m pretty sure that’s where San Francisco is, right?” He took on a bewildered, befuddled expression to play out his farce. “If I’m wrong please let me know right away because that’s where REVOLVER opens its eight-city tour and I’d sure hate to go to the wrong country! We are going to need some roadies to help us out. Oh,” he added, “did I mention that REVOLVER currently holds the top three positions in the US Top 40?”

Cheers and hugs dominated the practice hall for the next several minutes as Dima broke out several bottles of Champagne he had hidden from view. In three short years he had brought them to the brink. By the time they finished their first U.S. tour next March, the band REVOLVER would have become the world’s Next Big Thing.

4

TWO CLUSTERS OF AIR BUBBLES RACED toward the surface of the sapphire blue water in search of the noonday sun. A moment later two heads broke the surface of the warm Caribbean. Wes Franklin and Ashley Jordan, on vacation in the Cayman Islands, had just finished an hour dive to the *Capt. Keith Tibbits* off Cayman Brac. Russian Destroyer #356, a 330 foot frigate originally built for Cuba in 1984, had been purchased by the Caymans in '96, renamed for a famous and colorful local politician/businessman, and scuttled as a diving site. One of only a couple of Russian warships ever to sink in the western hemisphere, the *Keith Tibbits* provided divers a great, multi-tiered diving experience. Stretching from its conn at a depth of about 30 feet to its keel at 100, it had quickly become one of the most popular dive sites in the area.

“That was fantastic,” said A.J. “Did you see Boris?” she asked, referring to a rather shy jewfish the locals had nicknamed.

“No, I missed him,” said Wes. “But I saw Charlie the moray eel. Boy, that is one ugly critter!”

Wes and A.J. tossed their dive fins into the boat and lugged

themselves up the back steps. Once aboard, Wes helped A.J. out of her Cressi BCD buoyancy compensation device, then turned around so she could help him out of his. After stowing their gear, A.J. coated herself with Coppertone and stretched out to soak up a little sun while Wes took the helm. He gently eased the throttle forward and turned the bow of their 27' Crownline starboard, back toward the west side of Grand Cayman.

Following back-to-back cases in October and November, one in The Netherlands that nearly cost Wes his life and the other involving the U.S. President and an extraordinary man named Jared Kennan Cain, Dr. Wes Franklin—a member of the international intelligence community known as the Cloister of Akhenaten, or Ankh Network—and Ashley Jordan, his computer-wiz girlfriend, had retreated to the Cayman Islands for Christmas and New Years for some badly needed rest and recuperation. They were staying at the Marriott Beach Resort on Grand Cayman's Seven Mile Beach and looking forward to getting back there for lunch.

* * * * *

“WHAT DO YOU THINK?” ASKED WES, looking over the Hemingway's menu.

“I don't know; it all looks so delicious. The Tuna Ceviche sounds good. What are you going to get?”

“I'm leaning to the Lobster and Clam Chowder,” said Wes. “But I haven't tried the Havana Rum and Coconut Shrimp yet. That could be good!”

“You had the chowder yesterday, get the shrimp,” she said with a mischievous grin. “That way I can try it, too. I think I'll also have the Wild Mixed Greens.”

“Do you want any wine?” asked Wes.

She thought for a moment then said, “No, not now. Just an iced tea.”

They ordered lunch and sat at their beachfront table in the shade

of its umbrella, sipping tea and watching the waves lap slowly onto the shore. Their stretch of Seven Mile Beach was sparsely populated just now, probably too hot at this hour for most of the tourists. There were some small children of varying shades of black and brown at work on a sand castle and a dozen or so teens scattered up and down the beach sunbathing or splashing waist-deep in the water.

With a month of vacation behind them, both Wes and A.J. were tan and fit. Wes covered his 5'11", 175 lb muscular body with a pair of blue Tommy Bahama Hibiscus Camo swim trunks, a white T-shirt sporting the picture of a cold glass with a slice of lemon straddling the lip and the words Add Rum in large letters, and brown Skechers sandals. A.J., recently a brunette, had gone back to her naturally blonde hair since they would be in the sun so much. She wore a red coral two piece from Maaji, over which she had thrown a beaded V-neck silk chiffon caftan. Her athletic 5'5" body looked stunning in it, but then, to Wes, she looked stunning in anything she wore.

"Oh, look," said A.J., pointing to where a half-dozen horses and riders were romping along the beach. The horses, some of which were shoulder deep in the aquamarine water, appeared to be having as much fun playing in the surf as their riders. "We should go riding while we're here," she added.

Wes smiled. "Sure. Looks like fun."

After a few minutes, A.J. spotted a young woman walking alone along the wet sand from the north end of the beach. The scene was picture-perfect, like it had been staged for a Victoria's Secret magazine ad. The woman wore a turquoise print bikini that left little of her beautifully curved body to the imagination, as she ambled leisurely along the shore. Every few seconds the water ran up to tickle her feet then raced back out to sea as if playing an aquatic game of tag. Her long blond hair floated away from her face as she walked. She gazed mostly out to the horizon and seemed lost in thought as she came even with where Wes and A.J. were sitting.

In an instant A.J. bolted upright in her chair, pointing in the girl's

direction.

“Wes, look at that!”

Wes turned quickly to see what had caught A.J.’s attention and saw a man come swiftly up from behind the young woman and grab her shoulder. The young woman spun round to face the man, who then appeared to lean in and attempt to kiss her. At once her pensive demeanor changed to anger. She slapped the man’s face, pushed him back with both hands, and began yelling at the man and wagging a threatening finger in his face.

Wes was out of his chair in a flash, headed in the woman’s direction, his Skechers plodding as quickly as they could through the soft white sand. Neither Wes nor A.J. could make out what the girl was saying but it was obvious she was upset and the man was not backing away. Wes, being his naturally chivalrous self, was going to at least get close enough to help if the young woman needed assistance. As Wes got closer to them, the man looked in his direction then turned and walked quickly away.

Wes shouted out as he came closer, “Are you alright.”

The young woman seemed at first confused by Wes’s approach, but then answered, “Yes. Yes, thank you, I’m fine.”

“My friend and I were having lunch over there,” he pointed back toward A.J., “and we thought you might need some help.” In an instant her face registered with him. “Say, aren’t you Valeria Kempter of the band REVOLVER?” She nodded and smiled, amused that he would know her—he appeared to be older than the group’s typical fan. “What are you doing here in Grand Cayman?” he asked, but didn’t give her time to answer. “Listen, come join us for lunch,” he gestured back toward their table. She didn’t answer right away but didn’t seem to object. “I know A.J. would love to meet you.”

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VALERIA KEMPTER ORDERED A SALAD and iced tea, as the three of them fell easily into conversation. When Wes asked her what she

was doing in the Caymans, she explained that the band was in Havana for some fun and sun prior to the start of their first-ever US tour. Havana was the natural Caribbean vacation spot for her Russian friends but she had always wanted to see the Cayman Islands. There was little difference between Cuba and Grand Cayman in the weather, terrain, or water, but there was a decidedly more relaxed feel to life on this little island.

“Where will you be playing in the States,” asked A.J.

“We have an eight city tour set up, but to tell you the truth, I only remember that we will begin in San Francisco at the Oakland Coliseum and end at Miami’s American Airlines Arena. All in all, we will be there ten days, I think.”

“Actually, the Oakland Coliseum is in Oakland,” corrected Wes. “Oakland and San Francisco are close to each other, but they’re two different cities.”

Valeria laughed at her mistake. “Sorry,” she said. “This will be my first time in America. I’m sure I will have a lot to learn.”

A.J. said, “Well, I know one of the first things you’ll learn is that America loves you! Your songs are being played on almost every station these days. People can’t seem to get enough of REVOLVER.”

Valeria smiled, “Thank you. I must admit I’m a little nervous, but that helps. Anyway, enough about me! Tell me something about yourselves. What kind of work do you do?”

Wes tried to offer a shorthand explanation of the Ankh Network but the girl’s natural affinity for Egyptian history, as well as Wes’s exquisite Lapis Lazuli ring in the shape of the Ankh, pressed her to ask for more. She casually took his hand in both of hers and unabashedly examined the ring as he told her about the Cloister of Akhenaten. A.J. smiled at the girl’s enthusiasm and innocence.

Wes recounted how Professor Robert Clark and his four archaeological colleagues had begun the group in the 1920s, built around Pharaoh Akhenaten’s dedication to truth and non-violence, as well as their understanding that science and human knowledge were

not fixed in time, but rather in a constant state of evolving and learning. The group's motto, Truth never happens in real time, had become something of a catchphrase for the group over time, and one that Wes, himself, was wont to say. He told her that Akhenaten had been the first human to declare a single, faceless God, and that historical accounts of Akhenaten's life had led Professor Clark and his associates to hypothesize that the Pharaoh Akhenaten and the Biblical figure of Moses were, in fact, one and the same person, a notion that was later advanced by none other than the father of modern psychotherapy, Sigmund Freud, though most scholars remained unconvinced. "The truth of this," said Wes, with a wry smile, "will just have to remain undecided in real time." He went on to explain that the Cloister of Akhenaten had expanded to include people of all disciplines, and since WWII had found its members involved in all manner of political, social, and scientific investigation. Wes told her that his services were available to governments, corporations, and individuals, alike, and that while he often received substantial payment for his services, he possessed significant personal wealth and often assisted people *pro bono*. In addition to his investigative work, he spent several months each year working with Doctors Without Borders.

Valeria looked to A.J. with a question. "And what do *you* do while this amazing man is running all over the globe doing good things for the world?"

A.J. laughed and joked, "I've become quite adept at needlepoint."

"Don't let her fool you, Valeria," said Wes. "Ashley Jordan is, among other things, an expert in computers and telecommunications, and indispensable to the work I do. If not for her, I couldn't accomplish half the things I get most of the credit for!"

"I thought this might be the case," said Valeria still looking at A.J. "You strike me as a woman who does not take a backseat to anyone, and a man as intelligent and talented as Wes would soon be

bored with a woman who was not at least his equal!”

They all had a good-natured laugh.

“So tell me, Wes, as busy as you are how do you manage to know my little rock and roll band, let alone recognize an insignificant girl on this tiny island in the middle of nowhere?”

Both Wes and A.J. gave an incredulous laugh.

Wes said, “Valeria, I’m only forty-six, so I was too young to know the Beatles, but as near as I can tell, there hasn’t been another group to even come close to generating the mania that the Fab Four created until REVOLVER came along!”

A.J. added, “I think you’ll have a better idea of this once you get to America. I’m eight years younger than Wes, and I can assure you I haven’t seen anything like this in my lifetime. You and your group are truly a modern phenomenon!”

Valeria Kempter felt humbled at the praise her new friends were heaping on her and her band. “Maybe you would like to come hear my band?”

Wes laughed aloud, “Sweetie, we would love to, but even with all the friends I have in the world and all the wealth I possess, I don’t think even *I* could finagle two tickets for one of your concerts at this late date!”

“You underestimate your power to charm,” said Valeria, with a puckish smile. “We are giving a private concert at the Masonic Auditorium in San Francisco before our first public concert. I just happen to have a little influence in the band and I am pretty sure I can arrange for you to have front row seats, as well as a backstage pass for a small party afterward. What do you think? You would like to come hear us play some songs?”

Wes and A.J. were almost speechless. “Absolutely!” they both said in unison.

“Then it is settled. I will leave tickets for you at the Will Call window and we will get a chance to talk some more after the show.” Valeria rose from the table to leave, but as she began to move away,

she turned back to Wes. She took his hand in hers and squeezed it affectionately. “My brave Don Quixote,” she said with a cryptic grin. “That man on the beach? He was not a threat to me, but you are my champion nonetheless.” She bent over and kissed Wes on the cheek then walked softly away.

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WES AND A.J. SPENT THE REST of the day on their boat casually motoring around the island. Around 4:00 p.m. they arrived at Stingray City, where they eased themselves into the shallow water of the sandbar to frolic with their graceful aquatic friends. After a late dinner they turned in for the night, the soothing sound of the waves outside their room lulling them quickly to sleep.

The phone in their suite rang at seven the next morning.

Wes answered half awake, “Wes Franklin.”

“Wes, sorry to bother you so early,” said Don Chandler, owner of a local dive shop and longtime friend of Wes and Ashley. “I could use your help, buddy. A diver washed up on shore this morning right outside my shop. Wasn’t my customer, Wes, but a dead diver in full scuba gear on my property?...that isn’t going to be good for business!”