

Blame it on the Moon

By Michael Parra

GEOFF

Damn dogs, at least he hoped it was only canine mess. *One couldn't be sure these days*, Geoff reflected as he scraped malodorous brown muck off an expensive, Italian leather shoe and onto the side of a US postal box. The blue metal was none the worse for the indignity. Mail boxes in downtown San Francisco had been derelict for the past three years anyway, ever since globally warmed Bay waters flooded the financial district. Twice daily the tide submerged postal boxes and everything else in their path. Brine swirled around brick, steel and concrete corners, rousing rubbish and excrement in one giant, slimy broth and then; after splashing the filthy soup onto everything, it gradually retreated, leaving the most buoyant chunks of debris behind. A putrid film dripped and then encrusted the glass sides of office towers. Low tide was worse. On a hot summer day, the flies and odors were overwhelming. Any retail stores able to remain in business had long ago moved to second floor accommodations.

Geoff lifted the hem of his trouser to inspect his shoe. As a junior partner in one of San Francisco's most prestigious law firms, Geoff dressed to impress. He spent a small fortune on dry cleaning every month and was not about to risk soiling his best suit. He was proud of his appearance, even if he had grown a bit soft since his surfing days. Blessed with a strong chin, devilish dark eyes and more muscle than he needed, Geoff still worked out twice a week. His clientele expected him to appear crisp, even though the only way to get to the courthouse from downtown was via the recently installed and often unreliable patchwork of boardwalks that crisscrossed major thoroughfares. The footpaths were ingenious inventions, buoyed underneath by black plastic floats and anchored along their sides by sturdy piers driven into the forsaken streets; the wooden planks carried pedestrians above the invading sewage. Some of Geoff's more affluent clients arrived for their court dates via helicopter, but their attorneys had to hoof it. *God help anyone in a wheelchair*. The American Disability Act had disintegrated into little more than wishful thinking.

That morning, an unexpected break in his schedule allowed Geoff to head towards Mike's private training gym early. The court had granted Geoff's opponents an extension to permit completion of a pertinent engineering report. A crack had been discovered at the base of one of the sky scrapers and water damage to tower foundations was likely to be added to the estimated repair costs. If all the great buildings of San Francisco were similarly afflicted, the amount of losses would be staggering. Not enough of the work day remained to warrant additional billable hours, so Geoff had taken advantage of low tide and departed the office mid-afternoon. A new moon caused the ebb tide to be lower than usual. Boardwalks rested on their pontoons, scant inches above street level, where there still remained enough water born obstacles to pollute his path. He paused another two blocks up Market Street to reexamine his shoe, steadying himself by gripping the branch of an overhanging plum tree. The dead wood was

brittle and his first attempt snapped off in his hand. It was March. In prior years the tree would have been in full bloom, but like all its tender brethren lining downtown boulevards, the plant had succumbed to a toxic mixture of salt water and indifference.

San Francisco's main commercial corridor gradually elevated as it ran west away from the Bay. Two tiers of public transit formerly operated under the street, a local one called MUNI and a second network called BART that served the greater metropolitan area with a tunnel burrowed even deeper than its sister system. At stations closest to sea level, stairs and escalators now descended into gloomy murk, beneath which boarding platforms, turnstiles and ticketing machines policed a lightless and lifeless underwater world. Thus far, water inundated only the lowest six city blocks, but climate changes engendered by global warming had outpaced even the most apocalyptic predictions and the city's Board of Supervisors was not taking any chances of further retrenching. Despite the outcry of major retailers, the new subway terminus was located at Civic Center, several blocks uphill from fashionable Union Square department stores.

The resultant finger pointing would keep Geoff handsomely employed for years. He represented a consortium of utility companies seeking release from liability. With electrical conduits and sewage as well as drinking water pipes all under water, service to the city's beleaguered office towers was spotty at best. Even routine maintenance required a diving team, and with coastal cities similarly threatened around the world, competent divers charged as much as lawyers. Geoff's clients sought reimbursement for submarine repairs mandated by the city, and the costs, estimated in billions of dollars, for rerouting everything from gas lines to computer cables. The legal battleground was complex and volatile. Bankers were practically worshipped, and a day didn't go by where Geoff didn't get a job offer from at least one insurance company.

By the time he arrived at Civic Center, the streets were a hive of gridlocked, sweaty drivers trying to take advantage of the extra low tide to access downtown. Erratic traffic light operation was one of Geoff's most contentious negotiation topics and here the problem was in action, or rather inaction. Traffic was stopped in all directions. Car horns ringed City Hall Plaza in an ear-splitting vehicular crescendo of complaint.

The din receded as Geoff departed Market. Shade trees still graced some of the better residential streets and the ground quickly gained elevation as Geoff marched past ornate Victorian homes. This early in the year it was still possible to enjoy an afternoon out of doors, but Geoff was soon perspiring due to the steep ascent. He stripped to the waist, carefully folding his coat and dress shirt over one arm.

"Hey Handsome ", a bearded passerby greeted him when he paused at a flashing street light. Upper Market Street was a popular neighborhood for gay men even before the demise of Palm Springs, now returned to desert dust, and the subsequent homecoming of thousands of queer retirees. In this part of town a well muscled, naked torso was easily interpreted as an invitation. For the past five months Mike had amplified Geoff's circuit training with a female workout

partner. Explosive body weight exercises alternated rapidly with extremely demanding weight lifting. The results were obviously stirring.

“Woof!” a second fellow commented as Geoff reached the opposite corner. *Damn, these guys are always on the prowl!* Geoff hurriedly put back on his t-shirt. His impressive physique had evolved as an afterthought. Five years ago, mostly to meet women, he had joined a group exercise class at the UCSF’s Mission Bay campus. It worked too, at least until Geoff acquired a reputation as a player. He lived alone, just a few blocks uphill from the university community center where Mike taught, and beautiful co-eds were often willing to offer Geoff short rides up the south side of Protrero Hill. His little two-bedroom/one bath was the perfect bachelor seduction palace, although back then the neighborhood was less than desirable. Nowadays of course, any home on high ground fetched astonishing prices, and his view had changed in the past four years. The campus at the bottom of the hill was submerged. The largest oncology facility in the nation was once again a marsh.

Geoff’s fitness gains had been tangible enough to make him follow Mike when the trainer opened his own private studio, but Geoff missed the ladies. As the Bay waters consumed the city and his professional focus, Geoff’s office and home had become literal as well as figurative islands of isolation. The money was good, but there was less and less to spend it on...until Mike introduced him to Anne.

She was everything Geoff was not, light of complexion, light hearted, full of optimism. He thought about her daily, hourly, the touch of her, the scent, the ease of her laughter, the shared secret of a silent, sideways glance. Every week culminated with Wednesday’s buddy workout at Mike’s gym and the stolen hours until Anne needed to return home to her family. *Am I obsessing about Anne because I know I can’t have her completely?* Geoff hated the thought that he might be a cliché.

High pitched shrieks of laughter, the unrestrained joy of children, filled the air. He’d wandered upon friendly bedlam, the after school exodus of grade school kids greeting parents and nannies. Mothers shouted instructions above the squeals, negotiating schedules for the week with one another while holding one child in one hand and bags of toys and food in the other, all the while disciplining siblings in the back seats of double parked cars. By the time Geoff reached the school’s main entrance, he was knee deep in children. He was surprised by the number of fathers present. *Moms still outnumber Dads three to one, but there are many more here than I recall from my own years in elementary school.*

A sudden constriction around Geoff’s right thigh brought him to an abrupt halt. A little girl with curly brown locks tied in pig tails with yellow ribbon had wrapped her arms around his leg. She couldn’t have been more than three years old. The child embraced Geoff’s leg as though his knee were a favorite doll.

“No Honey, that’s not Daddy. Come back here. Leave that man alone.”

Geoff smiled down at the toddler who matched his gaze with big, deep brown eyes of her own, eyes that swallowed Geoff whole. The girl disregarded her concerned mother and appeared quite content to ride Geoff’s pant leg as long as he cared to let her do so.

“Oh, I’ m sorry Mister, Stacey is new to all this. She gets a bit confused with all the excitement. We’re here to pick up her brother...Eli! Get back in the car! You hear me? Eli!”

Mother and daughter waddled away but Geoff stayed rooted in place hoping the child might turn and give him one last wave goodbye. There was a time before law school when Geoff had contemplated becoming a school teacher. *What happened to those dreams? Children have disappeared from my life.* Geoff still spent holidays with his siblings, but the family had more or less dissolved with the death of his parents. Married with children, his brother and sister had spawned little clans of their own. Geoff was welcome at both homes, but his role was a distanced one, *the friendly uncle that arrives with expensive gifts.* Geoff wanted to run after the little girl and take her in his arms. Instead, he imitated her quirky little wave goodbye, sighed and resumed his steady pace uphill to Mike’s place.

ANNE

“Nick, it’s not fair! I can’t get a sitter on such short notice. How can you just spring this on me at the last minute and expect me to drop everything? I have plans. I have appointments. Ouch! Damn it!”

Anne stood over her new kitchen sink and watched soap spray envelope the jagged remains of her shattered coffee mug. Her husband inched Jackson’s high chair closer to him and wiped excess oatmeal off their son’s chin. Nick was never one to let well enough alone. He ignored his wife’s tight shoulders; the heaving sides of her well muscled back, and hammered away at his argument. As far as Anne was concerned Nick was hammering away at their marriage...*another nail in the coffin.*

“Appointments? What appointments? You mean your workout with Mike? Call him and reschedule. This is important!”

“If it’s so important then take Jack with you. Wednesday is my one day off, my one day for me. Nick, you promised.”

“Come on Anne. What am I, the highly paid, official expert on shoreline renovation, suppose to do with a baby in the Mayor’s office? I’m sorry this is so last minute, but that’s politics. These guys operate in the dark. Half the time they intentionally schedule meetings when they know somebody they don’t like can’t make it. That’s when they make their move. I have to be able to act and react quickly, and this is a make-or-break meeting.”

Anne turned to face him. A petite blonde who might have chosen a modeling career were she not also ambitious, Anne did not look like a typical stay-at-home-mom of an eighteen month old child. Even teary eyed and without makeup she was gorgeous. Anne kept her short hair as stylish as when she was a marketing executive, and her body was tight. Nick on the other hand carried the weight of too many business lunches, and Anne suspected he was smoking again. *He denies it, and that’s worse than the cigarettes.*

“It’s always make-or-break with you Nick.”

“Anne, my job paid for this kitchen.”

“I know that. I appreciate how hard you work and the ingenuity of your schemes. They’re brilliant really, but in another couple of years I could have bought myself a new kitchen.”

Nick sighed and spooned another glob of oatmeal into Jackson’s eagerly waiting open mouth. They didn’t seem to have much to talk about these days besides the details of schedule, house keeping and parenting. Dialog had become increasingly adversarial and more and more predictable. Anne frequently went down this same road of regret, reminding Nick how successful she had been before sacrificing a career to motherhood. He knew his wife was smart, professional, sought after. After all, he’d married her.

“Look, can we postpone this stimulating topic for another time? I’d like to join the mayor and his boys for lunch so that I can strategically position myself before the meeting.”

“I don’t appreciate your sarcasm Nick. It’s a poor model for our son, and FYI, it’s not the best method of communication for us either. What time will your meeting end today?” She heard her own acquiescence in the question and sighed. “Will you pack Jack’s things while I clean up breakfast?”

Jackson squirmed in her arms as Anne descended the ramp that led from the French doors of their second story living room to the outboard dingy moored to the front gate. At low tide they could still use the main entrance; however, at that hour the original front door and garage were half under water. Nick waited for his wife and son to settle into the forward seat of the boat before handing Anne the back pack and collapsible stroller and then boarding himself. The electric motor hummed as the trio floated by the other flooded homes of San Francisco’s once affluent Marina district. The mood could have been romantic, or at least tranquil, but they were tight lipped except for Jack, who cooed at a pair of harbor seals sunning themselves on what use to be someone’s front porch. Anne noticed that several homeowners in the neighborhood, many of them Nick’s real estate clients, had added ramps and boat docks similar to their own.

When the boat grounded they trudged across Lombard Street to higher ground beyond, four lanes ankle deep in water with Nick dragging the boat behind him. By the time they arrived at one of the recently installed, two-foot tall, black metal boat racks that dotted Nick’s projected new shoreline his breathing had become ragged.

Anne sat among the baby accessories with Jackson and watched Nick’s back disappear around a stately Pacific Heights Edwardian at the end of the block. Their hybrid SUV was parked just two streets away, another example of her husband’s genius and political savvy. Last year Nick had convinced several homeowners on high ground to join his new parking service. In exchange for a portion of the fees that Nick collected from drivers, high ground residents rented their driveways as parking spaces. Nick won city approval to erect strategically placed parking attendant stations on prominent street corners, and he paid valets minimum wage to watch over car keys. Some of the attendants kept a bucket and rags in the booth and made a show of wiping off the car exterior for tips. The parking service was an easy sell to Marina homeowners. More than once Anne had spied a frantic neighbor, water up to his knees, clawing at a pad locked

garage door between sea swells. If anyone forgot just once about high tide, they would find their vehicle trapped in their garage, totaled by invading salt water. Sometimes a fireman showed up in time on one of those sporty, bright red, speed boats that now patrolled the soggy edges of the city at all hours, sometimes not.

Nick pulled up and helped stow Jackson in the child's car seat along with diapers, toys, bibs, blankets, stroller and baby food for day. He handed Anne a plastic toy dinosaur as she took the back passenger seat beside their son.

"Nick, you might as well go through the Presidio and I'll drop you at the N-Judah train. Construction has traffic blocked on all the streets cresting Pacific Heights."

Nick kept his speed slow on Lombard. Even as sizeable a vehicle as their Range Rover could hydroplane on the deceptively placid stretch of road. He picked up speed as they wound their way over the formerly forested hills of the Presidio, now sand dunes. Anne's eyes scanned the vacant terrain. *I remember when the approach to the Golden Gate Bridge was shaded with pine and cypress trees.* They were all gone now, though groves of eucalyptus still remained.

"What mischief will you and Jack get up to this afternoon?" Nick called over his shoulder as he merged into the congested traffic clogging Park Presidio Boulevard, "Maybe visit the zoo?"

"No, they closed it last November for good."

"Really? I thought they were going to move it to the hilly area in the Park."

"The zoo tried, but in the end the airport won out."

Both institutions formerly operated on land built at sea level, San Francisco International was on the Bay side of the city and the zoo had what use to be ocean front property. *Nick must have known that the airport won the land grab. He may have even made money on the deal.*

"I was supposed to lead tours today," Anne continued, "I may take Jack to the museum anyway."

Anne had graduated as an Art History major and since Jackson's birth had become a volunteer docent at the de Young Museum. The work made Anne feel like she was contributing her skills and knowledge and it gave her opportunity to flex her mind around topics unrelated to home improvement, scheduling or baby-talk. The museum was safe haven with a volunteer staff comprised mostly of educated women and articulate, older gay men.

"I can't take the baby with me while I lead tours, but the staff always loves to visit with Jack." Their son wiggled against his car seat restraints. "Yes Baby, I'm talking about you", Anne crooned. "You're a charmer just like your daddy."

"Maybe he'll behave well enough for you to take him on rounds."

"Nick, the museum can't risk that. Think how unprofessional that would look! Some of the visitors might be donors. Suppose he suddenly needed a diaper change? No, we can sit out in the sculpture garden, have lunch at the café and maybe take a stroller walk to the carousel."

The restored carousel was a marvel of antique restoration. Housed in a greenish, brown stone building that was more window than brick, the old world charm of mirrors and painted ponies inset with glass jewels still cast its spell over

the swings and slides of the nearby playground. Nick had proposed to Anne on that Carousel. One minute he was snuggled up behind her with his arms wrapped around her waist, the next minute her hand grasping the golden pole was flashing its own jewel.

“Nick, if you finish at City Hall by three o’clock you could meet us.”

“I can’t promise anything, but I’ll try to get out as early as I can.”

Anne looked up into her husband’s reflection in the rear view mirror. *Where was the man that once insisted they take a full moon kayaking excursion around the Bank America Tower? If only it were possible to return to the way we use to be.* There was a time when Nick would drop everything to spend time with her.

She thought of Geoff waiting for her at Mike’s place, flushed with exertion, panting with effort. Their joint workouts had begun innocently enough. Mike had already been her trainer for a year and the pairing with Geoff had been simply a matter of convenience for all three of them. Workout conversation evolved from polite to intimate. The bantering and bawdy jokes were a natural way to ease self-consciousness. As Mike increased the challenges the training necessitated greater interaction: a touch of hands as an assist with lifting dumb bells, steadying one another during balance exercises, a seemingly plutonic pat on the back following a successful set, Geoff’s strong forearms supporting her low back. She was flattered when at the end of their fifth buddy workout Geoff asked her to coffee, and she agree to cocktails the following Wednesday. *It was only courteous to offer him a ride home, even if it was a bit out of her way.* They consummated their flirtation in the back seat of the Range Rover, like over eager high school kids. Soon Anne found herself making excuses for her delayed return home on Wednesday evenings. She started buying groceries en route to Mike’s gym and leaving the bags in the car during the workout so that she could tell Nick the reason that she was late getting home was that she’d gone shopping after her session. Now, in those infrequent moments when Nick made love to her, Anne fantasized about Geoff’s sweaty body.

“Okay Nick, then I may still try to make my training appointment with Mike.”

Her son threw the plastic dinosaur at her to regain her attention. Anne wiggled it in front of him, teasing Jackson for a moment by holding the toy just beyond his reach.

“You won’t make a fuss at Mike’s will you Sweetie? Huh? Not you, not my sweet honey-bunny.”

MICHAEL

Whenever he had a free hour between appointments, Michael liked to spend it outside in his little courtyard garden, preferably with a glass of fine cabernet. He reached for the bottle and then rethought the wine. Although Anne and Geoff were two of his favorite clients, almost friends really, as long as he was on their dime, he’d better stay on top of his game. Not that he had to worry about injuring either of them. In fact, their individual athleticism, their healthy bodies, was what made it such fun to train the two. Michael could and did throw every difficult exercise he could imagine at them. *Just got to watch the placement*

of Anne's thoracic spine to avoid aggravating her slight scoliosis and keep an eye on Geoff's shoulder. Ever since Geoff started surfing again, his shoulder ached in overhead motions. Michael suspected the real culprit was not the rotator muscles but rather an enflamed biceps tendon. *The important thing to remember is not so much to avoid injuring Geoff as to not make the guy look weak in front of a beautiful woman.*

Michael's groping hand found his fallen garden tool beneath the top stair. He had forgotten that he was wearing his phone's blue tooth and its loud ring directly in his ear startled him so much that he had dropped his pruning shears. *Anne sounded distressed, but bringing the kid is no big deal, might even be fun.* He clipped a second branch away from the banister. The bougainvillea was magnificent with its exuberant fuchsia wands, but it wouldn't do to have clients brushing up against thorns, however visually grand they made the entrance. The colorful vine and the stand of bamboo were the only creatures remaining from the original garden, planted when Michael first set up shop in the Victorian carriage house eleven years ago. Nowadays the yard was tropical: palms, even Hawaiian plumeria. All his other babies had succumbed to the high temperature. *There is some benefit to the heat, he mused. Gardenias finally bloom for me.*

Over the years, individual customers had come and gone, but Michael's clientele remained predominantly in the thirties/forties age demographic, so from his perspective the world was getting younger all the time. Michael had lost both of his parents a couple of years back, and his last real romance had been what, *two years ago?...three?* He was alone in the world, closer to sixty than fifty, and answerable to no one but himself. Wrestling a rambunctious bamboo cane, he admired his tattoo as one of his well shaped biceps flexed in the sun. *Still look better than most of my clients,* he flattered himself and noted that while it might be a good thing personally, it said little for his professional skill as an instructor. Not that he worried. Michael knew how much his clients were fond of him. Perhaps it was the graying of his short cropped hair. He had become everyone's Dad.

The sound of the gate buzzer prompted Michael to check his watch. *Forty-five minutes early, unusual for Geoff, maybe he needs to talk.* One never knew what elements best comprised a training session on any given day for any particular client. Sometimes a trainee had more important things to workout than pectoral and abdominal muscles.

Geoff bounded into the courtyard like a fervent puppy dog, his manner all grins and tail wags.

"Hey Mike, I know I'm early but I decided to take the rest of the day off. Mind if I hang out with you in the garden for a bit?"

"Sure Buddy. Listen, Anne called just a few minutes ago. She had trouble getting child care this morning so she asked if she could bring the kid. I told her okay, just for this one time. I hope that's alright with you."

"Anne's bringing their son? Shit! I can't believe she'd do this to me!"

Geoff paced rapidly back and forth along the concrete garden path. He stared blankly into space, almost panicked, liked a caged animal. Michael didn't

see what all the fuss was about. He thought Geoff had told him that he liked children.

“Geoff, it’s no big deal really. I can keep an eye on Jackson and direct the session at the same time. You and Anne will still get a good workout.”

“No, it’s not that. It’s just...it’ll change everything.”

“Well sure, it’s about time to shake up your exercise program anyway.”

Michael set down the pruning shears again, “Listen, why don’t I make us some coffee? We’ve got another half-hour before Anne and the baby show up. Go ahead and change.”

Geoff was one of the few clients for whom Michael kept an extra set of workout wear. The service was a testament to the friendship that had built alongside their professional relationship over the years. Geoff removed his shoes before entering the home studio.

“May I use your hose? I stepped in dog shit earlier.”

“Certainly Geoff, sounds like you could use my latest shameless advertising product, designer galoshes complete with my logo. Only twelve bucks!” Michael held up a pair of bright blue, plastic slip-on, shoe covers with VOLITION FITNESS writ large across each side in neon green letters.

“Kind of bright aren’t they?”

“Geoff, the only people who worry about subtly in advertising are funeral directors and you lawyers.”

Michael tucked the booties into the inside pocket of Geoff’s suit coat as he hung it up and slipped in a tide chart, also emblazoned with his VOLITION logo. Free tide charts were the advertising medium of choice for all sorts of products and services these days, replacing the omnipresent desk calendar giveaways in banks and realty offices.

Michael switched on the electric kettle and balanced the filter cone over the first cup, mostly as a way to turn his back to his client and take a moment to gather his thoughts. *Geoff was not prone to outbursts. Was it best to pinpoint the emotional turmoil and try to resolve it during the workout or avoid the subject this time and keep him focused on exercise?*

Michael had trained Geoff for over three years before pairing his sessions with Anne. About a year and a half ago, just after Jackson was born, Anne needed to switch gyms from the San Francisco Bay Club, where she originally hired Michael, to someplace on higher ground. Like Geoff’s club on the university campus, the Bay Club was located on the waterfront, right across the street from the rising waters that soon flooded over Embarcadero Boulevard, up the curb and the white steps and into the elegant, dark wood paneled lobby, around the semi-circular front desk, and across the basketball and squash courts before tumbling down into the sunken fitness floor where mats, foam rollers and plastic stability balls floated among heavy weight equipment.

“So Geoff, talk to me. What’s going on? You getting’ any?” Geoff chuckled and kept his eyes on his cup.

“Ah, you know me. I keep busy.”

“Anyone special?”

“Sort of...”

“Let me guess, a hot brunette with big hooters.”

“Actually she’s a blonde.”

“Is she old enough to drink?”

“Mike! She’s my age!”

“Hey don’t object so strongly counselor. I’ve watched you go through a handful of ‘em. Remember that Brazilian babe, the club dancer? What was her name, Margarita?”

“Reylla, and she was pre-med. The dancing gig was just to get her through school. She’s probably a cardiologist by now.”

“A good thing too. I’m sure she broke some hearts. So Geoff, what’s the hold up with this new lady?”

“It’s complicated Mike. Is that pink flower a rhododendron?”

“No, my rhodies all died. Couldn’t take the heat. That one is some kind of rain forest plant usually found in Panama. I forget its name.”

They sipped in silence while a hummingbird investigated every red geranium bloom in the yard.

“Mike, you have a great set up here, but do you ever miss not having a family, children of your own...a mate?”

The truth was that Michael had never felt very comfortable around children and the thought of one or more of them constantly underfoot didn’t appeal to him in the least, but he could see that Geoff was struggling with something that probably had little to do with Michael’s circumstances.

“Well Geoff, the bachelor life has its good and bad days. You’ve kind of boxed yourself into a solitary corner, eh?”

“Yeah, I guess you could say so. Overall I’m extremely satisfied with my life, so much so that I’d like to share it, expand it. I may have to rethink some of my more recent choices though.”

“Like this new, complicated blonde?”

“Hmm, maybe I’m better off remaining the lone wolf.”

“Well Geoff, I agree that you’ve been a dog”, that brought a smile to Geoff’s face, “but, if I may be candid with you for a moment, I don’t see you as the loner type.”

“What do you mean? I work alone. I live alone, competently I might add. I spend my recreational hours alone on a surfboard surrounded by nothing but water.”

“Circumstantial evidence Sir...you’ve made the most of the cards dealt you; but if I recall correctly, your first career choice was one that would have had you caring for kids all day. Besides, surfing only appears to be a solitary activity. You guys with your boards and your babes are tribal; and the experience of the ocean is as much spiritual communion as it is sport. The problem with your aggressive profession and your hobby is that both are initially driven by youthful hormones. It takes years for maturity to gain a voice. A young stud has a difficult time hearing his heart when so much of his attention is focused by another part of his anatomy.”

The gate buzzer announced Anne’s arrival. She entered the yard flushed

with effort, balancing Jackson skillfully on one hip and armloads of toys and *God knows what else the kid requires*. Geoff had disappeared inside.

"Mike I apologize again for bringing Jack, but there really was nothing I could do short of canceling the session. I hope I'm not late on top of everything else. There wasn't a space at the park so we had to drive around for a bit."

Nearby Duboce Park, like many small, neighborhood commons throughout the City had been paved over to replace parking lost to flood waters. However, not even those extreme measures were enough to meet demand. Garages and taxis took advantage of the hardship, adding astronomical expense to an already difficult and competitive situation.

"Come inside and let's get Jackson set up." Michael grabbed the stroller and led them past Geoff who was already spinning on the stationary bicycle. "Will he be okay over here in the corner?"

"He should be fine as long as he can see me." Anne said, unzipping her black nylon jacket to reveal an orange and coral colored leotard. Geoff's eyes devoured Anne, but strangely avoided her son. If she noticed, she didn't show it.

"We'll begin quietly to allow Jack a chance to settle." Michael said from the stereo. The bottom story of Michael's carriage house was one great U-shaped room and Mozart's soothing string arrangements soon blanketed the entire downstairs.

"Anne, that new outfit looks made for you."

Geoff grunted agreement from his perch atop the bike.

"Well of course I want to look pretty for my three favorite men in the whole world!"

Michael directed his clients to face away from the mirror and fold forward at their waist, hands as well as feet on the floor in Downward Dog position. Geoff's upside-down gaze kept wandering to the reflection of Anne's behind.

"Eyes closed please! Focus on expanding the side ribs with every inhalation." Michael switched on the interior fountain and lit pillar candle sconces anchored at the base of the mirrors. *There's an odd assortment of tensions between these two today*, Michael sensed as he watched his clients twitch and self-adjust during their typically calm series of poses. He directed them to opposite ends of the studio and gave each client individual routines.

"Geoff, have you been sleeping well?"

"Uh, some nights I'm more relaxed than others," he panted between crunches, turning his head in Anne's direction. "It depends...on how...much...stress relief...I...get."

Anne grinned as she matched her pushups to his rhythm, "Maybe it has to do with the amount of exercise you accomplish on any given day."

"Good point Anne." Michael said.

Geoff paused and assumed plank position, then turned his head to face her, "Yeah, I'd like to get some every night."

"Good for you Geoff, but that frequency of exercise is not realistic." Michael advised.

"Tell me about it!" Geoff began his pushups at a frantic pace.

"Whoa! Reign it in cowboy," Michael commanded as he replaced the Mozart with jazz standards to liven the mood, "I want you to save some strength for a few challenging exercises I've planned for later." Michael opened the back door to allow a cross breeze, and then he demonstrated a fiendish abdominal routine on the Pilates Reformer. *Maybe if I fatigue them early on I can get their minds to release this pent up stress...or do I need to discover the root of the problem?*

"Anne, how are things going at home?"

"Ug," she moaned as she lifted her hips off the table with very little assistance from the rope straps fastened to her feet, "I've been better. Let's say my home life is not as hard as this exercise, but it's not a walk in the park either."

"Okay, let's pair you two for the next exercise." Michael positioned a stability ball, a plastic orb that looked like an extra large white beach ball, across the room from a half-sphere, balance platform called a BOSU. He directed Geoff to stand on the blue wobbly surface while Anne reclined on the stability ball with her feet on the floor.

"Anne, you're going to explosively toss this medicine ball to Geoff as you execute a sit-up; and you, Big Guy, are going to catch it and throw it back to her without falling off the BOSU. Oh! One other thing Geoff, I'd like you do this standing on one leg."

"Well, I'll give it a try on two feet but the one-legged thing is too much of a circus trick for me."

"Ah, come on Geoff," Anne teased as she sent the six pound ball flying across the room, "no guts, not glory. You can't always play it safe."

"Safe? You think surfing ocean waves is risk free? You think arguing against some of the most powerful people in this city, threatening to cost them millions of dollars, is safe? You have NO idea," he accused loudly as he shot the ball back at her with enough speed to break a finger, "what it's like to stand before a judge, hung over and insufficiently prepared because the night before you decided to throw caution to the wind and spend time with an attractive woman."

Anne pushed the ball back at him with just as much force as he gave her, "I don't mean your work. I think keeping a harem of beautiful women in order to maintain emotional distance from any particular one is playing it safe."

"I don't keep a harem. You're the one playing it safe!"

"Me? I've risked everything!"

The medicine ball became a blur of fury.

"You've risked nothing. Your greatest challenge these days is...what? Vacuuming? Deciding which afternoon soap to watch instead of Oprah? You're in this because you opted for comfort and security and now you're looking to replenish a lost sense of adventure."

"Damn you! That's not true!"

Michael stepped between his frenzied clients and intercepted the medicine ball before it hurt someone or broke one of his mirrors. *What has gotten into these two?*

"Okay guys; let's lower the intensity before we wake the baby."

Too late, Jackson started to wail.

"Oh no! Please, each of you grab a pair of dumb bells and do a reverse lunge to overhead press. I'll try to quiet Jack."

The baby was a squirming mass of protest in Michael's arms and after less than a minute it was obvious that Jackson wasn't about to calm down. Michael despaired; *I'm not good at this!* Anne put down her weights and attempted to rescue both her trainer and her son from further discomfort. She rocked the child, bounced him and made all manner of singsong distractions. Jack refused placating; he knocked the toy dinosaur out of her hand and across the room.

"Man, that kid has some lungs!" Geoff said.

"He's the only one getting any exercise at the moment." Michael said in apology. Geoff retrieved the toy and stood before Anne.

"Let me give it a try...please?"

Her look was one of curiosity as Anne carefully positioned her son in Geoff's arms. She was about to advise Geoff to cradle the boy's head with one hand, but Geoff nestled the child perfectly against his chest before she had a chance to speak. He instinctively knew what to do, caressing the baby's head while he murmured reassurance in low, measured tones.

Michael exhaled with relief when Anne smiled. Jackson's cries had become giggles and the boy gazed at Geoff with delight and complete acceptance. Geoff's back was to them, but in the mirror Michael saw him sniffle.

"You know what folks? I can't do this anymore." Geoff faced them.

"That's okay," Anne said taking her son from him, "I can hold him now."

"No, I mean I want to discontinue our training sessions. I think I'll workout on my own for a while."

Michael turned off the music. His clients stared at one another in tearful silence. *What's going on?* Only the trickling of the fountain accompanied Jackson's whisper.

"Geoff, if we need to make some change in your program I can..."

"No Mike, really, I need to take a break." Geoff said, never turning his face from Anne. "Maybe we can start again in the fall." With that Geoff gathered his work clothes and left. Michael squeezed his shoulder before closing the studio door. *I must have tripped one of Geoff's emotional wires today. I'll call him later.*

Meanwhile Anne was sobbing in the middle of the room; and sensing his mother's distress, Jackson was beginning to squirm again. *Uh-oh.*

"Anne, I don't know what's got into Geoff, but I'm sure he'll be back. Anyway, I can always find you another workout buddy or we can do private sessions again."

"Yes, I'm sure it'll be okay." She said wiping her tears with the back of one hand while cradling Jackson in the other. "I'm sorry for the drama. I...I don't know why I'm so emotional about it."

"Well, it's a new moon. The body is ninety percent water you know. Maybe like the tides, you're feeling the lunar pull."

"Hmm, maybe that's it."

"Shall we keep going?"

“Yes. Let’s continue. What else can we do? Hopefully we learn from our mistakes and get stronger. I’ll have to leave pretty soon though. The city will flood high tonight.”