

The Chinese crystal ball

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Credits

Special Thanks to my Freeport high school buddy (class of 1961), George Schandel for helping with editing this novel.

Dedication

To my wife Dolores, who always supports whatever I do, and to my children who have always been there for me.

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Index

<i>Chapter 1-Manhattan.....</i>	<i>page 4</i>
<i>Chapter 2-Moon Light.....</i>	<i>page 14</i>
<i>Chapter 3-Toronto.....</i>	<i>page 26</i>
<i>Chapter 4-Hawaii.....</i>	<i>page 40</i>
<i>Chapter 5-Return to Toronto.....</i>	<i>page 53</i>
<i>Chapter 6-San Juan Capistrano</i>	<i>page 58</i>
<i>Chapter 7- Baja, Mexico.....</i>	<i>page 71</i>
<i>Chapter 8- The Search.....</i>	<i>page 85</i>
<i>Chapter 9-San Miguel De Allende, Mexico.....</i>	<i>page 91</i>
<i>Chapter 10- El Diabolo.....</i>	<i>page 99</i>
<i>Chapter 11-Mexico City.....</i>	<i>page 110</i>
<i>Chapter 12-Retrieval.....</i>	<i>page 122</i>
<i>Chapter 13- The Romanian Gypsy.....</i>	<i>page 131</i>

I believe that nothing happens apart from divine determination and decree. We shall never be able to escape from the doctrine of divine predetermination - the doctrine that God has foreordained certain people unto eternal life.

Charles Spurgeon



Chapter 1-Manhattan

It was a sunny day in Greenwich Village in New York City. John Cardomen a young Irish man in his late twenties was walking down 9th street toward Washington Square to have lunch, and relax awhile sitting on the wooden benches around the park. He was a stockbroker with a degree from Dartmouth College. John was ready to take on the world. Life had been good to John. His red hair in a crew cut was thinning, but his health was good, and he had the energy of three men when it came to stocks and bonds. His distinct nose had a little bulb on the end, and his face always looked like he had a permanent five o'clock shadow. John was

about 6ft. 2”, and a descent college basketball player. He played on the Dartmouth team that went to the National finals a few years before.

It was November in New York City, and the leaves had already turned, and many had dropped to the ground. Washington Square was beautiful this time of the year with bright red and orange leaves on the trees. The air was a crisp 55 degrees, and the wind was blowing in John’s face. Dogs were barking and the sounds of the city were everywhere.

As he sat at a park bench, he ate his sandwich from the local deli, drank his diet soda, and reflected on how well his life was going, and particularly with his girlfriend Jodi. He decided to take an extra long walk, and go back to Broadway where he worked. He walked south for a few blocks and looking at the Chinese trinket shops, and the rummage stores along the way. As he turned to walk east toward Broadway he noticed a rummage shop that had some great blue glass vases which he enjoyed collecting. He thought to himself, “ I have a little time, maybe I will just drop into this store, and see how much the blue glass vase in the window costs.’ So he entered the store to the ringing of bells hanging over the door.

“Can I help you,” an old Chinese man asked in a thick Chinese accent. John responded, “I am interested in the blue glass vase in the window. How much does it cost?” ”For you Mister, only thirty five dollar,” the old man responded. “Wow, thirty five dollars, that is a little steep. How about twenty-five dollars?” John

replied. “No, very expensive glass from China. You pay thirty dollars?” asked the old man. “OK thirty dollars seems fair, wrap it up for me please,” said John.

As he approached the cash register counter he noticed a beam of light shining from behind the counter. The light caught his eye. It looked like a glass ball of some type. John asked, “Excuse me what is that glass thing?” “ Oh, it is very old from China, you no like,” the old man added. “You not want it, many mysteries, ”the old man said. “Can I have a look at it John said?” “The old man hesitated for a minute, and then shook his head, and took a scarf off of the glass ball.” When the old man put the ball on the table John noticed right away that it was a chinese crystal ball about 12-18 inches in diameter with some Chinese symbols etched in the lower bottom . “Is this really a chinese crystal ball,” John asked?” The old man answered, “This is very old quartz from China, perhaps hundreds of years old, no maybe thousands from the Chin dynasty.” “Really,” John exclaimed. “Is it really that old or are you playing me old man?” The old man laughed, “you funny, many stories about this both good and bad.” “Some consider it cursed,” the old man said. “The last owner sold this to me years ago when I was in China, and I was warned to keep it covered at all times or an evil spirit will come out.” John was intrigued; “OK what is it going to cost me to buy it from you?” “No not for sale,” said the old Man.

“How about two hundred dollars cash,” John offered. “OK, I will buy both the Chinese crystal ball, and the blue glass vase, OK?” John asked. “Yes,” said the old man, “good purchase for you. Keep the ball covered from light and dust,” said the old man. John replied, “I don’t believe in superstitions, but I love the clear slightly green quartz ball. It will look great on my coffee table.” So the sale was made, and John took his purchases and headed off to work.

When John got home that evening he took the chinese crystal ball out, and placed it on a silver tray on top of his coffee table. It looked great there, John thought to himself. The blue vase he put in his collection cabinet along with the other blue vases he had collected.

The chinese crystal ball sat for over a month, and no spirits or evil things ever appeared. One day in December, a month later, John was watching the New York Giants football team play the Dallas Cowboys football team on Television. The sun was shining brightly through the balcony glass doors passing through the chinese crystal ball. A spectrum of different colors appeared on the wall and all over the apartment like a rainbow. John did not notice at first, but an image appeared on the wall projected by the chinese crystal ball with the sunlight as a source. It was a vague picture of a yellow taxicab hitting what appeared to be a woman. John could not believe that this was indeed an image on the wall coming from the chinese crystal ball. He was sure he had too many beers while watching

television. The image scared him for a minute, and he thought back to the old man's gibberish about mysteries about the chinese crystal ball. It was really weird and there must be some explanation. He dreamt about the image all night long. The image in his head would not go away in his head.

The next day was Monday, and John was to meet his girlfriend Jodi after work at Joe's Coffee Shop on 6th avenue and 32 Street in New York City. It was one of their favorite places to meet since it had coffees from around the world, and pastries that you could kill for. John and Jodi had first met at Joe's coffee shop a few years before, and it has always been a special place for them since. As John was crossing 6th avenue he saw Jodi coming across 6th avenue from 31nd street. He waved, and she waved back. She was in a cute short plaid skirt, and a red sweater with the usual ribbons she always loved to tie into her dark brown hair. It was hard to see Jodi above the crowd since she was only 5 feet tall. All the men and women around her dwarfed her. The traffic light changed on 6th avenue for all traffic to stop, and Jodi stepped off the curb with a crowd of people.

Suddenly, out of nowhere a New York City Yellow taxicab came speeding around the corner from 31st street heading south on 6th avenue. It didn't look like he was going to slow up despite the red traffic light, and all the pedestrians walking across the avenue. The yellow cab driver suddenly realized the light was red, and slammed on his brakes to avoid the pedestrians crossing the street with

Jodi. The taxi driver veered the cab to the right, to avoid the crowd, but the cab did not stop as fast as the driver had hoped. Several people jumped out of the way as the taxi approached, and suddenly, it hit Jodi who never saw the cab coming. She was focused on John standing across the street. The cab hit her directly on. She flew up, and over the car like a toy doll, smashing the windshield, and then bounced onto the pavement. Blood was everywhere on the cab, the windshield, and on the road. Jodi was dead on contact. A few nearby pedestrians rushed over to see if she was still alive. John only saw the cab screeching to a stop at the light. He did not see Jodi being hit by the cab, and fly up over the hood hitting the windshield. All he saw was the cab slamming into the crowd crossing the street. He ran across 6th avenue, now jammed with traffic in every direction to see what was going on.

A policeman who was standing at the corner of 32st street and 6th avenue was running toward the accident. It all happened so fast, and when John got across the street there was beautiful Jodi in her red sweater, and plaid skirt lying on the ground in a pool of blood. John could not believe what he was seeing and almost fainted. He could not believe that this had happened to Jodi. Images flashed through his mind. “Oh my God, this was the scene he saw on the wall projected by the chinese crystal ball.” John thought. “This could not be happening. This had to be a dream. How could it be?” he said to himself. Tears swelled up in his eyes, and he cried uncontrollably. He knelt down to check the pulse in her neck, but

there was no pulse. Her blood was all over his hand. The policeman was trying to help by pushing the crowd back from the scene. There was pandemonium everywhere as the crowds tried to push inward to seeing what was going on.

Five minutes later, a Police Ambulance arrived, and took Jodi's body, and John away to St Vincent's hospital. The paramedic took her pulse, and blood pressure, but got no reading. John was beside himself. This all seemed so surreal. This could not be happening to him or Jodi. "Oh, my God what happened here, was it an act of God?" John cried aloud. "Did the little chinese crystal ball really have a vision?" So many thoughts raced through his mind.

An hour later John was waiting outside an emergency room when Detective Nathaniel Green from the New York City Police department approached him. "Sir, I am sorry to bother you, but are you the victim's boyfriend or brother?" said detective Green. "Yes, yes I am her boyfriend. Her name is Jodi Greenspand, and she lives at 92 Park drive, apartment 22," said John. His head hung low and he had a serious headache. "How could this be?" he kept saying to himself?" The rest of the day seemed like a blur. He vaguely remembers calling Jodi's parents and sister from the hospital. They were shocked too. Jodi's father asked a million questions, which John tried to answer, but his thinking was clouded, and he was in shock.

The next day the police called John at home, and asked John to come down to the precinct, and identify the cab driver that hit Jodi. John hadn't slept all night.

He kept thinking he was dreaming, and the chinese crystal ball was just a fake. Just in case he covered it with a hand towel. He didn't completely believe that this glass thing had any magical power to it, but now he wasn't sure. He dressed slowly that morning, skipped breakfast, and he headed for the cross-town bus to the Police precinct. He was supposed to meet the Police that afternoon for a line-up with the Cab driver, and others in the line. The cabbie was being charged with vehicular manslaughter that was a major felony, and could put the cabbie in jail for over twenty years. But that wasn't going to bring Jodi back.

The afternoon came and went quickly. He went to the Precinct and identified the cabbie that hit Jodi and went to the bathroom to throw up. The cabbie was a short stubby man long dark hair, with a dark beard, and a faded leather jacket. After the line up the Police had the cabbie arrested, and booked for vehicular manslaughter for speeding, and attempting to run the red light. John went back to work afterward, but could not get any work done. Over and over he tossed in his mind how this wasn't real. No piece of quartz, no matter how old could project the future, except in comic books. He simply could not accept the fact that the chinese crystal ball had any power at all. John thought for a moment of telling the police what he saw on the wall the day before the accident, but they would never have believed him, and he would have ended up in the Psychiatric ward at Bellevue Hospital.

Exhausted, John headed home early from work that day. His heart was especially heavy because he had to meet Jodi's sister and parents at the funeral the next day. Jewish burials are required to take place as soon as possible, according to tradition, so both the funeral, and burial would be the next day once the coroner released the body. John was dreading the funeral and burial. What was he going to tell her parents, and sister? Was he responsible in some way? Hundreds of questions flooded his mind. When he got off the subway he walked to his apartment at Trump Towers and went up to his room on the 10th floor apartment 1033. Dinner was a frozen pizza, and a lot of scotch. After ten drinks he fell asleep on the couch, but he didn't sleep very long. He got up every hour all through the night.

When morning finally came he had bags under his eyes, and looked like "death warmed over." The funeral was at 1:00 that afternoon at Silverstein's Funeral Parlor on 9th avenue in New York City. He decided to take a cab downtown to the funeral home. He arrived a little early, and took a Jewish yamaka, and put it on his head, and went into the funeral home. The funeral parlor sign indicated the room to the right was Jodi's funeral. As he entered the room, there were Jodi's parents, Sam Greenspand, and his wife Greta, and their daughter Molly. The grandparents were there too, and many cousins. Everyone was crying. John went up to Sam Greenspand, and gave him a big hug. "I am sorry Sam for your

loss and mine,” said John. “It is fine my son, it is fine, and it is God’s way,” said Sam, in a heavy tone full of sadness. “She is at peace now,” Sam said. Greta just cried unable to say anything. Molly Greenspan gave John a hug, and just looked at him, and cried. John moved around the room hugging each, and every cousin, and the two surviving grandparents. Finally, the Rabbi arrived and before John knew it they were all saying prayers for Jodi. It all went by in a flash in his mind. He vaguely remembered getting into the hearse with the close family members. It was a short ride to a Jewish cemetery across the midtown bridge to Queens. Later on it all seemed like a bad dream in John’s mind. He wanted to forget this even happened, but he could not. Everyone was so kind, and understanding, but none of that would bring Jodi back.



Chapter 2-Moon Light

Several months later in the May, John was sleeping in bed when he thought he heard something. He had forgotten to completely close the balcony door, and the wind had blown it open. The wind also blew the towel off of the chinese crystal ball. John got up and closed the balcony door and went back to bed. Early in the evening that night a full moon arose, lighting the bedroom, and living room. The bright full moon light shining on John's face in the bedroom awakened him. He got up and headed to the bathroom not realizing the moonlight had awakened him.

When he came out of the bathroom he noticed a bright light coming from the living room, and but it wasn't moonlight. He walked into the living room only to see the chinese crystal ball shining an image on the wall. The image on the wall looked like a dog biting the pants of a man. It lasted for only a minute and then turned to just a spectrum of colors, red, green and blue.

John could not believe his eyes. Here was, yet again, another vision or image or whatever it was called. His first thought was that a dog was going to bite him the next day. Now he was afraid of a dog would bite him. He poured himself a double shot of scotch and went back to bed dreaming about dogs all night.

The next day came and went with John looking over his shoulder every minute for a dog. Whenever he heard a dog bark, he jumped. Walking to the subway was more difficult than he imagines looking everywhere for a dog. John was indeed afraid of being bitten by a dog. He skipped going to Washington Square for lunch that day, and stayed in his office instead. When the workday was over he took a cab to go home to avoid walking to the bus and getting bitten by a dog. When the cab arrived at his residence he ran into his building at Trump Towers.

“No dog had attacked him that day so maybe he had dreamt the whole thing,” he thought to himself. He took four Advil pills for his headache, and went to bed early that night. The next day was Saturday, and he was planning on going to Chinatown to get some fresh vegetables for stir-fry.

It was Saturday morning in New York City, and it was windy, rainy and a cool 40 degrees. John decided to go to Canal Street anyway, and shop for fresh Chinese vegetables. It took a bus ride, and a transfer to get to Canal St. from his residence on the westside of Manhattan. As he got off the last bus, the smell of

Canal Street hit him in the face. He was greeted by smells of chestnuts, burnt trash, burnt toast, fish, and more smells that could not be identified. The aromas of Chinese food filled the air along Canal Street and all the side streets. Mott Street was a short walk from the bus stop, and all of the vegetable vendors were on Mott and Canal streets. Mott Street was where John's favorite Chinese restaurant called "Hung Fats." Hung Fats had been on Mott St. for over twenty years. When John was young his father used to bring him to Hung Fats.

"I would like some fresh garlic, Chinese cabbage, and some ginger root please" he said to the Chinese merchant. "Yes, very good, six dollar please," replied the Chinese lady behind the counter. As John walked a little further down Canal Street his plan was to have lunch at Hung Fats, and then go home, and prepare dinner for that night. Jodi's sister Molly was coming over. After Jodi's death Molly made a special effort to comfort John. She was single, and just turned twenty-one after graduating from Columbia University School of Social Sciences. Molly was very smart, and majoring in Psychology. She was planning on applying to a Medical school somewhere in New York City. John suspected that Molly always had a "thing" for him, but never told him, since he was engaged to her sister Jodi. They had become very good friends after her sister was killed.

John strolled down Canal Street dodging the heavy crowds of Chinese people, and tourists who were packed together. Suddenly, he heard a dog barking,

and the hair on his neck stood up straight. He had a moment of panic that a dog was going to jump out and bite him. He stopped at a vendor and bought a wooden cane, just in case, so he could beat any dog attack away. Just then, after buying the cane, a door flew open to an upstairs office of a jeweler or pawnshop. John was not sure because the lettering on the door was in Chinese. A man came running out of the door with a leather bag in his hand. He knocked a few Chinese people down as he kept running down the sidewalk into the crowds of people shopping. The dog darted out of an alley, and bit the man on his pant leg, and would not let go. Some Chinese gentlemen who looked like thugs came out of the doorway, and chased the man with the leather bag down the street. He rounded the corner with the dog in tow, and the two Chinese men running two blocks behind him, shouting in Chinese, holding guns up in the air. John was shocked. "Was it true, was the image or vision coming true?" he thought to himself. John ran behind the two men running after the man with the leather bag dragging the dog who had a death grip on his pants.

As the man with the bag rounded the corner where the pastry store was on Mott Street and Canal Street, he lost his grip on the bag, and it went flying into a pile of rubbish in an alley. There was no time to get the bag with the dog biting at his pants leg, and the men chasing him so close. The Chinese men with guns did not see the bag fly into the alley, because they were too far down the street. The dog held onto the pant leg with a grip of iron. It was too late for the man to turn

around, and go back for the bag, so the he headed down the stairs into the subway to escape. The two Chinese men followed the man into the subway, and the dog finally let go, and went whimpering off down the street.

When John finally rounded the corner all three men were gone. He was going to turn around and walk back when he noticed in the alley the large leather bag the runaway man was carrying. His first thought was “walk away,” and “don’t get involved,” but despite that thought, his curiosity got the better of him. He stepped into the narrow alley and picked up the bag, and turned and walked in the other direction back down Canal Street.

He hailed a taxi on Canal Street, and asked for the cabbie to take him home to Trump Towers on the Westside of Manhattan. He got into the cab, and took a peek into the leather bag. All he could see in the bag were stacks of bills in twenty and fifty dollar dominations. He quickly closed up the bag, and waited until he got home to count how much money was inside the bag. His hands were shaking from nerves.

When John got back to his apartment, he laid out all the stacks of money on the table, and it came to roughly \$800,500 dollars. It was a fortune in bills that the guy must have stolen or robbed from the jewelry company on Canal street. His first thought was, ”should he return the money, and get a reward?” “Perhaps those

Chinese thugs flashing guns were part of the Flying Dragons Gang that ruled over Chinatown?” John thought to himself.

After a couple of shots of whiskey, John decided that he would not return the money. Instead he would put this money to good use where it could not be traced. “But where,” he thought? If he put it in the bank the IRS might ask questions why he was depositing more than ten thousand dollars in his account. If he put just nine thousand in different banks, it would take a lot of banks to deposit the money. He fell asleep that night dreaming how he would hide or spend the money. He had no idea that the money was stolen from a Pawnshop. He was also not aware that the money stolen was in fact being used in a money laundering scheme run by the Chinese Flying Dragons of China Town.

Molly was coming over for dinner that night. He had to call her, and tell her he was feeling under the weather. She would be disappointed, but he was in no mood to share this story with her. He dialed her phone hoping for an answering message. “Hello, hello Molly, this is John. “How are you doing? I am feeling really sick today. Is it alright if we postpone our dinner to next week?” said John. “Sure John, no problem. I was looking forward to talking with you, but if you’re sick, I don’t need to catch what you have. Get some rest and we can talk later in the week. You take care John,” Molly said. “Boy what a relief,” John thought to himself. That was too easy to be true.

When John was dressing for work the next day he was thinking about where to hide his new found stolen fortune. He turned on the Television for the morning news to see a news bulletin that a pawnshop had been robbed in Chinatown on Canal Street. When the New York City Police investigated, they found money counting machines, drugs, and a drug lab. The leader of the Chinese Flying Dragons was identified, Jerry Wong, and was arrested. John recognized the face of the Jerry Wong being on TV. He was one of the men with the guns that were chasing the man with the leather bag. John realized that he was in real trouble with the Chinese Flying Dragons gang.

The realization came to him that he might have the Chinese Flying Dragons looking for him, and the bag he they knew he picked it up. He decided to call into work, and take the day off. He needed time to go to a lot of banks, and make deposits under ten thousand dollars in all of them. This was going to take some time, so off to Fifth Avenue, and several bank offices he went.

“Hi My name is John Cardomen and I would like open a savings account with your bank,” this was the line John used at every bank. It suddenly occurred to him that he could not make 88 different bank deposits, so he took a chance, and put some larger amounts of cash in deposit boxes. He managed to find fourteen banks, and made deposits in all of them, in addition to setting up a deposit box in each of the banks.

By the end of the day almost all of the money was gone, and John had a mess of bankbooks, and checkbooks to show for it. The day went by fast as he traveled from one bank to another depositing nine thousand dollars so as not to raise suspicion by the IRS. John knew that banks had to report any amount of ten thousand dollars or more to the IRS.

Returning home that evening John was exhausted. It takes a lot of money and energy when you are trying to cheat the government, and also a gang of Chinese thugs. Depositing the money was just the beginning. He had to do something with the money so it could not be traced. He would have to formulate a plan, but for now he had to go to work as usual, and not spend a lot of money to draw attention to him.

It was going to be a full moon in ten days according to the New York Times and John began to come up with an idea. Supposing the chinese crystal ball really did work? After all, it worked in the past for better or worse. So ten nights later, John decided to uncover the chinese crystal ball, and wait and see if an image would appear on the wall again like the last time. It was after midnight, when the strong light of the full moon began showing brilliantly through the chinese crystal ball. Nothing appeared on the wall, however, until around 2:00 am. John was falling asleep on the couch. Suddenly, two sets of letters appeared on the wall. John woke up just in time to see the letters on the wall. John quickly got a pen, and

wrote the letters down and before they disappeared. The letters were STC and BBD.

The next morning he could not figure out what the letters meant. They must be an abbreviation for something, or a code. The answer did not come to him until he was on the bus on the way to work. While sitting on the bus, John noticed a gentleman opposite him reading the New York Times. He had the newspaper folded so that he could read the stock page. Then it dawned on John, “maybe the letters were to identify some stock or bond on the stock market? John bought a New York Times newspaper when he got off the bus, and quickly turned to the stocks section. Looking down the list for STC and BBD, he finally found the stocks he was looking for. They were technology stocks STC was trading at \$40.00 a share, and BBD was \$28.10 dollars a share. STC was for “Strategic Tech Company” of Oklahoma, and BBD was for “Best Bundle Divine” of Texas. If the chinese crystal ball was right something was going to happen to these stocks. It was a gamble since the stocks could do down or they could go up over time. John decided to take a gamble and buy stocks with his stolen money.

The next day John called his stockbroker friend Jim. “Jim, this is John, how are you doing?” John said on his cell phone. “I am fine John what’s up with you?” said Jim. “Well Jim I came into an inheritance from my grandmother, and I want to invest it in some stocks. Can you help me out Jim?” “Of course John, what stocks

do you want to buy?” said Jim. “I was looking at STC for \$40.00 a share, and BBD for \$28.10 dollars a share. Can you buy me \$500,000 worth of both stocks as soon as possible Jim?” said John. “Wow that is a lot of money, but sure, if you think these stocks have value, I will buy them first thing today before the stock market closes,” said Jim. So Jim put in an order for STC at \$40.00 a share for as many shares as he can get, and also for BBD at \$28.10 dollar a share. The next day the stocks began to rise in price. Buyers were wondering why so much STC stock was sold in one day, and why BBD stock was also sold in one day.

After work John returned home to Trump Towers on the west side of Manhattan. When he entered his apartment he found it was ransacked. Chinese lettering was painted on the wall in red letters. John did not read Chinese so he looked up the symbols on the Internet. As best he could determine was that the expressions said something to the effect of “death to the thief who stole our money.” John did not waste any time in the apartment. He packed some suits, the chinese crystal ball, put clothes in a bag, and hailed a cab for Penn station on 31st and 7th avenue. If the Chinese Flying Dragons could trace him to his house, then they must have found out who he was and where he worked. That meant they would kill him if they caught him. A chill of fear ran up John’s back.

John called Mickey Smith a friend from work that lived in Freeport, Long Island, and asked him if it was alright if he stayed at his house for a few days. “My

apartment has termites and has to be fumigated,” John lied to Mickey. Mickey said, “come on over John, it will be good to have you around.” John took the first Long Island RR train out of Penn station headed for Freeport station on the south shore of Long Island.

It took about an hour to get to Freeport, Long Island, where Mickey was waiting in his 1990 blue Dodge pickup truck. Mickey was an old friend from the college days at Dartmouth. He was the same age as John except he had gone prematurely bald. He was a short puggy man with a scar over one eye he got in a basketball game in college. Mickey was divorced, and living alone with his three cats. Mickey had always been a cigar smoker, a habit John could not stand. They had been friends for a long time, through good and bad times. John stood by Mickey when he was going through his divorce, and Mickey never forgot that loyalty.

Mickey and John commuted into work together each day for two weeks on the Long Island Train system. After two weeks, John decided it is too dangerous to go into work, just in case the Chinese Flying Dragons traced him to his job. Sometimes Chinese gangsters can be very persuasive when they want to find out something John thought to himself on the train one day.

Three weeks after John’s sudden move to Long Island, STC got a government contract to make special computer parts for NASA, worth 50 billion

dollars over three years. In addition, BBD also won a Government contract from Britain, and the USA government for a special sensor for ultraviolet rays that can converted the rays into energy for \$100 billion in funding over the next ten years. Both Britain, and the USA governments wanted this for the International Space station. The stocks took off in sales as soon as the announcements about the contracts were made. John's initial investment doubled, and tripled, and then when through the roof in just one week. STC jumped from trading at \$40 a share to \$550 dollars a share. BBD went from 28 dollars a share to \$700 dollars a share. John had become a millionaire in less than a month. His broker Jim could not believe the increase in sales, and could not wait to tell John that he helped make him rich. John asked Jim to sell his stocks when they reached the highest point, and deposit the money in a special account he set up in Switzerland. Jim followed the instructions and made a handsome sum on his commission.

John was becoming paranoid and looking over his shoulder all the time. It was time to make a big move, so he packed up his bags, and thanked Mickey for putting him up at his house. He put his apartment in Trump Towers up for sale the same day. He e-mailed a letter to his bosses, and quit his job effective immediately. Then, John bought a ticket to Toronto, Canada one-way, and left that same day on Canadian Airlines. The fastest way to Kennedy airport was the taxi, so he called for a taxi, and paid the driver in advance \$30.00 for a ride to Air Canada at

Kennedy airport. An hour later, he was at Air Canada waiting for the next flight out. He managed to get through security without a problem with the large chinese crystal ball tucked in his walk-on baggage.



Chapter 3-Toronto

When John got to Toronto, later that day, he planned to stay at the Marriott hotel in downtown Toronto. His plan was to stay there until he could find an apartment to rent or a house to buy in Canada. He was hoping that the Chinese Flying Dragons would not be able to follow him to Canada. He had to stay one step ahead of them.

He moved some of his money in U.S. banks to Canadian banks, and some of it to Swiss banks. He also deposited money in offshore accounts in Barbados, and other Caribbean islands where they would not be traceable. Now he felt safe for a while. To be extra safe he packed the chinese crystal ball in a large briefcase, locked it, and stored it in his closet.

Canada was colder than John had imagined. It was 20 degrees, and overcast when he arrived in Toronto. This was going to be a new chapter for him. “Excuse me can you tell me how to get a bus or train to downtown Toronto?” John asked an airport attendant. “Just follow the sign, aye.” So John dragged his suitcase with the

chinese crystal ball wrapped inside past the security gate, and out into the airport, following the signs to the train to downtown Toronto. It was surprising how easy it was to get into Canada with an American passport. They did not even question what the big quartz ball was in his suitcase.

In a few minutes he was on a train headed for downtown Toronto. The weather was much colder than New York. The ride was only 30 minutes to downtown Toronto, and before John knew it, he was arriving at the train station in downtown Toronto. His plan was to book a hotel for a night or two while he tried to find an apartment or home that was reasonably priced in the Toronto area. He would have to contact a local real estate agent, and discuss what he needed in terms of an apartment or home to rent or buy. Right now he was tired that he could not wait to get to the Marriott, so he hailed a cab. The dollar exchange rate was in favor of American dollars so John was able to benefit from that rate of exchange when he used American dollars.

After checking into the Marriot Hotel he went up to his room, and collapsed on the bed. He stared at the ceiling for a while and thought back to everything that happened over the past few months, Jodi dying, the Chinese Flying Dragons, the leather bag, the stock market, and the trashing of his apartment.

The next day, John set out to visit real estate agencies in Toronto, in order to find an apartment or a house on the outskirts of Toronto. The first agency he

stopped at was the Toronto Century 21 Real Estate agency about four blocks from where he was staying at the Marriott. The owner was a nice Canadian guy called Tom Frise. He showed John a variety of apartments and houses. John wanted an apartment on the top of a building for security or a house with a built in security system. They went out in Tom's car and toured the city that day. Many of the apartments were the same, as well as a few older houses on the outskirts of the city. One penthouse apartment that stood out had a view of the city and was very secure with a special access key to the penthouse. Tom took John up in the elevator by turned the penthouse key. The elevator went beyond the 20th floor indicated by the buttons. "P" which meant penthouse. Only a key access would allow the elevator to go to the penthouse. John liked that security precaution. The apartment was fabulous with glass windows everywhere, and a glass sliding door to the penthouse garden and deck area. It was everything a man would want for an apartment including wireless access, and TV cable already installed. The cost was \$5,000 American dollars a month. The price was a little steep but the privacy and security was worth the extra rent. "OK, Tom I like the place. I will go to a bank today and have the money wired to your agency with the security deposit. Can I move in right away?" asked John. "Sure thing," said Tom. The penthouse has been vacant for a year now and the landlord will be thrilled to finally have someone rent it.

So the next day, John moved out of the Marriott hotel, and into the new Penthouse across town in Toronto. There was a lot to do. He had to order furniture, have the place painted and order custom drapes and blinds. He had to order a Television set in every room, pots and pans, and the list went on forever.

A month later John was completely moved in with all of the furniture he purchased new, computers, televisions, tables, chairs, beds, and a modern décor to John's tastes. He was beginning to experience the "good life." Things were going good. He was almost afraid to relax and enjoy the experience.

After a few months John had some time to experience the "night life," around Toronto. He went to the local bars a few nights a week to test the Canadian bar atmosphere, which was no different than New York except the Canadians always use the word "aye," instead of yes, and most Canadians could speak some French too. Amazingly there were a lot of Chinese Canadians, and Iraq Canadians. Canada allowed anyone with a college degree to become a citizen in just three years if they could find a job. He met a lot of beautiful women, but they were only "one night stands." He made it a point not to get too involved with any one woman just in case. He was truly paranoid about being watched and having someone looking into his life. To keep busy during the day John did some day trading online. He kept away from working for an agency since he thought he could be tracked from New York if he was in the stock business.

A YEAR LATER

A year went by, and John was settling down and adjusting to the Canadian weather, and lifestyle. The chinese crystal ball was tucked away safely in a wall safe in total darkness. John was afraid to let it sit out in the open sunlight or moon light. He felt that it was better not to give the chinese crystal ball a chance to portray any future events because he had no control over the future except to try and avoid it, if unpleasant. There was something about predetermination that John did not understand. If he could see what was going to happen to him, and if it was bad, could he change the future or would it happen regardless? John had no answer for predetermination, but he felt it was more than the power of God. He felt that somehow, mere humans had the power to make decisions and free will that could change the future he thought. He had not taken out the chinese crystal ball since moving to Toronto. He feared it's power, and he feared the future that the ball portrayed.

He was at one of the many Canadian local banks one day, withdrawing some cash from his account, and checking his safe deposit box where he kept emergency cash. The line at the teller was long that day. It was a Friday, and it must have been payday for all the office workers. A lot of beautiful Canadian women officer workers and executives were waiting in line. A blond women dressed in a leather

coat and leather knee high boots; accidentally dropped her checkbook on the floor. John bent down to pick it up for her. "You dropped your checkbook Miss," John said. "Ahh "she said "American, you are an American?" "Yes, he replied how did you know?" said John. "Your accent is so different from our Canadian accent, I could tell right away you were an American," the woman said. John looked into her green eyes for a second, and then looked away. "She was beautiful," he thought. He blushed thinking about her. "Hi my name is Serena," she said, "what is your name Mr. American?" "Oh, I'm sorry, my name is John," he stuttered when replying. The teller Line was getting shorter. After Serena cashed her paycheck she turned to John, and said "do you want to join me for a drink." John was surprised, but thrilled to hear that she was inviting him for a drink. "Sure I would be glad to have a drink with you," said John. Just wait one minute while I withdraw some money from my account.

So minutes later they were walking outside to a bar called "The Boar's Inn," around the corner from the bank. "What are you drinking Serena, " John asked. "I'll have a Singapore Sling," she said. "OK, bartender a Singapore Sling for the lady, and I will have a Dewar's Scotch whiskey and soda please," John said. "Coming right up," said the bartender. The bar was dimly lit, and animal heads hung on the walls all around the room with pictures of hunters and the animals they killed to fit the motif for hunters.

“So where do you work Serena?” John asked. “I work just around the corner in the banking exchange building,” she replied. John said, “Oh yeah, the really modern all glass government building. I have seen it before.” “What do you do John?” Serena asked. “I was a stock broker, but now I dabble in stocks and bonds, and in hedge funds too.” John replied. They got to know one another, and John was impressed how smart Serena seemed. She reminded him of his old girlfriend Jodi. After a few drinks, two hours passed by very quickly. John asked Serena if she wanted to have dinner with him. She replied, “I would love to John, but I have to prepare for a financial presentation tonight for tomorrow morning. Tell you what, I will take a rain check for Friday night this week, and we can have a fine dinner together without me worrying about my presentation?” “That sounds like a plan,” John said, and they both got up to leave. “Can I get you a cab Serena,” John said. “That would be fine since I live a few miles away.” Said Serena. A city cab pulled up just as they came out of the Boar’s Bar. “Bye Serena,” John Said, as he opened the cab door for her. Seconds later the cab was heading into the distance down the avenue from where John was still standing. Serena waved through the back window of the cab.

John went home and thought about Serena all night long. He was looking forward to having dinner with her that Friday evening. In his pants pocket was a slip of paper with Serena’s cell phone number. He gave a call later that evening

and they chatted for hours until he realized it was 11:00 pm. “I am sorry but I have to go,” Serena said, and John bid her goodbye, and shut off his cell phone.

The week went by fast and before John knew it he was meeting Serena at a French dining establishment called “Le Bromage.” It was a fondue style place where you order a cheese fondue from dozens of types of cheese ,and you get a baguette cut into little pieces to dip in the rich and creamy melted cheese. It was a very romantic place with impeccable tablecloths and dining atmosphere. The night went well, and Serena went back to John’s apartment and stayed for the night. It was their first night together.

Four months later

It was a four months later and John and Serena had been dating steadily over the past few months. Finally, John asked Serena to marry him, and she accepted. It was September, and the weather was getting cold again. John never told Serena about the chinese crystal ball. He kept it hidden in his closet. Serena was a beautiful girl about 5ft. 4” tall with blonde hair, freckles on her face, and a nice figure. She had attended Michigan State University, and graduated with a degree in finance. She was a born and bred Canadian, and her father was a carpenter who emigrated from Spain. Both parents passed away a few years ago, and Serena had

no family in Canada. Their romance was a great journey, and John's life seemed to be coming together.

Out of curiosity about the future with Serena, John decided to put the chinese crystal ball out on the kitchen table that was close to the sliding glass doors that went out into the courtyard of the penthouse. He wanted to see how things were going to work out with Serena, and he thought the chinese crystal ball would reveal something about their future together.

John's penthouse courtyard faced toward the south, and got a full exposure of sun everyday in the summer and winter. The light was important for the chinese crystal ball to project an image. The first week the chinese crystal ball sat on the table John did not see any image. He thought it might have shown an image, and he did not see it. He was beginning to believe that the chinese crystal ball would not work.

Finally, after two weeks had passed, something happened with the crystal. It was early in the morning, and John was having breakfast in his kitchen. The chinese crystal ball was sitting on the table in front of him, and the sun was bright and shining through the glass doors that morning. As he was drinking his coffee sitting at the kitchen table, an image began to form on the wall of the kitchen across from the chinese crystal ball. John almost choked on the coffee when he saw the image appear. There on the wall was a man with a gun. It scared the crap out of

John. He was shaking all over his body. Is that man Chinese or not? He appeared to be the same man that had a pistol that was running after the man with the leather bag. It was Jerry Wong, leader of the Flying Dragons gang in Chinatown. John ran to the bathroom and threw up. He was shaking again. "How could it be," he thought to himself. What should I do? What does this mean?" He thought to himself." "Is Jerry Wong in Toronto? Had he found out I left the country," all these thoughts raced through John's mind. He wiped off his face from sweat, and began to form a plan. He loved Serene, but did not want her to get in trouble. He had to do something fast.

He sat down and devised a plan while drinking some coffee. He had to find a way to prevent Jerry Wong from tracking him down. The question was racking his brain, "what could he do." No immediate answers came to mind. He decided to call Serena. "Hello Serena, how are you honey? How is your day going?" said John. Serena answered, "Fine John, how are you doing. I miss you already." "Thanks sweetie," John said. "Let's have dinner tonight, I have an idea about our honeymoon that we have been talking about," said John. "Great, I am excited," said Serena. "OK, I will pick you up after work tonight. Does Italian food sound good for dinner?" said John. "Sure honey it sounds wonderful, and I can't wait," she said. "Bye," said Serena. John went back to some day trading stocks he was buying and selling to take up the rest of the day.

That night John picked up Serena, and they went to a local Italian restaurant called “La Cucina.” Serena always loved the spaghetti and meatballs they made there. They ordered their dinners, and John said, “How does Hawaii sound for a honeymoon?” “That’s great,” Serena replied. “I have always wanted to go to Hawaii, see the beautiful islands, and enjoy the warm weather,” Serena said. They talked, ate for a few hours, and made exciting plans for getting married in October. The plan was fly to Hawaii for a two-week honeymoon. Secretly, John’s real motivation was to get out of Toronto for a while to avoid Jerry Wong in case he was in Toronto.

That same day John called the Halekulani hotel, and booked their tickets for two weeks on Oahu, and told the hotel that a package would be arriving for him, and they should put it in the Hotel safe, and hold it for him until he arrived the first week in October. John planned on packing up the chinese crystal ball and sending it to the Halekulani hotel so they would not have problems at the airport explaining why he was taking a crystal ball on vacation.

The weeks flew by, and before Serena and John knew it the wedding day had arrived. Serena decided to have a friend from work named Susan to be her witness. John chose to have a neighbor in his building called Keith to be his witness. The wedding was to be a small affair at the Justice Court in Toronto. This civil wedding seemed a good idea since either John or Serena were members of a

local church. John and his neighbor Keith arrived at the Courthouse early, and a few minutes later Serena arrived with Susan. They went up the long set of steps, and inside the building through the security entrance, and straight to the clerk of the court's office. The wedding certificate had already been paid for, and the Judge was scheduled to appear at 11:00 am. They signed in at the Clerk of the Court's office, and sat and waited for the Judge. Susan said, "This is so exciting for me to be here as a witness for you guys, you are a great couple, aye." "Thanks Susan," John said. "Susan let me introduce my neighbor, Keith, Susan this is Keith, Keith this is Susan who works with Serena." John Said. Serena was quiet and nervous. This was to be her first wedding. Finally, the Judge appeared. "Cardomen couple, here? Yes, Ok, just step into my office please." Said Judge Woodriff. "I will need the witnesses to sign on the wedding certificate, and this Canadian marriage document, here and her," the judge said. "Thank you Judge Woodriff," John replied. "Are you OK Serena?" John asked. "I am fine sweetie, just nervous," said Serena. "You look beautiful Serena," John said.

The Judge recited the standard words for civil weddings, and a few minutes later he said, "You can now both kiss." John held Serena close, and they both kissed passionately. "Here are your documents and congratulations Mr. and Mrs. Cardomen.

The wedding was over, and the couple was off with their witnesses to lunch at a small Spanish restaurant. They all had a great time at the restaurant. That afternoon John helped Serena move some of her clothes into his apartment. Professional movers were moving all of her furniture in the following day.

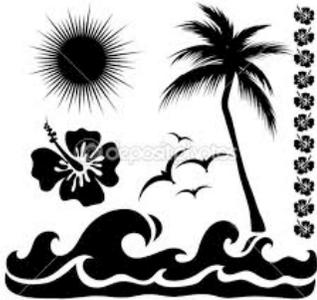
The wedding night was bliss as they made love again, and again until they lay exhausted on the bed. “Oh John I love you so, you make me feel so wonderful,” said Serena. John responded, “and I feel the same with you Serena, I cannot believe I married such a beautiful woman.” Serena was well endowed and John buried his head in her breasts, sucking on her nipples. She purred as he made love to her. They tried every sexual position they could think of. He even had sex with her on the kitchen table. It was then that the huge quartz ball caught Serena’s eye. “What is that beautiful ball of glass John?” Serena asked. John responded by saying, “oh it is an old Chinese collectors item that I bought years ago.” “Oh she said, “It is so clear with a little green coloring.” John pushed the chinese crystal ball to the side so he could spread Serena’s legs in order to penetrate her again with his extremely hard penis. They pumped up and down until he exploded. Life was good again for John.

The following morning Serena and John took a shower together, and then sat down to breakfast after they dried off. John was in seventh heaven over Serena. “Would you like some eggs and bacon John,” Serena asked. “Sounds good,” said

John. John was just about to pick up the chinese crystal ball and hide it away when, Serena said, “leave it here please, John, it looks great shining in the sun.” So, John left the chinese crystal ball on the table as Serena requested. He did not dare ruin the occasion by telling Serena the truth about the chinese crystal ball. Perhaps some time in their life he would have enough courage to tell the story, regardless of how insane it sounded.

John was totally paranoid about taking the chinese crystal ball on the plane to Hawaii. His decision to ship the chinese crystal ball to the Halekulani Hotel in Honolulu, on Oahu would keep Serena in the dark about the crystal ball. He wrapped it up with gel wrap, and taped it tight. He called UPS to come and pick up the package. Two hours later the deliveryman was at the front door. John buzzed him up to the Penthouse in the elevator. He gave the man the package, and made sure he understood it was to be insured for one million dollars.

A week went by and it was time to head to the airport to fly to Hawaii. Serena and John packed up their bags and called a town call to take them to the airport in Toronto that was just outside the city. They went through security with no problem, and when the boarding call came for Air Canada to Hawaii, they got on the line for First Class passengers. Their seats were together in First Class, and they were both excited to get to Hawaii. They had an orange juice before taking off and slept most of the way to Hawaii.



Chapter 4- Hawaii

That afternoon the Air Canada captain came on the PA, and announced that they would be landing on Oahu Island in 20 minutes. The airport was in Honolulu. The islands looked so beautiful from the air. Everything was so green and lush. The plane touched down smoothly, and before they knew it they were deplaning at Honolulu airport. There was a warm breeze, and it was sunny and beautiful that day as they stepped out in front of the airport to hail a taxi to take them to the Halekulani hotel. Excitement was in the air for Serena and John. This was their honeymoon, and they were ready to have a wild time.

When they arrived at the hotel the bellhop took the baggage and directed them to the registration desk. “Aloha, and welcome to the Halekulani Hotel,” said the desk clerk. Just then two Hawaii female dancers dressed in grass skirts came out of the office with beautiful flower leis immediately putting them around the necks of Serena and John. “Here are your keys Mr. Cardomen, and we have a package we have been holding for you,” said the hotel clerk. “Thank you,” said

John. Serena asked, "What package John?" "Oh nothing, just a little present I ordered for us," said John. Serena looked at him with a weird look, and they headed for the elevator to their room. John had the package under his arm. When they got into the room he put the package in the closet. Serena forgot about the package for the time being. They stepped out on the balcony where they had a view of the ocean beaches. "What would you like to do first," John asked Serena. "Well it is going to get dark soon so we can go to the beaches tomorrow, and maybe book a boat tour around the islands?" Serena said. "Sounds like a plan to me," said John. "Let's order dinner in tonight so we can just be alone and relax," said Serena. "I am fine with that," said John. John picked up the room phone and said, "Hello room service we would like to order two Hawaiian pork chop dinners with all the extras, two Miller Lite beers in bottles, and some local bread to room 448 at 6:00 pm, thank you."

John and Serena decided to be naughty and took a bubble bath together. It was so romantic in the tub together. John's penis stood up as straight as a flagpole sticking out of the bubble foam. Serena laughed and grabbed his cock and slowly massaged it to make it even harder. John was in ecstasy. They got out of the tub and John kissed Serena against the bathroom sink. He said she was beautiful and asked her to turn around and hold onto the bathroom sink as he stuck his penis in "doggie style" from the rear. The sensation was more than John could bear. Serena

bumped and pumped against John until he exploded inside her. They kissed again and dried off with towels.

They ate in the room that night and watched the moon rise over the ocean and beaches from their balcony. It was a most romantic night. They had dinner, watched a movie and fell asleep on the bed, tired from a long day of flying.

The next day, Serena was again inquisitive about the package that John picked up at the desk. The weird thing is that writing on the package looked like John's handwriting, and the postage was Canadian via UPS air. "John, dear, aren't you going to show me what is in the package?" said Serena. John began to get nervous, and had to come up with an excuse for the package. "Oh, I just wanted to make sure no one stole my Chinese crystal ball that is hundreds of years old," said John. "You what," Serena said. "You shipped that glass ball all the way to Hawaii, why?" said Serena. "I told you it is worth thousands of dollars by collectors for the clear crystal," said John. "Well then you might as well put it out for display so we can keep an eye on it," said Serena. "OK, ok, let's not have a fight over the stupid thing," John said.

He went over to the closet and unwrapped the chinese crystal ball and put it on the living room table that was bright with sunshine. "Tell you what, while you are setting your hair, I am going down to the pool to swim a few laps, and then I will come back up to get you. We have reservations later this morning for a boat

tour of the Islands remember,” said John. “Alright, I have to shampoo, set my hair and then dry it, so go and have a swim,” said Serena. “Come back in about an hour, OK, John,” Serena said. “Sure,” he said, as he was putting his swimming trunks on in the bedroom.

John left to go down to the pool, and Serena stepped into the shower to shampoo her hair, and set it in curlers afterward. Her blond hair was very straight and needed curlers to give her hair some wave to it. John was gone, and the apartment was very quiet. Serena could not help but notice when she was sitting in the bedroom that John must have left all the lights on in the living room. She went into the living room to turn off the lights, only to notice that the lights were in fact off, and the glare was coming from the chinese crystal ball that was as bright as a halogen light bulb. She had to squint her eyes as she walked toward the chinese crystal ball. Suddenly, there was an image on the wall, and she screamed. She thought what she saw was a mirage on the living room wall. It was a boat, and it was on its side and sinking below the ocean waves. The name of the boat was “the Day Trader,” the same name of the tour boat that they were to take that afternoon. Serena could not believe this was happening. She thought she must have been dreaming. “Did she take her medicine that morning? What was happening? She went back to her bedroom and took some pills to calm her nerves and she collapsed in shock on the bed.” “What could this mean,” she thought to herself? “How could

this ball of glass project an image on the wall? Was it really a computer or projector of the future? What the hell was it?” she thought.

An hour later John was at the door, back from his swim in the pool. “Serena, I am back Honey, where are you?” he shouted. “I am in the bedroom?” she called back. He went into the bedroom to see her makeup had smeared around her eyes giving her a raccoon look from crying. “What is wrong with your makeup?” Somewhat shocked he asked. “John do you have something to tell me about that Chinese ball of glass or quartz or whatever it is?” Serena asked. “No honey, what do you mean?” John answered. “John I just saw an image on the wall projected by the chinese crystal ball. I must be going crazy or something, it was weird, a boat, the same boat we are to take this afternoon, The Day Trader, was sinking in the ocean, ”she said. “What do you mean, what happened Serena? Tell me everything,” said John. “Is that glass ball really a computer John, what is it?” cried Serena. “I did not want to tell you this before Serena, but it is a real chinese crystal ball that has magical powers,” John said. “What are you nuts? Have you lost your mind John? Did you have any drinks at the pool? What are you talking about?” Serena said.

John said, “Maybe I am going to need a drink sweetie.” He went into the other room and got a small bottle of Scotch from the mini-bar. “Serena come in here, and let’s sit down and I will tell you the whole story from the beginning,”

John called out. He downed his scotch, and then told Serena the whole story of how he bought the chinese crystal ball in Greenwich Village in New York City, and how his first Jodi girlfriend was killed. Then he explained the image of the dog biting the man's pant leg that was running away with a leather bag; the Chinese thugs, the bag, the money, and what he did with the money. He told her how the Flying Dragons Chinese gang trashed his apartment, and how he moved to Long Island. He told her how he quit his job after getting rich on stocks from an image on the wall. He finished his story by telling her how he moved to Canada to escape the wrath of the Flying Dragons.

Serena just sat there shocked. Her eyes were wide open like glass orbs. "What are we going to do?" she asked. "Why didn't you tell me these stories before John?" Serena said. "Well we are going to cancel our trip on the boat for one thing. I learned the chinese crystal ball is never wrong," John said. Picking up the phone John called the reservation desk, "Hello Reservation desk, yes, this is Mr. Cardomen in room 448, my wife is not feeling well, and we are going to have to cancel the boat tour with 'the Day Trader today, thank you and please credit my account," John said, and hung up the phone.

"Why didn't you tell me this story about the chinese crystal ball before, John?" Serena asked. "I was afraid you would think I was crazy," John responded.

For a moment they sat together not talking. There was the chinese crystal ball sitting on the table shining away but no image on the wall.

Again, John had defied his destiny. “Was it predetermined that he, and Serena should drown on a boat touring the islands?” He thought to himself. He did not know the answer. What he did know was he was very nervous about the future and what was to be, or not to be. If only he believed in God, he could pray to God to let him live a long life. But John had forgotten about God since Jodi died. He blamed God for letting her death happen. He stopped going to church, and he stopped praying at night. Now was when he needed a miracle to get out of this mess.

John and Serena went downstairs in the hotel to have lunch. It was a most quiet lunch with both of them thinking of what had happened that day. They did not feel like going out so they went back upstairs to their room and slept the rest of the afternoon.

That evening John turned on the television to watch the local news and “shock of all shocks,” there was a special NEWS report on local Hawaiian TV. The touring boat called “the Day Trader,” had hit a hidden reef, and sunk in the ocean. Fifteen passengers had died. The Coast Guard had rescued 100 more passengers. Many of the passengers made it into lifeboats, and were drifting out to sea when they were rescued. A mother and her 4 year old daughter was reported

missing by her husband, who was elsewhere on the ship when it struck the coral reef. John could not believe it. The chinese crystal ball was right again. He had cheated death one more time. Serena was also in shock. “What have we done, maybe we should have informed the ship’s captain not to sail or something?” Serena cried. John said, “it would have made no difference, they never would have believed us. Do you think they would have believed that a chinese crystal ball told us the ship was going to sink? Not a chance,” said John. Serena cried, and John comforted her in his arms.

John went over to cover the chinese crystal ball, and suddenly an image appears on the wall. It is an image of a boy flying a kite. John did not understand what it meant, and he was scared to even look at the image. He called Serena into the living room, and showed her the image. She screamed and said, ‘oh my God what does this mean?’ “Stop it or someone will hear you,” John said. “What does this kite flying image mean?” John exclaimed. “Serena do you have any idea?” John asked her. “No, I do not have any idea except it might mean something about Chinese children, since Chinese love to fly kites,” said Serena. They discussed the image all day, afraid to come out of their apartment.

John decided they had better change their plane ticket, shorten their stay at the hotel, and return the next day to Canada. He headed downstairs to make all the arrangements with the desk clerk. “Are you leaving so early Mr. Cardomen? Were

you unhappy with the service sir, is there anything wrong?” asked the clerk. “No I have some pressing business at home to get back to,” said John. “We are so sorry you are leaving Mr. Cardomen. I will call the airlines for you, and change your return flight to tomorrow, for you, and I will also order a town car to take you and your lovely wife to the airport,” the clerk said. “Do not worry about the hotel bill we will send it to you in Canada,” said the clerk. “That is OK, I am going to talk to the Hotel manager anyway,” said John. John headed toward the Hotel manager’s office.

Upstairs in the hotel room Serena got a few beers out of the refreshment bar for her and John. She could not understand this mysterious chinese crystal ball. It just seemed impossible that this chinese crystal ball had magical properties to tell the future. The towel had slipped off the chinese crystal ball from the ocean breeze coming in the window, and Serena did not notice it. As the sun got stronger in the southern sky the globe again began to light up. “Oh my God, not again,” Serena screamed. Serena stood pressed against the wall in fear looking at the image. An image appeared on the wall, and it showed John and the manager were standing next to the pool, John slipped, and fell in the pool and hit his head on the bottom, blood was everywhere in the pool. Serena realized that John could be killed, yet again. She put on some clothes and rushed downstairs to see where John was, and to tell him about the vision on the wall. She approached the Desk Clerk, and asked

if he has seen Mr. Cardomen. The desk clerk replied, “ I think he is out on the pool deck, Mrs. Cardomen, talking to the Hotel Manager.” “Oh my God at the pool, “Serena exclaimed and she ran toward the pool doors.

When she got to the pool she looked around, and there on the other end of the pool was John, and the Hotel manager talking, and having a drink together. They were standing next to the diving end of the pool. Serena shouted out, “John, John over here.” John looked up to see Serena running toward him waving her hands. He had a weird look on his face wondering why Serena had come down to the pool. As she got closer he could hear her saying, “John, John step away from the pool.” “He responded, step away from what? said John. The manager and I are talking Honey, everything is OK,” John said. He started to walk toward her, excusing himself from the Hotel manager. Just then a little boy ran in front the Hotel manager, and jumped into the pool. The Hotel Manager tried to avoid tripping over the little boy. In so doing he turned, and fell down on the edge of the pool, and smashed his skull on the cement. It all happened in a split second. Blood was pouring out of his head and spreading all over the pool. Several women screamed. “Get help,” they cried, “the Manager has fallen down.” “Help, someone, call 911,” a woman called out. It all happened in so fast and the manager was dead. John was ten feet from the pool walking toward Serena. He was unaware of the accident behind him until he heard some women screaming. Serena saw the

accident occur, and she screamed, “John look out.” John turned around to see the Hotel Manager hit the concrete with his head. He ran over to the manager, but it was too late. He checked for a pulse, but there was no pulse. There was a huge gash in the side of the manager’s head, and he was covered in blood, and continued to bleed all over the pool and deck. John got a towel off one of the pool chairs and held it to the manager’s head. The bleeding continued turning the entire towel red.

Ten horrible minutes later the medics arrived, and they rushed into the pool area to retrieve the dead pool manager. “Hello this is medic 109, calling in with a fatal pool accident at the Halekulani hotel. We have secured the victim and are returning to the Police morgue, over and out, ” the medic barked over his walkie talkie. John and Serena were sitting down nearby in total shock. John said, “What happened Serena, why did you come down to the pool?” Serena whispered in John’s ear,” John I saw another vision of the chinese crystal ball showing you falling, and hitting your head and dying.” “Really” he said “Yes, I was so afraid I ran down here to prevent you from falling onto the pool edge,” said Serena. John replied, “You saved my life sweetie. What are we going to do, how can we avoid the future?” “ I feel sick to my stomach” John moaned. They slowly walked from the scene of horror back up to their room. John had a couple of scotch on the rocks, and even Serena had two beers to settle her nerves. “Serena cover that damned chinese crystal ball. Don’t let any light get inside,” said John.

Eventually they both fell asleep, and woke up 9:00 pm that night. “I still don’t understand the child flying a kite, and what that means,” said John. “What I do know is we need to get out of here fast tomorrow,” John said. “You are right honey,” Serena said. They both took a shower and had a small snack from the mini-bar, and went back to bed. John could not sleep. He woke up at 1:00 am, and then 2:00 am, and again at 3:00 am. He finally decided to have a glass of milk, and headed into the kitchen. He filled a glass of milk and went and sat in the living room and turned on the television. The chinese crystal ball was sitting right next to him with a cloth Serena had put on top of it. John picked up the chinese crystal ball and took off the towel to look at the quartz ball and wonder how the hell this thing could have any mysterious powers.

What John did not know is it was a full moon outside in the Hawaiian sky. He put the chinese crystal ball down to finish his glass of milk and watch the shows on late night television. Meanwhile, the moonbeams began to show through the glass balcony doors. Slowly the chinese crystal ball began to light up. John did not notice it until the television was hard to see from a strong beam of light coming from the chinese crystal ball. He turned to look at the chinese crystal ball, and sure enough there was an image on the wall. It scared the hell out of him. What was the image? It was a Chinese man with a gun chasing someone. The Chinese man had an image of a dragon on the back of his coat. John could not believe it. This was

similar to the image he had seen before with the two men chasing the man with the leather bag. Was this clue that the Flying Dragons were in Oahu? Were they tracking him down? It was easy for any person to go from hotel to hotel, and show a picture of him to every clerk with a twenty-dollar bill and get quick results. He began to panic. He started packing his bags, and lay on the coach until sunrise when he woke Serena up, but did not tell her about the image in the night.

“Come on honey, we need to get to the airport early because we are going to lose three hours in flight time because of the time zones going back to Toronto,” John said. “OK, John I am going to rush as fast as I can. Help me pack my bags please,” said Serena. “I have them already packed,” John replied. Forty minutes later they were checking out. The clerk said “did you see the accident yesterday when our hotel manager accidentally slipped and died?” “yes” said John, “I gave a statement to the medics when they arrived,” John said. “Come on honey let’s get into the town car it is waiting outside.”

The trip to the airport was very quiet. The chinese crystal ball was wrapped up in some clothes. At the security gate they scanned the suitcase and the security guard asked John to open the suitcase up. “Do you have anything to declare Mr. Cardomen, “ the security guard asked. “What is this glass ball? He asked. “That is just a table decoration I bought downtown from a Chinese vendor.” “What is it worth Mr. Cardomen?” He asked. “Just a few hundred dollars because it is quartz.”

John replied. "OK you are clear Mr. Cardomen," said the security guard.

Meanwhile, Serena had cleared her security check and was sitting down waiting for John. They proceeded to gate 21 for Canadian Airlines for their return flight to Toronto. Both of them were very nervous. The incidents that had occurred with the chinese crystal ball telling the future were most disturbing. John kept looking around for a Chinese person with a dragon logo on his jacket. So much of his life was being threatened because of his ability to see a little into the future. John was beginning to believe that he had made deal with the devil. He had hoped that the chinese crystal ball would show him how to get rich fast, but instead most of the future involved death instead of life or wealth. "Did the future always have to be so gloomy?" John thought to himself.



Chapter 5- Return to Toronto

The flight back to Toronto was much longer with a time zone difference. John and Serena did not get into the Toronto airport until 10:00 pm EST. John and Serena dragged their bags through security, and when they cleared the terminal, they hailed a town car and went back to the Penthouse. By 11:30 pm Serena and John got home exhausted from a whole day of flying. They both took quick showers, and dropped into the bed, and were sound asleep before midnight.

The next day John was thinking of a plan to avoid the Flying Dragons even though he had not actually seen any members of the Flying Dragon gang in Toronto. Serena and John talked about the chinese crystal ball for hours. She did not have to report back to work for another week. The image of the boy flying a kite, and the man with the Flying Dragon logo on his back running after someone with a gun was still fresh in his mind. John went to the banks that day to check on his balances, and to take more cash out of his personal bank vault box.

“What would be the solution,” he thought to himself. “Must he run all his life from these Chinese thugs?” “What had he gotten Serena into by marrying him?” He thought. He had a lot on his mind, and no solutions. He bought a “USA Today” newspaper at the local paper stand that day and took it back to his penthouse. When He got back to the penthouse he sat down to read what was happening in the States.

An article about Los Angeles stood out, regarding foreclosures, and houses worth five million were being sold for under \$900,000 with a significant deposit down. “It was a buyers market,” was the title on the Newspaper. John checked this information on his computer to be sure the article was right. It was true, the banks had to dump these houses or have them taken down because they were becoming drug dens and community eyesores. Many California towns and cities were passing new laws to remove these eyesores from the community at the expense of the bank or landlords. The cities had the right to condemn the property for tax delinquencies and come in and bulldoze the houses to the ground to avoid any further liability. Perhaps here was a chance to sell his Canadian penthouse and move to Los Angeles and make a killing on the housing market buying a new home for him and Serena. The only problem was Serena’s job, and getting her to want to leave it, for no job in Los Angeles. But after all he was a millionaire, Serena did not have to

work at all or she could help him buy foreclosed properties, and try to resell them on the market.

John discussed some of the options he was thinking of with Serena. At first she did not want to leave Canada and quit her job, but she said she would think about it. As fate would have it Serena's finance company was having a bad year on the market, and they were cutting back on employees. Serena and fifty other employees were given pink slips and terminated with a small stipend for the short notice. Serena was in shock a week later when she got home after finding out about her job was terminated. Los Angeles was beginning to look a lot better now.

Christmas came and went, and New Years day also. It was a real cold winter in Canada. Lots of snowstorms and lots of frigid weather are common in Canada. John had been researching California's real estate market was good when looking for a estate they could buy cheap. He found just what they were looking for in Capistrano, California. A five million dollar villa with a pool, and a view of the ocean had been in foreclosure for two years. John called the bank and made an offer they could not refuse. He offered to pay \$500,000 down on the house if they would short sell it for \$900,000. It was scheduled by city of Capistrano to be demolished for not paying taxes, and for becoming an eyesore in the community. The bank accepted the offer after considering it for a few days. John wired the money from one of his offshore accounts to the bank directly.

Once the paperwork was done they were scheduled to move in April 1st. John had to inform his landlord he would not be renewing his penthouse lease. He arranged for some professional movers to pack up all the furniture and household belongings and truck it from Toronto, Canada to Los Angeles, California within a week's time. The furniture would be at the new home in Capistrano by April 1st or the moving company would have to pay a penalty.

It was nearing the end of March, and the moving truck arrived after the packers spent a whole day packing up everything John and Serena owned except the chinese crystal ball. He was taking that on the plane to Los Angeles in his carry-on bag. So they moved into a hotel for the last week of March, and on March 30th they left Canada for Los Angeles from the Toronto airport. Since there had been no sightings of any Chinese gangsters had occurred over the past year, and John was beginning to feel safe. Serena's passport was still good to travel to California so that problem was solved. They were ready to move.

April 1st when according to plan, the moving process began. The movers had arrived one day early, and were waiting at a nearby motel to move in on April 1st. They came at 7:00 am and left at 8:00 pm that night. Everything was unpacked, and accounted for just in case of breakage. John paid the driver with a certified check. In addition he tipped the driver, and each assistant with \$400 each.



Chapter 6- San Juan Capistrano

The Cardomen's new life in California was about to begin. Still "the child flying the kite image," haunted John, and the image of the "Chinese Flying Dragon Gangster running after someone with a gun in his hand," was always in the back of John's mind. It was an obsession he could not get over.

The chinese crystal ball was packed safely away in a floor vault, and they had almost forgotten about it after living in the new house for months. John passed his real estate license test and began looking for foreclosure bargains on the market. The banks were all in financial trouble carrying these houses for years with no hope of unloading them at any price. Finally, some local banks under community pressure decided to unload full housing developments that had gone bust. They would pay off the taxes and have the towns bulldozed the homes to the ground to remove the eyesores, and close out the tax liability. John got wind of this settlement and went to several banks and offered to pay the town taxes, and remove the homes to a new location in another community, where the housing rules were a lot looser.

John made the deal with the banks, and the towns. He had 20 homes moved to El Centro in the middle of the California desert. Each house was put on a special flat truck for transporting houses, and shipped off to El Centro. The route being used had to avoid overhead telephone wires and electrical wires so the route chosen was over the mountains straight into the dessert. A month after signing the deal all 20 homes were on their way to El Centro. John was planning on buying cheap desert land, and selling the homes for a profit over what he paid for them with bank costs, taxes, demolition and transportation fees considered. He still made a killing, and the homes were practically brand new. He purchased 40 acres in El Centro off of Highway 8 in the middle of nowhere, and put one house on each plot with two acres per house. The next step was to install solar energy and the communities own water tank supply. A community back-up generator was installed in case of storms, and a nice little pond with palm trees was landscaped. No sooner had the homes been finished than buyers were coming to the office. The homes were available for only a \$200,000 mortgage for 30 years at a fixed rate of interest at 5.5%. In less than a year the entire community was sold. John was “in the gravy once again.”

Meanwhile, Serena went to work for John and helped to look for good investments to buy and sell for a profit. Everything was going smoothly. John had

put his fears of the Flying Dragons behind him and him and Serena were getting along great and even talking of having a child.

ONE YEAR LATER

They had been in Capistrano for over a year and surprise, Serena was pregnant, and expecting in six months. They did not want to know the sex of the child, and they wanted it to be a surprise. John dared not look at the Chinese crystal ball because of his fears of the future. He wanted to avoid any glimpse of the future, and he did not want to consult the chinese crystal ball to do so one way or another. It was basically a stalemate. So the ninth month of pregnancy finally came around. Serena went to the hospital after her water broke, and after 16 hours of labor, a little girl was born. They named her SamanthaCardomen. They would call her "Sam." After two days in the hospital, Serena brought Samantha home to their villa in Capistrano. They had prepared a child's room in advance with both blue and pink colors just in case. Serena had even hand painted flowers and trees on the walls around the room.

FOUR YEARS LATER

Four years later, Samantha was age four, and having a birthday party. Many neighbors came, and brought presents. Dolls, games, toys and clothing were part of

the many gifts. John brought in the birthday cake, and Samantha made a wish and blew out the candles. It was a wonderful day and the party was held outside in the back yard under a 200-year-old tree that gave a lot of shade.

As John stood in the kitchen that day preparing with Serena the party goodies, he looked up at the cloud filled skies and thought to himself, “rain is on the way.” Suddenly, out of nowhere a beautiful kite went soaring across the sky. John was shocked. He stood and watched the kite fighting the winds, darting back and forth. He went outside to see who was flying the kite and surprise it was “Sam” flying the kite with the help of the Nanny, Maria. Samantha had gotten a kite for her birthday and all the kids were watching Sam fly the kite.

As John walked up behind Sam and Maria something suddenly went off in his mind. The child flying the kite, Sam was the child flying the kite. The chinese crystal ball was right again. How strange was that? John was glad it was something good for a change, and not something involving life and death.

Later on John told Serena that he had seen Sam and Maria flying a kite. It was just like the scene he saw on the wall projecting from the Chinese crystal ball. Serena though it was strange also, but was glad it was not a bad omen. So the kite-flying incident came and went, and John no longer feared the image of the child flying a kite.

While watching television that night, ABC news from New York said, “notorious gangster Jerry Wong of the Flying Dragons was getting out of jail after serving many years for drug dealing and money laundering.” John thought, “wow, Jerry Wong is out of jail, what does that mean for me?” He was tempted for a second to take out the chinese crystal ball, and place it in moonlight or sunlight to see if he could see something in the future about Jerry Wong. He resisted the urge to look at the chinese crystal ball because he was afraid of what he might actually see. He preferred to believe that people’s lives are lived out of chance and error, rather than predetermination. Predetermination, if it was bad was always something to avoid. John had learned that the hard way from his experiences with the chinese crystal ball. Soon after the news story, John forgot about it the next day. Days rolled into months, and months rolled into years.

TEN YEARS LATER

Sam was ten years old now, and John was a very successful businessman as well as Serena who worked with John on all their financial projects. The real estate market had gone flat for a while. New construction has slowed to an all time low and the banks had gone belly up with subprime mortgages. It was a new era in real estate and not a good one.

One day while downtown Capistrano a Gang of Motorcycle riders pulled into town with logos on their backs. The logos were Hells Angels and Flying Dragons on other riders' jackets. They were touring up and down the entire California coast s part of an anniversary of the Hells Angels gang being formed many years ago. John was in town at the Home depot when the motorcycle gang stopped at the local International House of Pancakes. When he recognized the red badge of the Flying Dragons it sent a chill through his spine. After all these years they had not given up searching for him. What were the East Coast Flying Dragons doing on the West coast where the Hells Angels ruled? John thought to himself. It was a question that did not get answered until that evening on the local news channel. "Today 100 motorcycle riders rode into Capistrano to visit the local monastery. They represent the Hells Angels chapter, and a visiting Flying Dragons gang from Chinatown, in New York City. The Hells Angels were hosting a group of Flying Dragons that are taking the summer off to tour the United States. The president of the Flying Dragons, Jerry Wong just got out of prison, and was personally leading the cross-country tour on motorcycles." The newscaster said. John turned off the television. "Did they know he was living here or were they looking for him or had they forgotten about him?" So many questions were on John's mind.

All that night John dreamed of Jerry Wong, and the Flying Dragons Gang. Over and over the scenario played out. John woke up several times in a cold sweat. Come the following morning John was exhausted. He and Serena spoke about the Chinese gang coming to Capistrano, and whether it was a conscience or whether they were still looking for him. John told Serena they needed to come up with a plan. The problem was he could not decide on a plan at that moment. Meanwhile the Hell's Angels motorcycle gang and the Flying Dragons were still staying at Capistrano.

“Serena, I am going to take a trip to Los Angeles today to move some of our bank accounts around and to check on our bank security box.” John said. Do you want me to go with you John?” Serena asked. “Daddy can I come too,” asked little Sam. “No I need to do this by myself and it will be boring for you guys with just paperwork and meetings.” John responded. “I’ll take the Mercedes and I will be back before dinner tonight,” John said.

At a Taco shop in Capistrano, Jerry Wong was sitting with his fellow gang members and some of the Hells Angels gang members were having some tacos and burritos. “Man I never get used to Mexican food. All I want is rice with each meal and here they stuff the rice in the burrito to make it fat. Sneaky,” said Jerry. “Hey man pass the hot sauce over here,” asked Lee Tan the Flying Dragons gang Captain. Jerry Wong had an old folded picture in his vest that he took out. It was a

photocopy from a security camera on Canal Street the day John picked up the stolen leather bag with John's faded face shown walking down the street with the bag in his hand. "Man I have been chasing this mother-fucker for a long time and he seems to have disappeared into the air." Said Jerry to his assistant Lee Tan. "I cannot figure out where this bastard went," he said. Jerry got up from the table and went over to the clerk in the taco shop and asked him, "Hey man have you ever seen a white dude like this picture?" "No senior I do every see this hombre." The taco clerk responded. "Oh well it was worth trying. For all I know he could be in Europe or South American for that matter. I was just hoping we would find him someday so I could personally shoot him in the face after I cut off all his fingers," Jerry said. The gang members got on their motorcycles and took off for a cruise along the shore for that day. They were planning on moving down to San Diego in a few days. They had no idea that right here in Capistrano the man they were looking for actually lived.

John was on route 5, heading for Los Angeles that day. The traffic at 9:30am was crawling. John planned how to escape his past with the Flying Dragons. Suddenly a plan occurred to him. If he could create a decoy posing as him and have the decoy enter Mexico he might be able to throw the Flying Dragons off his trail. It sounded like a plan but how would he get someone to pose as him? It would take some money to pay someone off but how would he do that? " He

thought to himself. The traffic crawled on forever until he got to Rt. 110 to take into Los Angeles. He arrived at Bank of American in downtown Los Angeles around 11:00 am that morning. He went to his security box in the bank and took out a lot of money to use to further his plan to fool the Flying Dragons gang.

It took most of day going from bank to bank to check on his balances and personal security boxes to make sure everything was in order. He wanted to stop in Chinatown to pick up some roast pork but was afraid to go near anything Chinese for fear he might be identified. John did not know that Jerry Wong had a security camera picture of him on Canal Street that fateful day several years ago.

It was time to head home to avoid the afternoon rush hour, so John got back on rt. 110, and headed south toward route 5, then further south to Capistrano. All the way home John could think of nothing but his plan, and how to execute it. Maybe he should consult the chinese crystal ball? No, he thought, he was afraid of what the chinese crystal ball might reveal.

Back at home in Capistrano, Serena and Maria were playing in the back yard with Sam. They were talking about the fun Sam was having with so many little Barbie dolls she had collected. "It is wonderful to be young," Maria said. "True," said Serena. "You look sad today" said Maria. "I don't want to talk about it," said Serena. "OK," said Maria. They talked for about an hour when Serena said to Maria, "If I tell you a secret can you keep the secret?" "Yes, Miss Serena you

know you can trust me.” Serena told Maria all about the chinese crystal ball, and how it could project things that were to happen in the future. Maria could not believe the stories. “Are you sure you did not dream this?” asked Maria. “I can show you,” Serena said. “You must promise never to mention this to my husband or anyone else. This thing is evil,” Serena said. “I promise Miss Serena, I will tell no one,” Maria said. Serena went into the house lifted up the rug in the bedroom and opened the floor safe where the chinese crystal ball was kept wrapped in a towel. She showed it to Maria. ‘You see, it is real, a chinese crystal ball with magical powers. Put it in the sunlight or in the moon light, and it will show you an image projected on a wall of something in your future,’ Said Serena. “Really,” said Maria. “I cannot believe it, but if you say so it must be true,” Said Maria.

Serena did not put the chinese crystal ball back into the floor safe; instead she wrapped it in a towel and put it on the bedroom dresser. “I have to hurry and make some dinner for John before he gets home,” Serena said, and she ran into the kitchen with Maria. “Maria you keep an eye on Sam, and I will prepare dinner,” Serena said. Serena began to cut vegetables for dinner, and Maria went out into the yard to supervise. They both forgot about the chinese crystal ball afterward.

John returned home later that afternoon a little before suppertime. Serena did not mention anything about the chinese crystal ball. When John went into the bedroom to change into some more comfortable clothes, Serena came and realized

that she did not put the chinese crystal ball back in the floor vault. Not wanting John to see her mistake she placed the chinese crystal ball, wrapped in a towel, in the bottom of the closet where John would not see it. Just then Maria came in and said, "Sam wants to come in and watch some television, is that OK?" Maria said. "That's fine," Serena said. She did not realize that Maria noticed her putting the chinese crystal ball in the bottom of the closet.

After dinner John asked Serena if she and Sam wanted to go out and get some ice cream cones at the local Seven Eleven store. "That would be a great idea" Serena said, so they all got in the car and left. "Maria do you want to come too," said Serena. "No Miss Serena I am tired, I will just go to my room and rest," said Maria. "OK see you later," said John and off they went in the family car.

They weren't a mile down the road when Maria could not resist the urge to get rich by looking at the chinese crystal ball. She did not know how it worked other than it needed sunlight or moonlight. It was a $\frac{3}{4}$ moon out that night and they would be returning within the hour so Maria was not sure what to do. There was a strong moon light beaming through the windows. She took out the chinese crystal ball. Wow, it was very heavy and beautiful with a clean greenish look. She was so nervous, but greedy thinking that it might bring her riches clouded her mind. She put the chinese crystal ball on the windowsill in the moonlight, and waited to see what would happen. Nothing happened. She sat and watched it for 30 minutes and

still nothing happened. Maria was beginning to get nervous because the family would be coming back soon with the ice cream cones. Seven Eleven was only five miles away from their home. Maria went to the bathroom for a few minutes, and decided while sitting on the toilet that she had better put the chinese crystal ball back. It was probably a fake anyway. She went back into the bedroom where she was amazed to see the moonlight passing through the chinese crystal ball forming an image on the wall. It was an image of two cars in a head-on crash. A small boy was in the back seat and a man in the front seat of one car. In the other car was a woman. The man looked familiar but Maria could not tell who he was until she saw the hat he was wearing saying "LAKERS." "Oh my God, it was her husband and her son in the car," She exclaimed.

She screamed, panicking, and ran to her old car, and took the chinese crystal ball with her wrapped under a towel. In less than a minute she was off racing toward her apartment ten miles away.

A few minutes later the Cardomen family came home. John assumed Maria went to sleep in he bedroom so they he left her alone. John, Serena and Sam, ate their ice cream cones, and watched television for a few hours and then went to their bedrooms. Only the sound of the waves crashing on the beach could be heard that night. "Time to go to bed Sam," said John. " "Yes, daddy, tuck me I please,"

said Samantha. John tucked Sam in bed and Serena went to the master bedroom to go to bed.

In a few minutes they were in bed. “Good night John,” whispered Serena. “Good night hun,” whispered John back. The moon rose high in the sky and before long everyone was asleep unaware that the chinese crystal ball was stolen.



Chapter 7- Baja, Mexico

Maria arrived at her apartment ten miles away to find no one at home. In a panic she called her husband on his cell phone. He and her son had gone out to pick up some dinner at a fried chicken outlet. “Hello Juan, this is Maria, come home pronto, I have something to tell you. No, drive slowly and be careful,” Maria said. Juan answered on his cell phone, “OK Maria, Pedro and I are getting fried chicken for dinner. We will be home in a few minutes.” Then he hung up his cell phone.

Maria waited nervously for her husband to return because she feared the chinese crystal ball might be right. Her husband was in danger. Thirty minutes went by and Juan and Pedro were still not home. She called Juan again on his cell phone and there was no answer. “Oh, God, sweet Jesus, do not let my Juan and Pedro get hurt in our car,” Maria prayed. Nervously she called Juan again, and stills no answer. The phone kept ringing. Hours went by and still no Juan. Suddenly, the doorbell rung and Maria opened the door. Standing there were two uniformed officers. “Oh no, what happened?” Maria cried. “Mrs. Serrano? My

name is Patrolman Ted Smith, and this is Sergeant Bill Wize. We wish to inform you that your husband Juan, and son Pedro, were killed in a head-on car accident earlier this evening. The other driver was drunk, and hit the road divider, jumped it, and hit your husband and son head-on. We are deeply sorry to have to bring you this news. Their bodies will lie in rest at the coroner's office in downtown Capistrano. You can come tomorrow morning to identify the bodies," said one of the officers. Maria fainted to the ground. Officer Smith and Wize picked Maria up and carried her into her house and put her on the couch. Officer Smith got a wet towel and wiped Maria's face until she began to come around. She opened her eyes to see the officers Smith and Wize standing over her. She was in shock. The officers called a paramedic to the house to look after Maria. When the paramedic arrived the officers left the house and returned to duty.

"It was all a big mistake, a dream perhaps," Maria thought, while the paramedic was holding something strong smelling under her nose. She was awake now, but still in shock. She could not go to the Police station that night. She was in no condition to do that. She would call her aunt to give her a ride tomorrow. From all the excitement going on, she forgot to call the Cardomen family and tell them of her tragedy. The chinese crystal ball was still wrapped in a towel lying on the bed in the bedroom. When Maria went into the bedroom to lie down, she put the chinese crystal ball in her shower until she could think clearly of what she was

going to do with the chinese crystal ball, and how she could return it without the Cardomen family. She did not want them to know she had taken the chinese crystal ball. She fell asleep on the bed from the medication the paramedic had given her.

The sun was up, and it was morning already the next day. Maria called Polina her aunt, and told her the tragic story She asked if Polina would give her a ride down to the Police station. Aunt Polina told Maria she would be glad to help. Polina was at the house in less than an hour, and they drove to the Police precinct in Capistrano. Maria cried the whole trip. When they arrived at the Police station Maria was asked to fill out some forms. A Sergeant behind the desk offered to take Polina and Maria down to the morgue so Maria could positively identify her husband and son. The elevator was cold with all steel walls. The doors opened in the basement, and the Sergeant led Maria and Polina to the morgue. Two bodies lie on the tables with white sheets draped over them. The medical examiner spoke through a speaker system, since no one was allowed in the examination room. The medical examiner rolled the gurneys, with the bodies on them, closer to the windows, and pulled back the sheets from their faces. Maria fainted when she realized her son and husband were lying there looking ashen grey and very dead. Juan had cuts all over his face, and little 8-year-old Pedro had a pushed in nose and a huge slash across his forehead. The sergeant helped Maria up off the floor with

her Aunt Polina assisting too. She sat in a nearby chair stunned and unable to talk. “Will you be able to sign these forms Mrs. Gonzales? asked the Sargent. Polina said, “Yes I will help her.” “Maria this is Polina, sign here please, and we can leave.” said Polina. Maria signed, and they left the morgue as fast as they could walk.

Back at the Cardomen’s home that morning, Serena was wondering where Maria was since she was not answering her door. Serena opened Maria’s bedroom door to find the bed made, and no one sleeping in it. She went over to the kitchen window that faced the parking area in the side yard, and Maria’s car was gone. Serena was very concerned. This was not like Maria to take off, and not tell her. She called Maria on her cell phone. The phone rang, and rang, but no answer. Serena hung up and wondered where Maria might be. “Sam, Maria is not here right now, so I will take you to school, OK,” said Serena. “OK mommy,” said Sam. They got in the car and headed off to school. John had already left for work. He had some houses he had to inspect up in the hills, so he would be gone for most of the day. “Hello John, this is Serena, Maria took her car, and did not take Sam to school, and she is not answering her cell phone. Did she speak with you or anything?” asked Maria. “No,” said John, “she never spoke to me.” How is Sam getting to school,” John asked. “I am driving her,” said Serena. “Alright let me

know when you hear from Maria,” said John. “OK honey, talk to you later,” said Serena.

The rest of the day was relatively uneventful for Serena. She tried several times to call Maria. It was most unusual that Maria didn't call to explain why she left without explaining where she was going. John returned home that evening and everything seemed normal.

A few days went by and finally Maria called the Cardomen's home and explained that her husband, and son were killed in an auto accident. Serena and John expressed their sadness and offered to do what every necessary to help Maria out. Maria said she was thankful but she needed to take some time off to grieve and to take the bodies back to Ensenada, Baja, Mexico, her hometown to bury her husband and son. “Will you be coming back soon Maria?” Serena asked. “I am not sure senorita, maybe, soon, I do not know, ”Maria responded.

Later that day Maria and Polina, and the bodies of Maria's husband and son in caskets in the back of a pickup truck, headed for the US/Mexican border at Tijuana. The US Border agent stopped them for a few minutes and asked what was in the caskets? “My dead husband and dead son are in the caskets. I have the paperwork allowing me to take them to our home town in Ensenada,” said Maria. She showed the papers to the border agent. “OK everything looks to be in order,

proceed,” said the border agent. Maria and Polina drove on through Tijuana and onto the toll road for the 60-mile trip to Ensenada. It was a quiet trip with either Maria or Polina saying much the whole trip south.

That afternoon they arrived in the Ensenada town square. Maria said, “We need to contact Father Emmanuel at the Church of the Holy Cross. He will help us with the burial of Juan and Pedro.” Polina got out of the truck and walked across the plaza to the Roman Catholic Church of the Holy Cross. She went inside while Maria watches the truck and coffins. About fifteen minutes Polina came back outside with Father Emmanuel next to her. “Senorita Maria, you can leave the coffins in the church until I can arrange for a burial tomorrow,” said Father Emmanuel. “Gracias, Father,” said Maria. We will be staying at my Uncle Jesus’s house until the burial. “What time padre? Que horo es?” Maria said in a low voice. “Si, manana, quattro, seniorita, we will make it 8:00 am,” said Father Emmanuel. Two men near by helped Father Emmanuel lift the coffins out of the pick-up truck and carry them into the church. After they were done, Maria and Polina drove on to her Uncle Jesus’ house a mile down the road.

“Welcome Maria and Polina, ‘me casa su casa,’ “said Uncle Jesus. I will speak to my wife Anna, and we will make a great meal tonight after the heat of the day is over. I am so sorry for your loss Maria, Juan was a good man and Pedro was one of my favorites,” said Uncle Jesus.

They all went inside the casa and sat down, and had some water with lemon in it. It was a hot day, and Uncle Jesus had no air conditioning. They sat and talked for a while, and then they all went to their rooms for a siesta.

Several hours later, when the sun had set, and the hot air began to cool off and they all sat down to have dinner of roast pork, wild mushrooms, pork tacos, and red wine. Uncle Jesus talked of the good times, and how Maria met Juan in their town, and how they eventually left for work in the United States. They were good times to remember. Maria cried a little over the stories. Polina tried to help Maria feel better by hugging her. After many glasses of wine Maria, and Polina headed toward their bedroom that they had to share together. Two small cots were in a small room with Mexican blankets and straw pillows. The cool night would be welcome for sleeping.

The next morning they arose early to prepare for the funeral. Maria and Polina had brought black dresses for the solemn occasion. Uncle Jesus made some Mexican coffee in a pot, and some fresh fruits were put out on the table. At 7:45 am they got into the truck and headed for the Church. Jesus drove and Maria, Polina and Anna rode in the open back of the pickup truck to the church. The service was short, and everyone at the service went outside to drive or walk to the church cemetery. Maria, and Polina wept loudly during the funeral at the grave. Finally, after the traditional prayers the coffins were lowered into the ground.

Maria and her extended family all left, and Uncle Jesus drove them back to his casa. The chinese crystal ball was wrapped up inside Maria's luggage. She had forgotten all about it during her grieving.

At dinner that night Polina and Maria were outside the casa drinking sangria. "What are you going to do now Maria?" asked Polina. "I do not know, but for now it is better if I stay in Mexico," said Maria. "Why," asked Polina? "You have a job back in America, and a small place you rent," said Polina. "Polina I want you to go back and pack up my stuff and store it at your place. Tell my landlord that I left for Mexico and will not be back. Do not tell him I am in Ensenada." Maria said. "OK, I will do as you request," said Polina. "What about your employers the Cardomen family? What should I tell them?" asked Polina. "Tell them nothing, stay away from them completely. I do not want to go back there." Maria said. Polina was surprised but she did not ask why.

Maria began to think of the chinese crystal ball, and what she was going to do with it. Should she give it to Father Emmanuel or should she try and sell it? Did the chinese crystal ball cause the death of her beloved husband Juan and son Pedro? Maria thought to herself. "What should I do with this evil magic?" She thought. "I need to sleep on it and make a plan. "Soon Senior John will realize the chinese crystal ball is gone and he will hunt me down until he finds the chinese crystal ball," Maria thought. I must run away. Maybe I should look at the chinese

crystal ball once more time, no, never mind it is evil death,” Maria thought to herself. “Perhaps the wine will wash away my pain?” Maria thought. It was quiet for a while and the only noise in the night was a coyote howling in the hills. The two women retired to their bedroom after drinking many sangrias and feeling no pain.

“Tomorrow Polina you will go back to America, and gather up and store my things until I come and get them one day, “ said Maria. “Si Maria, I will protect your things and return to America.” said Polina. “You will be safe here,” Polina said.

The next morning after some tortillas and Mexican coffee, Polina got in the pickup truck and drove back to San Juan Capistrano. Uncle Jesus and Maria waved to her as she disappeared down the dusty dirt road. When she was gone they turned and went inside the casa.

Uncle Jesus said to Maria, “Maria you are welcome to stay here as long as you want, you are familia.” “Thank you, Uncle Jesus,” Maria said. After a few weeks Maria was getting restless, and worried that Senior John might track her down any day now. “Uncle Jesus, I am going to visit my cousins in San Miguel de Allende in Mexico, ”said Maria. “How will you get there Maria, it is hundreds of miles from here?” asked Uncle Jesus. “I will take the bus across Baja and then a boat across the Sea of Cortez to Mexico, and then a bus to San Miguel de Allende.

I remember when I was a child my family took this route to get to San Diego, America,” said Maria. “It is a long trip, bring plenty of water, cheese and dried meat,” said Uncle Jesus. “I will have Anna pack you some food for your long journey, may God go with you Maria,” Uncle Jesus said.

So that early the next day Maria walked downtown Ensenada and took the first and only bus out of town to the Aztec coast of Baja. She took with her the chinese crystal ball, and all her life’s savings in American money. She could exchange it as she went along for Mexican pesos. The bus drove slowly up into the mountains and down the other side toward the seaports on the Sea of Cortez. It bumped and swung from side to side traveling at a slow speed because of the condition of the road with potholes and rocks everywhere. It took a whole day to get to San Felipe. Maria was exhausted from the heat of the day and the long bus ride. She found a cheap B&B in town that served food and lodging for a few pesos a night. The food was extra, but that too was cheap. Maria had a few shrimp burritos, some water and went to her room, collapsing from exhaustion and fear. She feared the Senior John would find her, so she knew she had to get as far away from San Juan Capistrano as possible. He would track her down around the world to retrieve his evil chinese crystal ball and she knew that.

The next morning with the roosters crowing to wake her up she had some dried meat Uncle Jesus gave her, and bought a cup of coffee from a street vendor.

“Senor when does the boat leave for Mexico?” asked Maria. The vendor spoke very good English and answered, “ in about an hour seniorita, down by the docks. The boat called “The Flying Fish,” will take passengers to Mexico,” said the kind vendor. “Adios, senior and gracias,” Maria said as she walked down the hill toward the fishing docks. She found the captain of the “The Flying Fish,” and bargained with him to take her to the Mexico shores to town of Guaymas. If the weather remained calm it would be just a few hours before the ship would get to Guaymas port on the Coast of Mexico. From there Maria could take several busses across Mexico to her hometown of San Miguel de Allende.

After two weeks of traveling across Mexico, Maria arrived at San Miguel de Allende that was 180 miles northwest of Mexico City. The summers in San Miguel de Allende were hotter than hell, and the winters are colder than hell. A lot of American retiree lived in the town and there are dozens of churches dating back hundreds of years. They have many open market places, bull fighting and many religious festival days that the whole city celebrated. This is where Maria grew up and many of her cousins still live here. How surprised they will be to see Maria grown up. They will never recognize her since she was just a child when her parents took her, and her brothers and left for America.

The bus dropped Maria off late in the afternoon, and she had to walk a few miles to number 330 Blanco Street near the San Rafael hospital. “My how things

had changed since Maria was a child living on Blanco Street?” Maria thought to herself. As she came to the orange house on 330 Blanco Street the front yard was full of flowers and cactus and looked very beautiful. She knocked on the large wooden door. “Ole’ como esta’,” Maria called out. “Que?” came from behind the door. The door opened and there stood a little old lady with white hair. “Ole’ Como esta?” said the old lady. “Nina it is I, Maria Serrano, Maria Sanchez when I was a little girl living here with my father Pedro and my mother Maria-anna. Do you remember me? I am your cousin,” said Maria. The little lady with the white hair look shocked, she called to another person standing in another room. Tomas come quick, it is Maria Serrano our cousin,” said the little white haired lady.

A young man appeared at the door “entra Maria, muchas gracias,” said Tomas. “It has been so many years, how is your son Pedro and your husband Juan,”asked Tomas. Tomas was the old lady’s son. Her name was Margarita.

“May I sit down? Please,” asked Maria. “Forgive me my Mexican is not as good as before. I speak English too much. My husband Juan, and Pedro were killed in a car crash over a month ago. I buried them in Uncle Jesus’ town, Ensenada, Mexico,” said Maria. “Oh, we are so sorry, but you are familia, you are welcome. Why have you come?” asked Tomas. “It is a long story and I will explain when I am more relaxed,” said Maria. “Come have some pollo, and beans with us. We will celebrate your arrival. Tell us all about America,” asked Tomas. Margarita sat in

the corner of the room and smiled her toothless smile. “Momma is not well, Maria, sometimes she is loco but the wine helps her calm down. She is in her eighties now. I take care of her, “ said Tomas.

They talked for hours and Maria told them of her life in San Juan Capistrano, and how she worked as a Nanny at a rich American’s house. She talked about Pedro and how he was a wonderful boy, and Juan her husband who had started an auto repair shop after working years as a mechanic for American car dealers. Day became night, and after dinner, Tomas showed Maria to a room with a small straw mattress on the stone floor. He gave her a warm Mexican blanket and bid her a good night.

The next day Tomas and Maria talked for a little more as Tomas explained to his mother Margarita what Maria was saying in English. Momma did not understand English well. “There are many Americans living retired in San Miguel De Allende,” said Tomas. I learned English from them in the market place and in the University. Maria gave Tomas some American dollars and said, “This is for your hospitality Tomas. May I stay for a while until I finish grieving for my husband and son? I want to seek a new life and not return to American anymore,” said Maria.

“You are always welcome cousin,” said Tomas. “Today I will show you the market place so you can help shop for food and our church the Parish of San Miguel. The

hospital of San Rafael is near by also if you ever get sick. Drink only bottled water
cousin. We are used to the water, but you will get sick on it,” cautioned Tomas. “Si
Tomas, “ I understand. “I have been drinking only coke or bottled water since I
came to Mexico,” said Maria.



Chapter 8- The Search

Back in San Juan Capistrano John, Sam and Serena were going about their lives. Serena hired another Mexican Nanny named Lupe' Warez. She was single and much younger than Maria. Serena and John assumed Maria went back to Mexico to bury her husband and son. Since it had been two months since they last heard from her they had decided that she was not coming back.

John was still working on his plan to cover up his trail so the Flying Dragons would not be able to find him. Everything seem normal at the Cardomen villa, until one day Maria was looking for her knee high boots in the bottom of the closet, when she noticed the chinese crystal ball was gone. Shocked, she searched everywhere, under the bed, in the blanket chest, the hallway closet and in the garage. She found nothing in the house. Panic was setting in and guilt as she tried to think of what might have happened to the chinese crystal ball. It was she who moved the chinese crystal ball out of the floor safe to show Maria months ago. With Maria leaving, and all that confusion she had completely forgotten about the chinese crystal ball. Serena had to call John on his cell phone. "Hello, John, we

have a big problem honey, I don't know how to tell you this but the chinese crystal ball is gone, it is missing. It is my fault, I am sorry, (Serena began weeping) " "It is alright I will be home as soon as I can, and you can tell me the whole story. How the hell did it get out of the floor safe? Well never mind we will talk when I get home," said John. He hung up his cell phone and headed for the garage where the Mercedes was parked. An hour later he was home and he and Serena sat down to talk. Emotions were running high and John could not help but shout. "What the hell were you thinking Serena, no one, no one was to ever see the chinese crystal ball. You know the evil powers it has. You have seen it for yourself. What were you thinking," John yelled. "Honey I made a mistake. I thought it was a good idea at the time and now I realize I was stupid. I took the chinese crystal ball out to show Maria but I forgot to put it back. It was wrapped in a bathroom towel and I put it in the bottom of the closet. I simply forgot it was there," said Serena. "Well we have to figure how to get the chinese crystal ball back and it isn't going to be easy," said John. "She may have fled to Mexico permanently and she will be hard to track," said John. "I think she told me she was going to bury her husband and son in Ensenada, Baja, Mexico, " said Serena. "That is about 60 miles south of Tijuana I think," said John. I am going to have to hire someone to track her down and find the chinese crystal ball," said John.

After their discussion, John looked up a local LA detective agency that he could pay to track Maria down. He would tell the detective that she had stolen a family heirloom of crystal. Hopefully the detective would be able to get the local policia to cooperate if necessary in threatening to arrest Maria or find some way to leverage her into returning the chinese crystal ball. John called the California Coast Detective Agency in Los Angeles and spoke with the owner Richard Ballard. Mr. Ballard set up a minimum daily fee plus expenses to send a Detective into Baja, Mexico. Everything cost extra going out of the country and seeking something stolen from a Mexican would require a bi-lingual detective that understood the Mexican language and culture. Mr. Ballard had only one certified detective who used to be an LA Cop previously before he retired. The detective's name was Nino Alvarez and he was Mexican-American descent and knew Baja cities well. So John requested a contract and offered to wire some money from his bank to the Detective.

Mr. Ballard made it clear that he could not guarantee that the crystal would be returned. Being that it was taken by a Mexican and considering the fact that Maria knew Baja and had relatives there would make it very difficult to find her. People and the policia would have to be paid off with American money in order to get anyone to take the payment that was received. Mr. Ballard would dispatch Nino Alvarez to drive to Ensenada, Baja, Mexico the next day. Mr. Ballard would get

daily reports from his detective Mr. Alvarez and then report back to Mr. Cardomen. John was satisfied with this effort and if necessary he would go to Baja himself if they found Maria and if she was not cooperative.

A week later, the first report came in that Mr. Alvarez was in Ensenada and looking for Maria's Uncle Jesus. No one in Ensenada seem to know who Jesus was since that was a common name in Mexico and Mr. Alvarez did not know what Jesus' last name was. He would keep looking for another week before quitting.

Nino went into a bar in Ensenada and sat down and had a Mexican beer. A local prostitute came over and asked him if he wanted her. No, he said but I have some money if you can tell me where to find an old man called Jesus that lived somewhere in Ensenada. "No Senor, I know many men called Jesus but they are not old," said the prostitute. Nino gave her two pesos. Suddenly it he noticed a phone book by the wall phone in the bar. He went over to the phone book and took it back to his booth in the bar to go over names in the book. There were hundreds of Jesus names in the book. He wrote down the first 100 Jesus names he found and decided to get a local map and go from home to home if he had to find Jesus.

It took four days until Nino finally had a bit of luck. A local Mexican remembered two Mexican women in a pickup with American plates parked just outside of town at an old man's house. Nino went to the house and Uncle Jesus answered the door. Nino said, "Uncle Jesus," "Si Senor, how can I help you," said

Uncle Jesus. "Maria wanted me to tell you she is doing well," lied Nino. It was a risky chance to get Uncle Jesus to admit where Maria was since there was no pickup truck in front of the house. "Gracias, I am glad she is safe. It is a long journey to Mexico from here," said Uncle Jesus. "What town did she got to Senor," said Nino. "I don't remember Uncle Jesus said, my memory is very bad, perhaps the Sea of Cortez and then to the shores of Mexico, I think," said Uncle Jesus. "Gracias, thank you senor my best to you and your family," said Nino.

As Nino drove away from Uncle Jesus' casa he got on his cell phone, and called his boss Mr. Ballard. When Mr. Ballard got the news he called John right away. "Hello Mr. Cardomen, this is Mr. Ballard. I just got some news from Mr. Alvarez in Ensenada Mexico. He says he found Maria's Uncle Jesus and according to her Uncle, she has fled to the Sea of Cortez, and taken a boat across the sea to Mexico. We do not know where in Mexico she was headed, however. It is like chasing a needle in a haystack," said Mr. Ballard. "Well thank You Mr. Ballard," John said. "I want you to do whatever it takes to track her down in Mexico, I will pay whatever it takes," said John. "OK Mr. Cardomen, we will go the limit to try and track her down. I will call Mr. Alvarez back and tell him to continue to the cities along the Sea of Cortez and see if he can find the boat she took to get to Mexico. I will call you back when we learn something," Said Mr. Ballard. "OK

thanks, keep me informed,” said John. He hung up and went to tell Maria as to the progress so far.



Chapter 9- San Miguel de Allende, Mexico

Back in San Miguel de Allende, Maria was settling into life in this small city. She was surprised that there were so many American retirees, artists and ex-military Americans and foreigners living in San Miguel. They made her nervous when she saw them in the market place. Mara often went to the market place with Tomas who knew where everything could be found in the city. The streets were confusing at first for Maria but she was adjusting to the landmarks and the churches all over the city. She attended the Parish of San Miguel ever Sunday with Tomas and some of her other cousins. Life was beginning to feel normal.

Maria was running low on money, and she could not find a job anywhere in San Miguel de Allende. She decided to sell the chinese crystal ball but not tell anyone what it was capable of doing. Pawnshops were not common in San Miguel de Allende. Used furniture stores and used equipment vendors were everywhere in the market place. Tomas and Maria sat in the garden behind their casa one hot evening and drank a lot of local Mexican red wine. Maria was depressed and the

wine felt good. Unfortunately, when she drank her tongue got loose and she started to tell Tomas about magic, and the chinese crystal ball. He did not believe her. Tomas thought the wine was talking not Maria. He laughed at her story about a chinese crystal ball that could show the future. It was a fairy tale he told Maria. Being drunk Maria wanted to prove a point so she went and took out the chinese crystal ball and showed it to Tomas. He was not impressed. Hocus pocus, magic; tell me chinese crystal ball, what is the future. Nothing happened and Tomas laughed. It is just a quartz ball Maria. You must have dreamed that it has magical powers. It was then that Maria told Tomas that she saw her husband and son being killed in a car crash and she tried to stop it from happening but it happened anyway. She felt guilty for her husband Jose's death and her beloved and only son Pedro. Suddenly, Tomas got very serious and for the first time in their discussion he started to believe Maria was not lying or dreaming. "But how does it work Maria?" asked Tomas. "I think it has to sit in sunlight or moonlight," Maria said. "Maybe it is the devil at work, Maria," Tomas said. They had a few more glasses of red wine and Maria wrapped up the chinese crystal ball and went to bed.

The following morning Tomas crept into Maria's room early in the morning, and took the chinese crystal ball and put it in the courtyard in the middle of the house in full sunlight hoping the chinese crystal ball would tell him something

about the future. The chinese crystal ball sat in the sunlight for a few hours, but nothing happened.

When Maria woke up she looked for the chinese crystal ball and was most upset to find it gone. She ran out of her bedroom to ask Tomas where the chinese crystal ball was. “No problem Maria, I put it in the sunlight so it can tell us the future,” said Tomas. “It is dangerous,” said Maria. “You should not have taken it without asking me Tomas, I trusted you,” said Maria. “I am sorry Maria, but I don’t believe that this quartz ball is nothing more than a shiny clear ball,” said Tomas. “Well you will see cousin, and if you are wrong you may be sorry for dealing with the devil,” Maria replied in a threatening tone. The chinese crystal ball sat all day and still nothing happened.

That night was supposed to be a full moon. Tomas was feeling desperate now so he sat, and watched the sun go down the moonrise in the sky. The night sky was very bright with the full moon shining on everything. Sometime around 11:00 pm something strange began to happen. A small beam of light was shining on the wall of the courtyard. Tomas could not believe it, and walked over to take a closer look at the beam of light. Suddenly the beam changed into a full image like a black and white movie. There on the wall was an image that looked like him running through the market with a man with a gun chasing him. Tomas freaked out and ran

out of the courtyard grabbing the chinese crystal ball and taking it to Maria. “Maria, Maria open the door, I have something to tell you.” “Yes, I am asleep Tomas, what do you want?” asked Maria. “Open the door and I will tell you,” said Tomas.

Maria put on her robe and opened the door. “Yes, Tomas, I was asleep, what is it?” asked Maria. “Maria, I saw it I saw myself running in the market place from someone with a gun, I am afraid now. You were right, it is the Devil working in the chinese crystal ball,” said Tomas. “Tomas, I told you it was dangerous. You thought you could get rich and instead you see how someone is going to try and shoot you,” cried Maria.

“What should I do Maria?” Tomas asked. “The chinese crystal ball does not lie, stay away from the market place. I will do the shopping. You may have to leave San Miguel de Allende, like I had to leave America. You had to try and change your future,” said Maria. “Here is your chinese crystal ball, Maria, hid it please,” said Tomas. “Yes I will hide it you must watch yourself and tell no one about the chinese crystal ball. Some evil men will kill for this magical device that they think will tell them about the future. Remember that Tomas,” said Maria. “I understand Maria, you are right, I am afraid now,” said Tomas. “I will not even tell Momma,” said Tomas. “Good, go to bed now,” said Maria. So the night passed and both Tomas and Maria lie in their beds trying to sleep all night and having terrible dreams.

The next morning a light rain splashed upon the dry earth. Maria had to go to the market to get some coffee beans and some flour for tortillas. "Tomas, you stay here today, and tell no one. Swear to me Tomas," said Maria. "I swear Maria, I will stay at home and pretend to be a cactus," said Tomas. "Good," Maria said. Then she left for the market place before it got too hot in the Mexican sun. The market was crowded that day and many American retirees were out shopping also. Maria pretended not to notice them, and went about her business. After Maria got a liter of coffee and some flour for tortillas, she headed for home. As she crossed the street she noticed a man crossed the street after she did. She decided to cross back over the street in between the taxis and market wagons. The man crossed back over again. Now Maria was worried. Someone was following her. She slipped into a small store and asked if they had a back door, "Si" said the vendor. Maria slipped out the back door into an alley behind the store. She walked quickly toward a side street and headed back to her home on Blanco Street. Looking back she seemed to have lost the person that was following her. She did not tell Tomas about the stranger following her in the market place. Now she was sure they were all in danger and she had brought the danger to her cousin's casa. She felt terrible that she had brought danger to her cousins. "What could she do?" she thought to herself.

It was siesta time, and the heat of the day burned up the sky. It was quiet in San Miguel during siesta. Maria lay on her bed napping to forget the heat and the

problems the chinese crystal ball has created. Tomas kept looking out the window curtains to see a man with a gun lurking. There was no one out on the street.

Tomas kept looking for he was getting paranoid about the image he saw. "Who would be chasing him with a gun and why?" he asked himself. Momma was in another room already asleep so Tomas did not disturb her. He just sat in a chair and worried about his future.

A week went by and nothing happened. Tomas wanted to believe that the image was all a dream and not real. Maria was cautious about everything, especially going to the market. Maria was running out of money and since Tomas was not working or Momma, she decided to sell the chinese crystal ball in the market place.

With the chinese crystal ball wrapped in a towel, Maria headed out to the market place to try and find someone who wanted to buy a quartz crystal that was shaped like a globe. She approached a few vendors but they were not interested. Finally she approached a used furniture salesman and offered him the quartz crystal for 500 pesos. The salesman was not really interested until Maria decided to tell him about the magical properties of the chinese crystal ball and how it came from China and was hundreds in not thousands of years old. They settled on 500 pesos and the salesman wrote Maria a check since he did not have pesos in his

pocket. Maria was relieved to get rid of chinese crystal ball and finally have some money to help her cousin Tomas.

The salesman's name was Richardo Warez and he had a small store in San Miguel del Allende. He wrapped the chinese crystal ball up and decided he would celebrate by going to a local Mexican bar and have a few tequilas. He put the chinese crystal ball in his knapsack and threw it over his shoulder. It was hot that day and nice tequila would be just right thought Richardo. When he entered the bar there were many people at the bar and a few prostitutes waiting on the end of the bar for customers. Richardo was married and was not interested in the prostitutes. "Senor are you looking for a date?" a prostitute named Eliza asked. "No, no not interested, gracias," said Richardo. "Bartender, I will have a tequila please. Por favor," said Ricardo.

Many hours later Richardo was on his 6th tequila, and he began to tell the bartender about how he had just bought a Chinese crystal ball worth thousands of pesos from a local woman. She said it had magical powers and could tell the future. The bartender really did not pay attention to Richardo because he was drunk and it seemed like he was making up stories.

Finally, Richardo had run out of money, and it was time to head home to his casa that was a mile walk away. He stumbled out the door and headed toward home before the sun went down.

Right after Richardo had left a local gangster called “El Diablo,” entered the bar, and demanded “protection money,” from the bartender. The bartender explained he only had a few hundred pesos and could not afford to pay for protection. The gangster whose name was Jorge Villese, and his nickname was the “el Diablo,” or the devil in English. He ran a gang called the Nortems in San Miguel Del Allende and was considered a very dangerous man. “I cannot give you all the money now Senor Jorge, but I can give you a valuable tip,” said the bartender. “What are you talking about,” asked Jorge. “I just had a customer who claims to have a Chinese crystal ball tells the future,” said the bartender. “You what?” exclaimed Jorge. “Do you think I am a fool,” said Jorge slamming his fist down on the bar counter top. “Si Senor, I do not lie, this man has a chinese crystal ball which he claims can tell the future,” said the bartender. “OK, Where does this hombre live?” asked Jorge. “I do not know Senor Jorge, but he come in here on a regular basis every week. I think he sells used furniture,” said the bartender. “Give me a 100 pesos for now and I want you to call me when this hombre comes into your bar again. You had better not be lying or I will cut your tongue out,” said Jorge. The bartender quickly gave Jorge 100 pesos and bid him good by, “via con dios, senor Jorge,” said the bartender.

Meanwhile, Richardo had arrived home and entered his casa and placed the chinese crystal ball in a safe place in the coat closet. He said hello to his daughters

and wife Marianna, and went into the bedroom and collapsed on the bed and fell asleep as drunk as could be. His wife Marianna covered his legs with a blanket and turned off the light so he could sleep.

When Maria got back to her cousin's house she gave him all the money she got for selling the chinese crystal ball. Tomas was very happy for they needed money badly for food but he was sad that Maria had to sell the chinese crystal ball. He and Maria headed out to the market the next day early to buy some food. Maria was happy that now they would all be able to eat and be happy.



Chapter 10- “El Diablo”

Back on the Mexican coast the detective Mr. Alvarez had just come across the Sea of Cortez in a Mexican fishing boat called the “Flying Fish,” the same boat Maria had taken from Baja to Mexico. He was tracking Maria route into Mexico not knowing that she was headed for San Miguel de Allende. He was going to need some help from the Office back in Los Angeles. He needed the office to track any known relatives of Maria or where she was born in Mexico as leads as to where she might have gone. “Hello Anita, This is Mr. Alvarez your detective in Mexico. I have traced Maria to the coast of Mexico where she took a bus somewhere. I need someone in the office to do a background check on her or ask Mr. Cardomen whether he knows of any of her relatives or birthplace on her job application and call me back on my cell phone,” asked Mr. Alvarez. “OK Mr. Alvarez, I will ask Tony in research to follow-up on your requests,” said Anita. Mr. Alvarez had nothing to do but wait around all day until someone called him back with a lead as to where Maria might have gone.

In San Miguel de Allende, “El Diablo,” was a very superstitious person and was intrigued that a read Chinese crystal ball could actually exist. “Imagine,” he thought to himself, “he could tell if his enemies were plotting against him or whether a drug cartel was going to take over the town or whether he would become a rich man.” The possibilities were endless. “El Diablo,” wasn’t a very religious man, but he hoped that “Mary the mother of Jesus would favor him and look over his life and bless him.”

Time was running out for Maria, Mr. Alvarez was a few hundred miles away and she was about to get a visit from a local gangster called “el Diablo,” Her life was about to change, as would Mr. Alvarez if he actually found Maria and “el Diablo,” if he found out who Maria sold the chinese crystal ball to and where the Hombre lived. Tomas and Maria were buying food in the market place when a friend of Tomas took him aside and said, “Hombre, some bad people are looking for your cousin Maria. They are seeking a magic globe or some kind that she sold to someone in the market place. They will do anything; even kill to get this magic globe. The word is out in the market to look for this woman Maria,” said the friend. Tomas was concerned. He did not want to cross “El Diablo,” for he was a powerful gangster in San Miguel de Allende.

While Mr. Alvarez was waiting for a cell phone call it finally happened that afternoon around 4:00pm. “Hello Mr. Alvarex, this is Anita, I have good news for you. We called Cardomen and he told us Maria put down on her job application that she was born in San Miguel de Allende that is 180 miles north of Mexico City. Cardomen is going to fly to Mexico City tonight and meet you there in two days. Can you get a bus or rental ride to the nearest airport? You will need to get a ticket to Mexico City right away and fly there to meet Cardomen. He will page you in the airline terminal. OK?” Said Anita. “Right, Mexico City, I am on it right away. I will find a way to the nearest airport today, goodbye.” Said Alvarez. Well he thought to himself, we are getting closer to finding Maria now especially with Cardomen coming since he can identify Maria by sight. One hour later Alvarez was paying a taxi his fare and getting his luggage for a flight to Mexico City. “Hi, I am American, do you speak English,” he said to the ticket clerk. “Si, yes I speak English,” the clerk said. “ I need a one way ticket to Mexico city tonight or tomorrow morning early,” said Alvarez. “The flight to Mexico City left today at 12:45 am but there is a flight 202 tomorrow morning at 9:00 am on Aztec Airlines. Shall I book you for that flight, Sir?” the clerk asked. “Yes on ticket to Mexico City, tomorrow at 9:00 am is fine,” Alvarez said. “Where can I get a motel for the night,” Alvarez asked. “Across the lobby sir is a chart of local motels you can stay at tonight,” said the clerk. “Thank you, gracias senior,” Alvarez responded.

Alvarez spent the night in a dumpy Mexican motel, while Cardomen was already in the air heading to Mexico City. “El Diablo,” was waiting for someone to sell Maria out for a few pesos. Everything was beginning to come full circle now, and closing in on Maria without her knowing it.

A week had gone by, and “El Diablo,” was getting impatient since no one had any information about this woman Maria, who was the cousin of some guy called Tomas. Eventually, a small boy named Topaz came to “El Diablo,” and asked, “Senior Diablo, do you have a reward for a lady named Maria, that sold a chinese crystal ball.” El Diablo responded by saying, “Si, here is the 500 pesos, where is she?” asked El Diablo. “She lives on Blanco Street, Senior Diablo, and I will show you,” said the young boy. “Hurry, let us go now and talk with this woman,” said El Diablo. So, Topaz led “El Diablo,” to Blanco Street a few blocks from the San Rafael Hospital. Topaz was not exactly sure of which house Maria lived so “El Diablo,” knocked on all the doors. Tomas and Maria were out that day, and only Momma Margarita was home sick in bed. When they knocked at the door Momma Margarita could answer the door or get out of bed. Topaz and “El Diablo” went up and down the entire street but no one knew Maria and no Maria seemed to live in any of the houses. “Give me back my 500 pesos, little boy,” said “El Diablo.” “You must have been mistaken, no one on this street knows a Maria with a cousin Tomas,” said “El Diablo.” “Here senior, take back the pesos, Senior El

Diablo, I am sorry, but I heard she lived on this street by a friend. Perhaps I was wrong?” said Topaz. So they parted their ways, and Maria escaped a confrontation with “El Diablo.”

Later that day toward evening, Maria and Tomas came back from spending a day in the local park. They had a good time sitting under the shade of a tree and eating fruit and water. One of Tomas’ neighbors came running over to him when he and Maria arrived at their home. “Senor Tomas, senor Tomas, she shouted, “El Diablo,” was here today looking for your cousin Maria. It is very bad,” the neighbor said. He said he was looking for a magical ball or chinese crystal ball that Maria has sold. He thinks he can control the future with this magical device,” said the neighbor. “You had better be careful and perhaps hide Maria until he forgets about the chinese crystal ball,” said the neighbor. “No one would tell “El Diablo,” that Maria lived on Blanco street or where, but he will come back senor,” said the neighbor. “Gracias Margarita my good neighbor, we are indebted to you for keeping Maria a secret,” said Tomas. Maria hearing all this from the neighbor was scared. Now she was sorry she told the salesman in the market place that the chinese crystal ball had magical properties. If a gangster heard about it somehow, then everyone would hear about this magical chinese crystal ball and begin to look everywhere for it. Especially, if “El Diablo,” posted a reward for information in helping to find her, the chinese crystal ball, or who she sold it to. Tomas and

Maria went into their house and Maria cried on the coach “I am so sorry I brought all this trouble to your house Tomas,” cried Maria. Tomas said, ”do not worry Maria, I will talk to Father Julio at the Parish of San Miguel, and see if the church will hide and protect you for now,” said Tomas. “El Diablo is a dangerous man and he has a lot of power in San Miguel de Allende,” said Tomas. “You may have to move to another town to avoid ‘El Diablo,’ ”said Tomas. “I am sorry Maria, you tried to do the right thing so we would have money for food, but evil men would like to predict the future and profit from it if they possibly can, and ‘El Diablo’ is one of them,” said Tomas.

I will leave tomorrow early in the morning for Parish Mass and speak with Father Julio and see if he will protect you and hide you until we can find a safer place for you to go. Later that morning Tomas went to morning mass and spoke with Father Julio. “Father Julio I have a problem I hope you can help me with,” said Tomas. “What is it my son?” said Father Julio. “My cousin Maria is in a lot of trouble with ‘El Diablo’ for selling a chinese crystal ball with magical properties that he wants,” said Tomas. “This is very bad my son, ‘El Diablo’ is an evil man with a lot of power,” said Father Julio. “We can hide her for a few days but someone will tell where she is for the reward,” said Father Julio. “Gracias Father, I will bring her to the church around noon time for you to hide her until I can

arrange for her to travel to another city far away from here, “ said Tomas. “Via con dios, my son,” said Father Julio.

When Tomas returned home there were hundreds of people in the street on Blanco Street observing a fire. “Oh my God, it is my house burning,” shouted Tomas as he ran down the street. “Where is Momma Margarita, and Maria,” he asked a neighbor. The neighbor shook her head saying “no.” Firemen were everywhere trying to put out the fire but because the house was mostly wood it went up like a torch. “What happened he asked everyone standing around?” Topaz came up to Tomas and said “Senior Tomas, I am sorry, I did not know he would burn down your house, forgive me, I only wanted the reward money” said Topaz. “It was ‘El Diablo,” he said he wanted to send a message. Someone on your street told him where you live and he came and only Momma Margarita was home. Maria was hiding next door at a neighbor. ‘El Diablo,” had his bad men burn the house down. Momma Margarita escaped out the back with Maria and hid in fear with the neighbor. ‘El Diablo,” did not find them so he left,” said Topaz. “Momma, Maria are you OK,” yelled Tomas. “Shhhh, do not call me Maria,” said Maria. Momma Margarita is OK, and I was hiding at your neighbor’s house when “El Diablo” came to house with someone who wanted the reward. He burned down the house and left saying, ‘that will be a lesson for them not to fool with El Diablo,” said Maria.

“Now what are we going to do Tomas?” asked Momma. “I don’t know Momma, but we must hide and then leave this city before ‘El Diablo’ kills us, said Tomas. “Let us run to Father Julio and hide until it is safe to travel to my brother’s house in Mexico City. He has a big house and is a Lawyer with a lot of money. I will call him and ask for his help,” said Tomas. “Lucky for us Maria and I have all the money from the sale of the chinese crystal ball which we can use to travel to Mexico City which is 180 miles away,” said Tomas.

An hour later the three of them were at the Parish of San Miguel. Standing in the courtyard was Father Julio. “Father Julio, father Julio,” Tomas called. “Yes my son,” said Father Julio. “El Diablo burned down my house father. We need your help to hide” Said Tomas. “I am sorry to hear that your house was burned down, ‘El Diablo’ is an evil man and will stop at nothing to get his way,” said Father Julio. “Come my children I will give you food and hide you in my casa,” said Father Julio. So they all went into Father Julio’s casa and Tomas asked to call his brother Juan Carlos in Mexico City. Tomas called his brother who was surprised to hear from him. Tomas told him about ‘El Diablo’ burning down his house and how Maria sold a chinese crystal ball to get money for food. Juan Carlos did not believe that a real chinese crystal ball could exist that could tell the future, but he humored Tomas since he realized he was very fearful. “Can I beg you to let us come to your

casa Juan Carlos? Por favor, please,” begged Tomas. “No problema brother, you are familia, come as soon as possible and I will have the maids make up a few rooms for you,” said Juan Carlos.

As Tomas got off the phone he explained to Momma Margarita, and Maria that his brother would give them shelter and protect them. They just had to get a bus ticket to Mexico City without ‘El Diablo’ finding them. Tomas was well known on Blanco Street and in the local market place, so he asked Father Julio if he would buy three bus tickets to Mexico City that day so they could leave as soon as possible. Tomas gave Father Julio the money and Father Julio went to the local bus terminal in San Miguel de Allende to buy three one way tickets to Mexico City. He was careful to look around the terminal for any of “El Diablo’s’ gang members. Few people were in the bus terminal that day. After buying the bus tickets Father Julio headed back to the parish to see Tomas, Maria, and Momma.



Chapter 11-Mexico City

The bus for Mexico city left in a few hours, and since it was a long trip it traveled overnight and into the next three days to get to Mexico city which was 180 miles to the south of San Miguel de Allende. Father Julio packed some dried meat and fruits for the three of them and blessed them on their journey. Maria and Momma tried to disguise themselves by wearing scarfs over their heads. Tomas called for a taxi that would be the fastest was to get to the bus terminal without being detected by friends of “El Diablo.” The taxi arrived twenty minutes later and they all hugged Father Julio and thanked him for his kindness. “Adios, and God Bless you my children,” said Father Julio and the three left in the cab.

The weather was the usual hot and humid weather for that day, and even hotter in the bus terminal in the city. Tomas listened to the PA announcements as to what busses were leaving for their destinations. Finally, an announcement was

made on the public address system, “Mexico City, Mexico City bus number 302 leaving from terminal 2.” Said the announcer. Tomas, Momma and Maria grabbed what food they had and rushed to board the bus to Mexico. The sooner they got away from ‘El Diablo’ the better. Finally they boarded the bus and sat in the back together in two seats. Ten minutes later the entire luggage was loaded underneath the bus and the driver was getting into the bus. What a relief to be leaving San Miguel de Allende after all the problems they had with ‘El Diablo’ and selling the chinese crystal ball. The bus was moving now and Maria looked out the window and watched the city buildings pass by quickly.

In Mexico City, at the airport, John Cardomen had just arrived, and was waiting for his baggage after departing the plane. The weather was humid and very hot that day around 100 degrees. Fortunately the airline terminal was cool and air-conditioned. John thought to himself, “what if they cannot find Maria and what if someone else gets the chinese crystal ball, what would that mean?” After getting his luggage, John got a mini-bus to the Mexican Hilton Hotel in Mexico City where he had booked two rooms. One room was for him, and the other one was for Mr. Alvarez the detective he hired to track down Maria. Already Mr. Alvarez’s bill had come to ten thousand dollars and was still climbing. No matter John had plenty of money to pay for the detective.

Also on his way to Mexico City was Mr. Alvarez, the detective, who was on an overcrowded Mexican bus headed for Mexico City. His trip involved many short stops along the way to load and unload passengers in many of the cities and towns along the way. The bus was expected to take almost a week to travel across Mexico and down to Mexico City. As the bus bumped along Mr. Alvarez thought to himself, No one can hide no a days. Cell phone records can be traced by bribing someone. Anyone in Mexico was up for a bribe. Already he had bribed his way across Baja, the Sea of Cortez and Mexico. Everyone had their hand out for money, especially, American money that was worth twelve times as much as a Mexican peso. He tried to sleep but the rough road kept bouncing him around. The roads in Mexico were not well repaired and were full of holes in the surface from the heat and cold of the climate and from the fact the government could not afford to repair the roads on a regular basis. All of the seats were full on the bus and he had to share a seat with a large Mexican man who was dressed like a worker in jeans and a work shirt. They said very little to one another because the Mexican man did not speak any English. So it was a long trip that week until Mr. Alvarez finally reached Mexico City. His first impression of the city was the altitude. He felt a little lightheaded from the high altitude of Mexico City when he got off the bus. The heat and humidity were unbearable, but he managed to drag his suitcase to the taxi

stand where he hailed a cab to the Hotel Hilton Mexico City where Mr. Cardomen would be waiting. According to his information Maria may have fled to a town called San Miguel de Allende that was 180 miles northwest of Mexico City. He arrived at the hotel in 30 minutes due to the massive traffic in the city. Upon entering the lobby of the Hilton Hotel he check in and asked if a John Cardomen had checked in. The Desk clerk informed him there was a message for him from Mr. Cardomen and that his room was already reserved on the 10th floor room 1033.

The message read ‘see me once you check in, I am in room 1034 across the hall from you. “ Thanks, John. Mr. Alvarez took the elevator up to the tenth floor and checked into his room. He took a shower first because it was the first shower he had taken in over a week. There was no opportunity to take showers on the bus trip across Mexico. As he dried off coming out of the showers Mr. Alvarez called room 1034 where Mr. Cardomen was staying. John Cardomen picked up the phone and said, “Hello, John Cardomen speaking.” “Yes, John this is Mr. Alvarez the detective you hired to track down Maria, “said Mr. Alvarez. “Find, when you are ready come over to my room and we will talk,” said John. “Great, I will see you in a few minutes then, thanks,” said Mr. Alvarez and he hung up the phone.

A few minutes later Mr. Alvarez was knocking on the door of room 1034. John came to the door. "Mr. Alvarez it is good to see you, come on in," said John. They sat down together and Mr. Alvarez talked about the clues he had discovered so far and the possibility the Maria may have returned to her hometown of San Miguel de Allende northwest of Mexico City. "We need to develop a plan said John, Mexico is a big country and this San Miguel De Allende is a good size city which will be difficult to find one person," John said. "Well, we have a last known address on Blanco Street for one of her relatives, a cousin I believe called Tomas Vilavese. That is a start at least," said Mr. Alvarez. Yes but should we rent a car and drive there or take the bus?" asked John. "Rent a car will be faster," said Mr. Alvarez and a lot more comfortable. We just have to watch out for "banditos" along the way who like to hold up tourists driving through Mexico," said Mr. Alvarez. "Let me contact my office in Los Angeles and see if we can get any more information on Maria," said Mr. Alvarez. It might be possible to have someone hired in San Miguel de Allende to track down Maria before we get there to save us some work in finding her," said Mr. Alvarez. "That sounds like a plan," said John. "I don't want to drive all the way to San Miguel de Allende only to find she wasn't there," said John. "Ok, I will check with the desk clerk and see if I can rent a computer for an hour or so to contact my office online. If they have any printouts or maps they can upload them for me to print out in the Hilton Hotel business

room,” said Mr. Alvarez. “Alright, you take care of business and we will meet tonight for dinner and formulate a solid plan for finding her,” said John. Mr. Alvarez got up and headed for the door. “Ok, I will meeting you tonight around 6:00 in the bar and then we can have dinner afterward,” said Mr. Alvarez. He waved goodbye and headed out the door.

John thought, “I hope we can make this plan work. It seems like looking for a needle in a haystack.” He poured himself a drink and sat back and reflected on the search they were planning. “How would he actually get Maria to give up the chinese crystal ball, “ he thought. He needed to think of a strategy. It was very difficult to get the local police to help out when the person was a Mexican and they were foreigners from America. Americans were not popular in Mexico and John knew that.

Mr. Alvarez was on a computer all afternoon downloading information the researchers back in Los Angeles had provided him from private and public records in Mexico. They included a map of Blanco Street near the San Rafael Hospital. They also found a local contact that could check to see if this cousin Tomas was still living on Blanco Street and provided some surveillance regarding the fact whether Maria was staying there. All of this information would be invaluable for their search and perhaps save them a trip if it turned out to be a dead-end.

On a bus somewhere north of Mexico City, Tomas, Momma, and Maria were traveling to Mexico City, unaware the John Cardomen her previous employer and the real owner of the chinese crystal ball, was already in Mexico City looking for Maria, and the chinese crystal ball. It was a long trip by bus, and they made a lot of stops for food, and to unload passengers, and load new passengers. Momma wasn't feeling too well from the long ride that would take at least four days. The bus drove through the nights but rested during the heat of the day for fear of overheating on the road. Tomas was very sad that their entire house burnt to the ground. "How would they ever have a house again?" he thought to himself. Momma did not understand what was happening. She was too sick to understand that a criminal in search of a magical chinese crystal ball had burnt their house down to make an example to everyone in the neighborhood that they needed to fear, El Diablo. Maria and Tomas talked all the way on the bus to Mexico City and Momma slept most of the time. They had eaten all the dried meat Father Julio had given them and the fresh oranges too. Now they had to buy food whenever the bus made a stop to unload and pick up passengers.

The salesman that bought the chinese crystal ball learned of Maria's house being burned down by "El Diablo," in his search of the chinese crystal ball. The salesman was afraid, and hid from going to the marketplace. He too had to flee "El Diablo." El Diablo had lost patience with the chinese crystal ball story, and had

decided it was just a fairy tale. He had no regrets for burning down Tomas and Maria's home. He also did not know that Tomas, Momma, and Maria had fled the city to go to Mexico City where Tomas' brother lived. It was a typical "Mexican standoff," between the salesman, El Diablo and Maria and her family. Everyone was in hiding to avoid 'El Diablo' and the trail had gone cold for "El Diablo.

Back at the Hotel Hilton in Mexico City, Mr. Alvarez paid off a high official that worked for the Mexican federal government and who had access to trains, busses and airline passenger lists as to who was coming and going around all of Mexico. For a few hundred pesos Mr. Alvarez had this high official do a search for the past month for Maria Serrano's name on any bus, train, or airplane. The search paid off. The search produced a bus ticket one way from the Mexican coast to San Miguel de Allende a few weeks before. But, amazingly she was booked for a ticket from San Miguel de Allende a few days before with two other tickets, one being a Tomas. For whatever reason Maria, and her cousin and mother were coming by bus to Mexico City. What a great break that was going to be? Mr. Alvarez could not wait to tell John Cardomen.

That night at the Hotel Hilton bar John was already at the bar, when Mr. Alvarez arrived. "I have great news, we have had a stroke of luck," said Mr. Alvarez. "I paid off a Federal official that has access to all the bus, train and plane passenger lists coming into Mexico and leaving Mexico. He did a search for me

and found Maria Serrano took a bus to San Miguel de Allende a few weeks ago.

But, here is the really good news; Maria Serrano and her cousin Tomas and another passenger are on a bus on their way to Mexico City. They will arrive tomorrow at 6:00 pm in the main bus terminal in Mexico City,” said Mr. Alvarez. “Wow that is great news Mr. Alvarez. You really did your homework. We need to celebrate.

“Bartender, two whiskeys over here please,” said John. Mr. Alvarez went on to say “we can surprise them as they get off the bus tomorrow. They have come to us for some reason.” “You are right Mr. Alvarez but we cannot arrest them on Mexican property. What do you suggest?” asked John. “I think we need to bribe a Mexican Policeman in order to at least detain them in the Police headquarters to find out where the chinese crystal ball is and whether they have it on them. Otherwise if they make a fuss they will alert the real police and we may lose control of the situation,” said Mr. Alvarez. “You are right Mr. Alvarez, we do not want to create a public commotion when they get off the bus,” said John. The two of them sat around the bar for an hour and then went and had dinner satisfied that they had a plan that would work the next day.

It was after noon the next day and Mr. Alvarez and John hailed a taxi and went to the central bus terminal in Mexico City. The plan was to wait there in case the bus from San Miguel de Allende got in early and have their paid off Policeman available nearby in case they had to arrest Maria when she got off the bus. Only Mr.

Cardomen knew what she looked like since Mr. Alvarez did not have an actual picture of Maria. John would have to spot her getting off the bus and then Mr. Alvarez and the local policeman would move in. They waited a few hours and then around 5:30 the Public announcement that the bus from San Miguel de Allende would be arriving at station six in ten minutes. John walked over to the unloading area at station six and waited. Minutes later the red and green bus arrived full of passengers. The bus pulled up and the passengers began to disembark. Many women got off but John did not recognize anyone until suddenly a woman that looked like Maria got off with another man and an older woman. I signaled Mr. Alvarez to have his Policeman move in to arrest them if they tried to run. John walked to Maria and said, "Maria is that you, I am so glad you are safe. I have been looking for you. I believe you have something of mine. If you give it up we wouldn't make any trouble," said John. Maria hid behind Tomas. "Leave her alone said Tomas, We have had enough bad luck. She sold the chinese crystal ball, it is gone Senior and "El Diablo," wants it badly and he is chasing us," said Tomas. "El Diablo," who the hell is he?" said John. Meanwhile, Mr. Alvarez and his friend in uniform had moved next to John. "Do not arrest us senior John, we don't have the chinese crystal ball anymore. Maria sold it for money so we could buy food in San Miguel de Allende," said Tomas. Maria was crying behind Tomas. "I am sorry Mr. Cardomen," she said. "I did not want to take the chinese crystal ball but it told me

of my husband and son's death but I could not stop it from happening. It was my entire fault.

Your wife told me about the chinese crystal ball and I did not believe her so I put in on a table and I saw my husband and son being killed in a car crash. I could not stop it, I could not stop it, Maria cried. "So where is the chinese crystal ball?" John asked. "A salesman from the market place in San Miguel de Allende has it," Tomas said. "How do we know what this salesman's name is and how are we going to get the chinese crystal ball back," John exclaimed. "Shall I arrest them senor?" the policeman asked. "No that wouldn't be necessary, now that I know what we have to do." Maria you are going to have to come with us back to San Miguel de Allende to identify the man you sold the chinese crystal ball to," said John. "Then we will release you and let you come back to Mexico City. I guess this is your cousin Tomas and is this his mother?" asked John "Si senor, this is my cousin Tomas who saved me from being killed by "El Diablo," said Maria. She started crying again. "El Diablo" burned down our little home." "He is a dangerous man Mr. Cardomen and I fear for my life, Maria went on to say. "Tomas you take your mother to where ever you are going and we will fly back to San Miguel de Allende tomorrow morning. I will have to charter a private plane to fly us there and back after we recover the chinese crystal ball," said John. "Mr. Alvarez, take Tomas and his mother where ever they are going and meet me back at the Hilton.

“I will book a room for Maria and, I will hold onto her passport so she doesn’t try to flee,” said John. Mr. Alvarez you will make sure you know where Tomas, and his mother are staying so we can bring Maria back to him when our journey is done,” said John. “OK Sir, I will get a cab, and take Tomas and his mother to where ever they are going. “Maria are you going to be alright,” asked Tomas as they were leaving. “I am fine Tomas, gracias, go and take care of your mother and say hello to your brother for me,” said Maria. “If the lord is willing we will recover the chinese crystal ball and not meet up with ‘El Diablo,’ “ Said Maria.

So John got a taxi for Maria and him and Mr. Alvarez went with Tomas and his mother. When John go to the Hilton he booked a room for Maria for just one night and informed the desk clerk he would be checking out early the next morning. “Can you give me the number of a local charter plane company senior,” John asked the desk clerk. “Si senior the desk clerk said her is the number of Taquito Charter Air Lines at the airport,” said the clerk. “Maria you take your stuff up stairs to the room I have reserved for you, room 1030, and I will be up shortly after I charter a plane to San Miguel de Allende, “ said John. Maria went up stairs and John followed after booking a flight the next day.



Chapter 12- Retrieval

The next day Maria, John and Mr. Alvarez boarded a Charter Plane to San Miguel de Allende. The flight would take a little over an hour. As everyone settled down in their seats John asked Maria about this guy nicknamed “El Diablo.” “So, Maria who is this guy “El Diablo?” asked John. “He is a gangster senior John and a very bad man. He burned down Tomas house when he was looking for me to find out who I sold the chinese crystal ball to,” said Maria. “Well Mr. Alvarez what do you know about this guy ‘El Diablo’? Said John. “Well sir, I looked him up on the Internet and he is a major crime figure in the city of San Miguel del Allende. He is connected to the Nortems drug cartel and has a criminal record a mile long,” said Mr. Alvarez. “He is a very powerful and dangerous man we are going to have to avoid at all costs,” said Mr. Alvarez. “OK out plan is to go back to the salesman and make him an offer he cannot refuse, get the chinese crystal ball and get out of town before ‘El Diablo’ knows what happened,” said John

A little over an hour later the plane landed at the San Miguel de Allende, and all three departed for the terminal. “Ok, Maria it is up to you to help us find the salesman. Do you know where he lives?” Said John. “Si señor John, I know where he lives, but he may be hiding from ‘El Diablo’,” said Maria. John replied, “I will rent a car for our stay here and let’s remember the plane is only staying her four hours and after that we loose our reservation to return to Mexico City tonight.”

A short while later they were all getting into the rental car, and heading for the market place near Blanco Street. As they passed Blanco Street Maria pointed out the burned remains of her cousin Tomas’ house. John was shocked at the damage. The only thing still standing was the stone fireplace. The rest of the house was in ashes. They continued onto the market place where Maria sold the chinese crystal ball. Maria got out of the car and asked a few vendors where Senor Allende could be found. Nobody in the market knew what happened to Senor Allende the used furniture salesman. Everyone knew ‘El Diablo’ was looking for him and the chinese crystal ball. John told Maria to pass the word that they would pay for information as to where Senor Allende could be found, and that they were not here to harm him. The window of opportunity to find this used furniture salesman was getting short, so Mr. Alvarez, John, and Maria split up and searched everywhere in the marketplace.

“Senor, Pssst, Senor,” a woman came out of an alley beckoning John.

“Senor you will pay to find Senor Allende, si?” the woman asked. “Yes, si, we pay mucho,” John said in broken Mexican. “How much senor, you pay?” asked the lady. John said, “if your information is correct senorita, I will give you \$1,000 pesos in cash.” “Follow me,” the woman said. They walked down alleys behind the shops with Maria and Mr. Alvarez following. Snaking through many back alleys full of garbage and stray dogs they came upon a door leading to a cellar room below a store. The lady that was leading them knocked on the door. “Senor Allende, it is me, Maryann, open the door it is OK. I bring friends of Maria that will help you. Please open the door,” pleaded Maryann. A few minutes later the door lock was being unlocked from behind the door and the door opened to a loud creaking sound. There in the door stood Mr. Allende. “Come inside quickly,” he said. John said, “Mr. Allende, let me introduce my colleague Mr. Alvarez and my name is John Cardomen. I am the true owner of the chinese crystal ball which Maria stole from me at my home in America,” John explained. “Si senor I am afraid, the chinese crystal ball is cursed and the evil one, ‘El Diablo’ wants to take this chinese crystal ball and perhaps my life too if I do not give it to him,” said Mr. Allende. He was very nervous and obviously shaking. “Senor Allende I have a solution for you. I will give you 500,000 pesos for giving me my crystal back and I

will help you get out of San Miguel safely with us in a plane to Mexico City where 'El Diablo' will not find you. I will guarantee your safety. Do we have a deal, Mr. Allende?" said John.

"Si señor, get me out of San Miguel and I will be most grateful. I accept your offer for the chinese crystal ball. It is an evil thing that brings evil people around to steal it."

John said, "We must leave immediately. Maria wishes to return to her cousin Tomas, and I need to get us on the plane before 'El Diablo' finds out, and tries to make trouble. "Pack your bags Mr. Allende and let's leave quickly. I had a rental car back in the market place." So they all left the hidden room and followed the snake like alleys. John paid the woman her reward and she disappeared as quickly as she had appeared before. As they approached the market place, Mr. Alvarez noticed some men hanging around the car that looked like stereotype criminals. "John, I think we have trouble. See those men around the car in dark suits. They look suspicious. I think they could be 'El Diablo's' men," said Mr. Alvarez. "What do you recommend?" asked John. "All of you stay out of sight. Maria and Mr. Allende hide behind Mr. Cardomen behind this store," said Mr. Alvarez. "I will try and create a diversion," said Mr. Alvarez. Mr. Alvarez went over to one of the market place vendors that was selling fireworks and purchased a bunch of cherry bombs and regular stick fireworks. His plan was to set off the fireworks on the

other side of the market place away from the rental car to attract the attention of ‘El Diablo’s henchmen.

Mr. Alvarez took a short walk to the other side of the market place, and put the fireworks next to a dry fountain, and lit them off, and walked away briskly. The firecrackers went off, boom, boom, crack, and crack, like the sound of guns. Some women in the market place shrieked in fright. Mr. Alvarez headed back toward John, Maria and Mr. Allende who were hiding. ‘El Diablo’s’ men heard the sounds and thought they were gunfire and ran toward the sound.

“John, Maria, Mr. Allende, quick over here, run to the car, quickly we do not have much time,” said Mr. Alvarez. They all hopped into the car, and they drove off quickly toward airport. ‘El Diablo’s men arrived at the dry water fountain and realized they had been tricked with fireworks. As they turned around they saw the car drive away. They ran back to the two cars they had and quickly pursued John’s car. “John look behind you,” said Mr. Alvarez, “they are following us. Try to loose them if you can,” he said. “OK I am trying but the traffic is real heavy with a lot of people walking across the street,” said John. Maria and Mr. Allende crouched down in the back of the car in fear. Maria was holding the chinese crystal ball wrapped in a scarf. The car seemed to hit every bump in the road as they tried to escape from “El Diablo’s men.

Finally they arrived at the airport. John circled around a few times to confuse the men chasing them. "I am going to drop you guys off in front of the terminal, make your way to terminal 32 where the charter flights depart. Our pilot is waiting for us at terminal 32. I am going to drive around a little more and then ditch the car in the rental parking lot and take the mini-bus back to the terminal. Maria be careful not to drop the chinese crystal ball," said John. "Ok Mr. Cardomen, I will make sure they are all safe and we will be waiting for you on the charter plane. Be careful these men will shoot if necessary to get what they want," said Mr. Alvarez. John pulled up in front of the airport main terminal and dropped off his passengers and sped off. Maria, Mr. Allende and Mr. Alvarez ran into the terminal and headed for terminal 32. They kept looking behind them, and so far there were no men chasing them.

John led the cars that were chasing them away from the terminal toward the rental car parking lot on the outskirts of the airport. Fortunately John had express checkout with the rental car company and was able to just drop the car off and run for the mini-bus. He had just gotten on the mini-bus when El Diablo's men pulled up in their two cars. He ducked down so they could not see him and for a few tense minutes he waited for the mini-bus to leave. Finally the mini-bus left, and he could see El Diablo's men searching all over the parking lot in the back window of the mini-bus. A few minutes later he arrived at the main terminal, and got out of the

mini-bus, and ran into the terminal. Suddenly a shot rang out. 'El Diablo's' men had left someone at the entrance to the terminal and the gangster had identified him running into the terminal. Despite the fact that there were passengers everywhere, and many police, the gangster fired off a round of bullets trying to hit John.

Everyone in the terminal screamed and hit the ground. The police standing around and the security guards pulled their guns. Luckily for John he cleared security easily since he had no bags to declare. El Diablo's gunman disappeared after shooting at John, and John headed down the terminal toward terminal 32 where the charter plane would be waiting. Huffing and puffing from having to jog the whole distance, John made it to terminal 32, and looked out the window to see his charter plane warming up it's engines. He hurried down the stairs and outside the terminal to the charter plane. Looking back he saw several of El Diablo's men standing inside the terminal looking out the window. He boarded the plane and said to the pilot, "let's get the hell out of here." "Ok Sir, we are cleared to take off next in line," said the pilot.

They taxied out to the main runway as John collapsed in a chair and buckled himself in. He was breathing heavy from the run down the terminal and the excitement from being chased by a bunch of Mexican gangsters. The plane took off and they left 'El Diablo's' men behind.

As the plane reached cruising altitude everyone started to finally relax.

Maria reached over to John and said, "thank you senor John, here is the evil chinese crystal ball, and I want you to hold it." "Thank you Maria, I forgive you...I know the chinese crystal ball had dark powers that even I do not understand. I could not let someone evil get their hands on it or who knows what terrible things would happen," said John. "Well Mr. Alvarez, you did your job well and you will be paid handsomely when we get back to America," said John. "As to you Mr. Allende you will be safe in Mexico City for now and maybe you can stay with Tomas' brother until it is safe to go home. The money I gave you will take care of you for a while and you can buy a house with it if you want. "Si senor, I am most grateful. It is my fault that El Diablo found out about the chinese crystal ball. I was drunk at a bar and I spoke too much. I am sorry," said Mr. Allende. "All is well that ends well," said John.

At that point the plane began it approach to Mexico City. After the landing Maria and Mr. Allende left in a taxi bound for Tomas' brother's house. "Mr. Alvarez, you and I will take a charter flight out of here as soon as I can book a flight to San Diego. We can then take a commercial flight or rent a car from there to get back to Los Angeles and finally my home in Capistrano," John said. "Great," said Mr. Alvarez, "it has been a long day and with El Diablo on our tails we need to depart as soon as possible." "Ok I will book a charter flight right now," Said John as headed off to the ticket counter for charter flights.

Two hours later they were both back in the air headed to San Diego, California. “Well if you offer extra money it is amazing how fast they find a charter flight for you,” said John. “I am just happy to get out of Mexico City,” said Mr. Alvarez. The sun was setting over the Mexican desert as the plane flew off into the night. The nightmare was over and the chinese crystal ball was back in John’s possession.

The next day they arrived in San Diego, California. After departing they decided they were too tired to drive to Los Angeles, so they took the train out of downtown San Diego to Los Angeles. It was a three-hour trip to Los Angeles and they could rest on the train as it traveled along the beautiful ocean views. It was around noontime that they arrived, and Mr. Alvarez had to report back to his office and John called Serena and told her he was home and eager to see Samantha. John rented a car to drive home for it was after all a beautiful day and he had successfully recovered the chinese crystal ball. The drive home would be less than an hour and the traffic was light that day.



Chapter 13- The Romanian Gypsy

The nightmare finally seemed over for John. The sun was bright and hot that day, and John was cruising down the Rt. 5 freeway. He made it to Capistrano in about an hour. As he pulled into the driveway of his home he breathed a sigh of relief that he had the Chinese crystal ball back and no one had an opportunity to use it for evil purposes.

Serena and Sam came running out to say hello and hug John as he got out of the car. "I am back Sam, I'm back Serena..." John shouted. "Daddy, daddy, I missed you," cried Samantha joyfully. "John, how good it is you are back safely with us," said Serena. "Come into the house I have prepared a wonderful salad for us to have for lunch," said Serena. "You can tell us all about your adventures when you get settled," said Serena. "Thank you love," said John. They all walked into the house and John had the Chinese crystal ball in a bag he was carrying.

John immediately put the chinese crystal ball back in the floor safe to make sure it was taken care of. After that he took a bath and had lunch with the family afterward. Life seemed good for once in a long time.

Night came quickly that day, and as the sun set, John sat in the courtyard of their house and told Serena the whole story from beginning to end how he hunted down Maria only to find she had sold the chinese crystal ball and some local gangster 'El Diablo,' tried to get the chinese crystal ball for himself. He went on to explain the car chase out of San Miguel de Allende and how it was like a movie scene with the bad guys chasing the good guys, only this was real and deadly." John did not tell Serena that one of the gangsters shot at him in the airport. He left that part of the story out so as not to worry her. Serena was frightened for John as he told the story. Sam had already gone to bed as the new nanny tucked her in.

A week later when everything seem like things were returning to normal John was in town at a taco shop getting lunch when the owner told him about the Flying Dragons and their motorcycle club's stay in Capistrano. "They were looking for some gringo who ripped them off the," owner Joe said. "They asked everyone in town showing a very bad image of some guy walking on a street somewhere in New York City," said Joe. "No Kidding?" said John. "Did they find

the guy,” John Asked. “No but they said they will keep looking, and offered money if anyone knew who this guy was. “Interesting,” John said and he walked to his car with an order of tacos and burritos. John was getting nervous again. He had to come up with a plan to throw the Flying Dragons off his trail. He thought about this as he drove home that day.

Life was beginning to return to normal at the Cardomen family. Yet still the fear of being discovered by the Flying Dragon Chinese gang loomed in the back of John’s mind. Samantha was growing taller and soon would be eleven years old. The Real Estate business was going good with lots of foreclosures for John to buy. John had a plan in mind about trying to get someone else to pose as him and have him disappear in Mexico or something. He was not sure how he was going to accomplish this and not have it traced back to him. “Details, details, “ John thought, “I have to work out the details in order to be successful.” Fortunately, the picture of John was over ten years old that the Flying Dragons were showing around town. It was blurred, and a poor image, so that nobody recognized John from the photo. Somehow, they seem to have lost his name over the years and that made it more difficult to find him.

A month had gone by and John had considered many plans to divert the attention of the Flying Dragons to a dead end that would stop them from seeking him out. Despite all the plans he devised no one plan seemed perfect. It occurred to him that perhaps one peek at the chinese crystal ball might make his choice of plans easier since knowing something about the future would give him an edge that he needed.

So one balmy afternoon John took out the chinese crystal ball and told Serena to stay out of the study room for the day and also Samantha. He did not want to tell her he was going to put the chinese crystal ball on a table in the bright sunlight because he knew it would worry her. After he took the chinese crystal ball out of the floor safe he placed it on a table in the study room in the direct sunlight coming in the window facing south. Now the waiting game was to begin. John sat in a chair for hours that day and no image appeared on the wall. He nodded off briefly in the chair only to awake an hour later in the afternoon. Still nothing appeared on the wall and the sun was beginning to go down. He decided to try it again the next day and wrapped the chinese crystal ball up in a cloth and put it back in the floor safe again.

The next day while his wife was shopping and Samantha was in school John decided to try the chinese crystal ball again. He put it out on the table again in the bright sunlight and waited. Several hours went by and he was getting tired of just sitting again when slowly an image began to appear on the wall. It was an image he had seen before and dismissed. It was the image of a child flying a kite. "What could this mean?" He asked himself. He thought that the day he saw Samantha flying the kite was what the image meant. Now he was not sure. Samantha had no flown a kite in many years. He did not even know if they still had the kite anymore since it was so many years ago that she flew a kite with the nanny. As the image faded, John took the chinese crystal ball and wrapped it up and placed it back in the floor safe.

What could this mystery be all about he kept thinking over and over? He had expected to see something about the Flying Dragons, but that did not happen. He was fearful and curious at the same time. He kept the image he saw a secret from his wife Serena. He had to solve this problem on his own without worrying his wife.

A month later John was watching Television one night and 60 minutes came on with a story about a Gypsy woman who claimed she could tell the future with a

chinese crystal ball. 60 minutes tried to discredit the Gypsy woman who lived in a little town called Goleta but some of the things she predicted actually came true. 60 minutes went back to the Gypsy and asked how she knew these things she predicted were going to come true. She told them it was the chinese crystal ball and that there were only a few chinese crystal balls in the world that had the power to foretell the future. John was intrigued by this gypsy woman's story. She even had a website which he checked out and it was true she lived in Goleta which was north of Santa Barbara on Highway 1. There was a telephone number on the web site so he decided to call it and talk with the, Gypsy. Her name was Jaelle according to the TV show about her. "Hello is this Ms. Jaelle Wander," John asked when the phone call connected. "Yes, this is Madam Jaelle, how can I help you?" "She said. John responded by saying, " I saw your interview on 60/60 on TV and I was very interested in your knowledge of chinese crystal balls." "Yes I am fifth generation Romanian Gypsy and I use a chinese crystal ball sometimes to help me see the future," the gypsy said. John said, "What do you know about Chinese crystal balls?" "Oh Chinese crystal balls are very rare and very old. I have never seen on myself and many say there are no longer around," she said. John thought for a minute and said, well I have a Chinese crystal ball that is thousands of years old and it really shows the future. I need your help in showing me what the images really mean." "Really she said, amazing...does it really work?" she said in an

amazed tone. “Yes I can attest to the fact that it has on several occasions shown me the future and it was true every time.” John said. “Can I arrange to meet with you and show you the chinese crystal ball and tell you what has happened to me as a result of having this chinese crystal ball.” “Yes, yes I am eager to see this magical ball. It is a one in a million thing that can be as good as it can be dangerous.” “When can we meet then? “ asked John. “I live down in Capistrano about two hours from your town,” John said. “Well I have some free time on Friday if you want to come up around noon time that would be fine. I live at 2030 Highway 1, Goleta, California. Look for the red house on the hill on the right of the highway heading north from Santa Barbara,” she said. “OK, I will pay you for you time and see you this Friday, thanks Madam Jaelle.

That Friday John told Serena that he had some business up the coast from Los Angeles involving some real estate on scenic Highway 1. This local road ran along the ocean with beautiful views of the rocky shore and isolated beaches. He took the chinese crystal ball out of the floor safe and wrapped it up in a towel and put it in a hard cover photographic bag.

He took the Mercedes that day, and told Serena he would be back by nighttime. He kissed Samantha goodbye, and got into the car and headed north.

He figured it would take over an hour to get to route 1 north of Los Angeles, Santa Monica.... The traffic on Rt. 5 was the usual heavy flow. He cut over on rt. 405 and to route 10 to Santa Monica where he planned to travel up route 1 along the coast. The weather was beautiful that day and the temperatures were a mild 80 degrees. The sky was cloud free and the ride along route 1 was very enjoying. John cruised along at a comfortable 65 miles an hour so as not to get a ticket from the highway patrol.

Malibu was full of surfers that day, all-waiting for the special wave. The traffic on route 1 was light and the trip was progressing fast. His destination was near Goleta just off Highway 1. He was passing Ventura now, and heading north to Santa Barbara. Driving on Highway 1 was a little slower than he had planned and it was going to take a full two hours to get to Santa Barbara, and north to Goleta. No matter, the drive was most enjoyable.

As he passed Santa Barbara and it's beautiful beaches he kept driving north. The road was becoming narrow now with winding sections of road right next to 300-foot cliffs down to the ocean. He was distracting watching the road and trying to look at the beautiful cliffs and ocean waves splashing over the rocks. His mind began to drift off for a while thinking about the last ten or eleven years since the

fateful day in Chinatown. So much had happened that changed his life when he innocently purchased the ancient chinese crystal ball. Suddenly there was a road sign saying, "Entering Goleta." He must be close now so he slowed down looking for the red house on a hill on the right. After traveling a few miles a strange looking sign said "Madam Jaelle." He slowed down and turned off the highway up a steep dirt road toward a two story wooden house that looked more like a hunting lodge than a normal house. John parked the car and got out and at the door was a bell that he rang and an old woman came to the door. "Hi, I am John Cardomen, we spoke on the phone remember?" John said. "Yes, welcome and thank you for driving all the way up the coast to meet me," Jaelle said. " Upon entering a musty moldy smell hit John's nose and he coughed for a few seconds from the smell. John had the photographic case with him and he placed it on the floor as he sat down on a really old padded chair. "So Mr. Cardomen, you saw me on TV, No?" she said in a thick Romanian accent. "Yes 60 minutes had a special on you, and I just happened to see it," said John. "Ah, yes, they tried to make me look like an old fool. I had a surprise for them and they could not explain my power. They were unbelievers. I am fifth generation gypsy you know," she said. "Yes I learned that on the television show," said John. " "So do you really have a chinese crystal ball or just a glass ball, Mr. Cardomen?" she asked. "No it is real enough, that is for

sure,” said John. “Would you like some herbal tea Mr. Cardomen, I make it myself,” she said. “That sounds fine,” John said.

A few minutes later Madam Jaelle brought two cups and an antique teapot and sat down in front of John with a dining table between them. As John poured the teapot he began to explain the long story how he bought the chinese crystal ball and what happened when the images appeared. Madam Jaelle said and listened intently as the story went on for about 40 minutes. “Do you have the chinese crystal ball with you Madam Jaelle asked?” “Yes right here in this photographic bag,” John said.

He reached down and opened the hard cover bag up and took out the chinese crystal ball wrapped in a cloth. He put it on the table and Madam Jaelle jumped back almost immediately. She cursed something in Romanian and then apologized. “At first glance Mr. Cardomen this looks very old and very Chinese. Romanian chinese crystal balls are usually glass and many are fakes that have no real power. Even my chinese crystal ball I will tell only you has no power whatsoever. It is if a person believes that makes the chinese crystal ball seem real. “May I touch it Mr. Cardomen?” she asked. “Sure be careful,” he said.

Madam Jaelle wiped off her hands and picked up the chinese crystal ball and held it to the light rays coming through the dirty stained glass windows. “Jesus Christ, I cannot believe it she said, this is truly crystal and very old. See on the

bottom is some very old and worn out Chinese markings, maybe Han dynasty? I am not sure, but it is very, very old, “ she said. “How did you say it worked Mr. Cardomen? She asked. “It has to have plenty of light he said, sun light of full moon light and when it is ready it beams an image on a nearby wall or ceiling, “ John said. “Beams an image you say, most interesting,” she said. “I have never seen a chinese crystal ball like this. I cannot see anything inside the chinese crystal ball, which might explain that this crystal needs light to work.’ “I must tell you Mr. Cardomen this is the work of the devil,” she warned. “As you have found out already from what you told me of Chinatown and the bag and the criminals, only bad can come from this chinese crystal ball because it is a source of evil and not good.” She went on to warn John that “this power cannot be controlled and more than often it will tell of death and not life.” “Men who wish to become rich by seeing the future see instead their own death or the death of a loved one as you did Mr. Cardomen,” she went on to say.

“What they do you suggest, “John asked. “Well I do not know,” she replied. “There is centuries of magic in this crystal and all of it evil I am sure. “I have heard of a Chinese crystal ball from one of the early Han dynasties that had great magical powers but brought an end to the life of its owner an early Emperor Gaozu of Han,” she said. “The question is how do I get rid of the Flying Dragons and what does the child flying a kite mean for the future? He asked. “I suppose if we put the

chinese crystal ball in the light it might work and it might not,” Madam Jaelle said. “Does it work right away Mr. Cardomen?” She asked. “Not really, sometimes it works after a few hours and sometimes it does not work for a long time. It works in moon light when there is a full moon too,” John said.

Madam Jaelle looked very frightened. She asked John, “What would you have me do Mr. Cardomen. “Part of me wants to believe this chinese crystal ball shows images and part of me says it is old Romanian folk story,” she said. “There is only one way to find out,” said John. “Put in on a table in bright sunlight and let’s see if something happens,” John said. “We will unlock the devil you know Mr. Cardomen,” Madam Jaelle said. So John took the chinese crystal ball gently in his hands and put it on a table next to the window that had regular glass and had the sun shining through it. They sat and drank tea and watched the sun shine brightly through the chinese crystal ball. The first hour went by and nothing happened. The second hour went by and Madam Jaelle was beginning to get nervous and doubting the magic of the chinese crystal ball until suddenly on the door behind the crystal door across the room from the window an image appeared. Madam Jaelle almost fainted, “Oh my God it is real,” she exclaimed. “What is it?” She asked. John got up to look and amazingly it was the image of the child flying a kite on a sunny day. “It is a child flying a kite just like I have seen before, Seen the child here as he pointed to the child image on the door and look up here is the kite flying

in the sky,” he exclaimed. “Mother of God, “ Madam Jaelle said. “I never would have believed this is as you say, you are telling the truth, and I thought for a while that this was a fake.” “Satan himself has given this crystal power, “ she said. “This is a very dangerous and evil chinese crystal ball you have here Mr. Cardomen,” Madam Jaelle said. “Now as to what the child flying the kite means,” she said. “I have no idea,” she said. “Perhaps you will see a child flying a kite or perhaps something will go up in smoke or fly away like a kite, it is a mystery beyond my power Mr. Cardomen,” she said. “I must tell you however that the owner of the chinese crystal ball risks great danger to themselves in the future and or their loved ones, “ she went on to say.

“Just as you told me what happened to your nanny Maria, she looked at the chinese crystal ball and she saw her husband and child killed. She tried to stop it but it was the future and she could not change the future for some reason. Just as you may not be able to change the future, “ Madam Jaelle said.

“Let me pay you for your time and be on my way,” said John. “Well Mr. Cardomen you have made my day, no money is necessary, I wish you well and I hope you survive the evil power of this chinese crystal ball.” Someday you will need to get rid of the chinese crystal ball or destroy it so that it will no predict anyone else being killed in the future, she said. “Evil, it is evil and there is nothing more I can say about this mystery from early China, “ she went on to say. John

picked up the chinese crystal ball and wrapped it in the cloth it came in and put it back in the photographic case. “Well thank you Madam Jaelle, you have been most informative, “ said John. I will consider what you said about destroying the chinese crystal ball, “John said.

As the drove his car slowly down the dirt road he glanced back to see Madam Jaelle standing in the doorway looking very worried. “No matter,” he thought, “at least I know the chinese crystal ball is Chinese and real and evil too.”

The sun was starting to go down over the ocean as John sped down highway 1 along the winding road back and forth along the high Pacific Ocean cliffs. He was doing about 60 miles an hour and slowing down on the curves to 40 miles an hour till he came around an “s” curve that was difficult to negotiate and as he came out of the “S” curve the setting sun was blinding him in the eyes and he had forgotten to bring his sunglasses. Rounding the corner he noticed something along the side of the road. He could not see exactly what it was as he rapidly approached it. “Oh God, it was a small child, a small child flying a kite.” He swerved to avoid the child while as the same time a cold shiver went down his spine. He asked himself in a split second,” was this the image he saw on the wall?” Just then as he swerved to avoid the child the kite blew low across the road in front of John’s path. He jerked the car to the right to avoid the kite that was headed toward his windshield. The car hit sandy gravel on the side of the road and went into an

incontrollable skid. The child who was flying the kite dropped the kite string and dove behind a bolder as John's car flew off the cliff tumbling down 300 feet to the rocks below. The photographic bag wasn't strapped in so on impact with the rocks and the surf the bag flew out of the passenger car window and hit a bolder and smashed open. The chinese crystal ball flew out of the bag like a bowling ball and hit the rocks with a smashing force shattering into a million little shiny quartz pieces. John smashed his head against the windshield and died instantly. The car was just a clump of metal half covered by the pounding waves and half on the rocks at the bottom of the cliff. The chinese crystal ball did not lie it was showing that a child flying a kite would force John to swerve off a road to his death. Unfortunately, John did not understand that image nor could Madam Jaelle. So a Chinese crystal ball from the Han dynasty thousands of years before finally came to its end as little pebbles in the ocean.

Ten Years Later

Newscasters on Television channel 9 “ Several children discovered magic marbles of smooth quartz today at the bottom of a cliff where a car crash ten years ago occurred. The children claim the marbles are brighter than diamonds, and they seem to be magical. The marbles is perfectly clear and shiny.

The children reported to News Reporter Samuel Seaclyff that if they held the marbles in their hands in the sunlight the marbles got very bright as if they were bulbs instead of a marbles. It seems to be a mystery to everyone except the children. “