

# The God of Parking

By Jack English

## I: Never Snow Street

“Uncle Bill, how come it never snows on your street?”

“I don’t know, Buddy, why doesn’t it snow on my street?”

“This is no joke, Uncle Bill. I really want to know.”

*Ten-year old boys can be so earnest*, he thought. “I don’t know why. Maybe it has something to do with the wind.”

“If it’s the wind, how come it never snows at your bookstore either? Wikipedia says the average snowfall in Boston is 43 inches a year. You get nothing.”

Bill spread his hands and shrugged and that’s when Buddy’s mother came to the rescue.

“Alright, Buddy, into the car. You have to get to school.”

“Can’t I stay with Uncle Bill?” he whined.

“Uncle Bill has to mind the store. Now into the car.”

Buddy grabbed his backpack and trudged down the stairs, climbing into the back of his mother’s Land Rover.

“Thanks for keeping him overnight,” she said. “I’d have no social life at all if I couldn’t drop him here once in a while.”

“Glad to do it, sis. He’s a great kid.”

She put her hand on his shoulder, “But, you’ve got to knock it off.”

“What?”

“You know what! Keeping it from snowing at your house and at the store. People are going to ask questions, and when they do, they are going to come for you, and pretty soon they’ll come for Buddy and me. So, knock it off.”

“I don’t just keep it from snowing at my house. I keep it from snowing on the whole block. Isn’t that what good neighbors are supposed to do? And, I keep the snow away from all the stores on my block too. They’ll never figure it out. Trust me!” Bill Monday gave his sister a reassuring hug.

“Sometimes you make me so mad, I feel like zapping you to Paris... or Syria.”

“Have you told Buddy yet?” he asked.

“Told him what?” Sarah asked, “That our great, great, great, great grandfather was a Greek god that shacked up with a shepherd girl?”

“You know damned well she wasn’t a shepherd girl. She was the daughter of the richest sea captain in Athens. And... by all accounts, she was the most beautiful woman to ever grace the city. You know, I think you have her eyes.”

“Cut it out, Billy. I’m not going to tell him we’re the descendants of a Greek god. He’s only ten.”

“He’s going to find out sooner or later, you better prepare him.”

“I’m not going to tell him until he’s forty!”

“Love you too, Sarah,” he said as he closed the door behind her.

~

Monday finished his coffee and put on a heavy coat, not that he needed it, and headed out the door. Boston had been hit with ten inches of snow overnight, but not a flake fell on his block. He smiled at the thought. It was a private joke shared only with sister.

It was five short blocks from his townhouse to his bookstore. It was a lovely walk most of the time. He had settled into a nice, quiet, comfortable existence. The dramas in his life mostly centered on discovering and promoting some new author, book readings, and the occasional romance. All in all, things couldn’t be better. By the time he arrived at the store two of his employees were already there waiting to be let in.

“Most of the city is snowbound,” Jimmy said. “How did you get them to clean up our block so quickly?” He had snow on the shoulders of his jacket and on his watch cap. The heavy boots he wore were encrusted with ice and snow.

“Friends at city hall,” Monday smiled.

By noon, most of the city was dug out and traffic picked up. A little bell jingled as a customer opened the front door. A well-dressed man approached the counter. “Bill Monday?” he asked.

“I’m Monday.”

“Name’s Linden Conklin,” he stuck out his hand.

“Do I know you?” Monday asked.

“I’ve sent you six letters in the last four months. By now we should be old friends.”

“I’m sorry... I’m just not making the connection,” Monday said. “Wait a minute, didn’t I read you are running for mayor?”

“Maybe, sometime in the future. Right now, I’m just the Deputy Mayor.”

“And?”

“I’m from the government and I’m here to help you.”

“Can I buy you a coffee?” Monday asked.

“Sorry, can’t take anything from anybody.”

“It’s a joke. Coffee is free,” Monday pointed him back to the coffee bar.

After pouring a coffee for each of them, Monday asked, “So how are you going to help me?”

“We’re going to increase the foot traffic in this section of town ten-fold. People with stores like yours will make a fortune.”

“And...”

“We’re building new retail space in the next block, a vertical mall, and we’d like you to consider moving in,” Conklin said.

“No thanks. We’re very comfortable here. We have plenty of space and the whole block has that lovely Federalist style architecture I like. Besides, it’s only a short walk to home.”

Conklin gripped his cup with both hands and leaned forward as though sharing a secret. “The thing is, we’re going to tear down this block for a parking garage.”

“You’re what?” Monday snapped.

“It will be great! You should see the plans. I have a model of the whole complex in my office.”

“You’re not going to tear down *my* store!” Monday raised his voice a little.

“I don’t want to bust your bubble, Bill. May I call you Bill? But, plans have already been approved. We’ve got a builder all lined up. We’re ready to go.”

“I own this building and the one next door. What if I don’t want to sell?” Monday asked.

“Eminent domain my friend. The city will take it anyway. It’s just a matter of time. We’ll give you a fair price. Work with us. It will be great.”

And that’s how it started.

~

Monday fumed all day, but a new author was coming to his *Monday Book Club* that evening, and he had to get ready. Dealing with young Mr. Conklin would have to wait.

“What’s the matter?” Sarah asked when she arrived. “You look angry.”

Monday handed her a stack of letters. “The city wants to condemn the store and tear it down.”

“Why?”

“Parking garage. They want to build some kind of damned vertical mall in the next block.”

She placed her hand on his arm, and in a low voice asked, “What are you going to do?”

“I haven’t decided yet,” he said.

“We don’t want a repeat of Romania 1410 or Germany 1938, so don’t do anything... out of the ordinary.”

“Sis, you worry too much.”

“I worry they will come and get you and try to dissect you to see where your power comes from or convert you to one of their agents. And as soon as they get you, they’ll come looking for Buddy and me. Don’t do anything stupid... or obvious.”

A smile returned to Monday’s face. “Trust me. I’ll think of something.”

“That’s what I’m afraid of,” she said.

“If you’ll excuse me, I have a new author to introduce,” he said.

Bill Monday introduced himself to the forty or so people who came for the book reading. Then he introduced the new author. At the back of the crowd, he noticed a tall, raven-haired woman with high cheek bones and a longish face.

While the author was reading from his novel, Monday quieted himself and projected the thought, *see me* toward the woman. *See me after the read.*

That's about when the author finished and Monday had to resume his host duties, which included inviting everyone to partake in the wine and cheese laid out for his guests. By the time he finished, she was gone.

"What's the matter?" Sarah asked.

"Sis, did you see a striking, dark haired woman at the back of the room?"

"Yeah, maybe. Why?"

"I suggested she see me after the read and she's disappeared."

"Did you speak to her?"

"Well no, not exactly speak, not as such."

Sarah poked him in the chest with her finger. "Don't get in trouble. Don't get Buddy and me in trouble."

"You know I'd never let anything happen to you."

Sarah shook her head. "I've got to go. I only paid the babysitter until nine."

~

By the next morning, Boston had gotten a fresh coat of snow, four inches over top of the prior day's ten inches. But, it didn't snow on Billy Monday's block or the block where his store was located.

He finished his coffee and walked to work as usual. The pavement along his path was clear and dry. Go figure.

As he walked, he liked to think. *How am I going to handle young Mr. Conklin?* After the book club meeting, he read a dozen articles about Conklin. The vertical mall was his signature achievement after working for the city for twelve years. It was the project he hoped would get him elected mayor. But, Conklin didn't seem like the type that could be reasoned with. Other means would have to be used to deal with him.

Monday decided the best way to bring Conklin to heel was to cut away his support. *The Boston Herald* reported the city signed a contract with O'Leary and Sons for the demolition and construction of the parking garage so he decided to pay them a visit.

## II: O'Leary and Sons

Shamus O'Leary was a big burley man, six-two, and at least three hundred pounds. To say his hands were the size of shovels wouldn't be much of an exaggeration. He looked up from his desk and saw Monday standing in the doorway.

"Who the hell are you and how the hell did you get in here?"

"The name is Bill Monday. Your secretary let me in. I said I was from the city."

"Are you one of Conklin's people?"

"Well no. Not exactly. Conklin wants to tear down my store to make way for a parking garage and I don't want him to."

"What the hell do you want me to do about it?"

"Cancel the contract. Withdraw. Tell him you can't do it."

"And why the hell would I do that?"

It's bad luck to tear down people's stores."

"Luck? You make your own luck in this world," O'Leary said.

Monday scratched his head. "I agree, but..."

"But what?" O'Leary barked.

"I just have a bad feeling about this project."

"Well that's too damned bad. Now would you mind getting your butt out of my office?"

"Suppose somebody found a bald eagle nest on my building. You wouldn't be able to demo it then, would you?" Monday asked.

"Bald eagle? We're in the middle of a damned city. Where the hell is a bald eagle going to come from?"

Just then, they heard a loud squawking sound. A bald eagle was standing on the ledge outside O'Leary's window. It was holding a fish down with one foot, tearing its flesh off with its beak.

O'Leary banged on the glass, "Beat it," he said.

The bird looked at him for a second or two and then flew away, leaving the half-eaten fish behind.

That's when the computer on O'Leary's desk beeped. "I gotta take this call." He punched a button and a man's image appeared on the screen. He was holding something long and thin.

"We were digging a foundation for the 34<sup>th</sup> street project and I think we stumbled into an old graveyard."

"Why do you say that?" O'Leary snapped.

The man waved the long object in front of the camera. "Looks like a leg bone," he said.

"Could it be from an animal?"

"A leg bone might be from an animal, but the hands are definitely human."

"Crap," O'Leary shook his head. "Better call the city and let them know. Send everybody home for the day."

"Bad luck," Monday said.

“Did you do this?”

Monday spread his hands and shrugged. “How could I possibly plant bones without someone knowing about it? Besides, how are you going to work in the snow anyway?”

“What do you think? We’re a bunch of buttercups? If we didn’t work in the snow, we’d be out of business four months a year. Do you think they call off football games just because it snows?” O’Leary asked.

“I have no idea,” Monday said.

“They don’t. Just like football players, we’re manly men and a little damned snow isn’t going to stop us!”

O’Leary put a beefy forearm on his desk and leaned toward Monday. “Who do you work for?”

“I work for myself.” Monday handed O’Leary a business card. It said *Monday Books*.

O’Leary threw it on his desk without looking at it. “Is this a union thing? Are you trying to shake me down?”

“I wouldn’t think of it. I just don’t want you to tear down my store.”

A loud, low rumbling sound came from O’Leary’s computer. The man he had been talking to was obscured by a cloud of dust.

“What the hell happened?” O’Leary asked.

“One of our bulldozers fell into a sink hole.”

“Anybody hurt?”

“No. Everyone was on break. But, I’m going to have to bring in a crane to lift the dozer out of the hole. Then we have to fill it.”

“I’m not paying for that! I’ll get the dozer, but the client is going to have to pay for filling the hole.”

“More bad luck?” Monday asked.

“You little sponge cake, you try to mess with me and I’ll flatten you!”

“I don’t want to mess with you. I just don’t want you to tear down my store.”

“Contracts have been signed,” O’Leary said, “hands have been shaken, money has changed hands, palms have been greased. It’s too damned late to do anything. Your store has got to come down.” O’Leary’s face was turning red. A vein popped out of the side of his neck. His hands were curled into fists.

Monday stood calm as a glass of water and said, “*The Herald* says you have nine projects in the city. Seems to me you don’t need bad luck on any of them.”

O’Leary mashed a button on his desk, “Otto! I got a guy here who is trying to shake us down. What do we do with shakedown artists?”

Otto Schmidlap appeared at O’Leary’s door. He was as large as O’Leary, but a couple of inches taller and half his age.

Monday raised his hands, “OK! OK! I’m going. I’m going.”

After Monday left the office, O’Leary said, “Otto, there is something odd about that guy. Find out who the hell he is and who he works for. I don’t believe for one damned minute he runs a bookstore.”

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A couple of days passed and he heard from neither the city nor O’Leary and Sons. He hoped they would abandon their project. But it just wasn’t to be.

The little bell over the front door tingled and Conklin stormed in. “I tried to be nice,” he said. “I tried to be civil. I tried to get you the best possible deal for your store, but you’ve done nothing but make trouble, organizing the other store owners like you did. Well, now we’re down to bare knuckles politics. The city is going to take your property whether you like it or not. There is an eminent domain hearing next week.” He held a brown manila envelope toward Monday.

Monday kept his hands at his side, “You know it’s bad luck to force people to do things they don’t want to do.”

“Luck be damned. You can’t stand in the way of progress,” Conklin said. He thrust the envelope in Monday’s direction again.

Monday kept his hands at his sides.

“Read these papers, don’t read them. I don’t care,” Conklin’s raised his voice. “By this time next week, it will be all over.” He threw the envelope at Monday’s feet and walked out.

Monday’s sister sidled up to him.

“Well, Sarah, that went well,” he said.

“Can they really take the store?”

“Who knows? We’ll just have to see what happens.”



### III: The Woman

Bill Monday was ringing up a book when he saw the raven-haired woman from the book reading. She was looking at something two aisles away. “Sarah,” he whispered to his sister, “there she is.”

“Very attractive,” she said. “Have you spoken to her yet?”

“Not yet. I think I’ll call her over.” *Look up*, he thought, *look up*.

His sister smacked him on the arm. “Don’t be the god of dorks. Walk over and introduce yourself.”

“Don’t worry, I’ve got this. Come to me,” he whispered. “Come to me.” He suddenly felt the zipper of his pants.

“What’s the matter?” Sarah asked.

“For a split second, I thought my fly was open.”

“Well, zip up your fly and go talk to her. I’ll watch the cash register.”

Monday gave her a half turn, then walked out from behind the counter toward the woman in question.

“May I help you?” he asked.

She was tall and slender with high cheek bones and an olive complexion. He guessed she was Italian or Greek. But, he wasn’t good at guessing that sort of thing so he didn’t mention it.

She held a book by the spine. It was an old bound volume of Shakespeare plays. “Do I look lost?” she purred.

“No. I saw you at the book club. I just thought I’d see whether I could help you with something. My name’s Billy Monday.”

“I know,” she waved her free hand above her head, “and all this is yours.”

He looked at the volume she was holding. “Shakespeare, he was a hell of a guy. He couldn’t hold his liquor though.”

“And you know this because...?”

“I don’t know. I must have heard it somewhere,” a sly smile spread across Monday’s face. “Well, if there’s nothing I can help you with...” He turned away.

“I didn’t say that,” the slightest hint of a smile curled the corners of her mouth. “I understand you promote new writers.”

“If they’re good. Why? Are you a writer?”

“I have ambitions,” she cocked her head a little.

“Uncle Bill,” his nephew pulled on his sleeve. “Excuse me, but can I use your computer?”

“Sure Buddy, the office is open.” He waved him off without taking his eyes off the woman. “He’s my nephew. His mom helps with the store, so he comes here after school.”

Buddy pulled on Monday’s sleeve again, “Is she your girlfriend?”



Monday gasped a little, “She’s just a customer, Buddy.” He paused and then said, “Where are my manners. This is my nephew Buddy. Buddy this is... I’m sorry I didn’t catch your name.”

“That’s because I didn’t throw it.” She held out her hand toward Buddy. “I’m Daphne Godwin. Pleased to meet you, Buddy.”

Buddy shook her hand and then looked up at her like he didn’t know what to say. Finally, he blurted out, “It never snows on Uncle Bill’s block. Isn’t that weird?”

“Don’t you have homework to do or something?” Monday asked.

“But...”

“Homework...” Monday pointed to the office.

His nephew took three steps toward the office, then he turned back toward Godwin. “Funny thing, it never snows on this block either.”

“It never snows on your block?” she asked with one eyebrow raised. “Really?”

“He’s exaggerating as boys will. I get snow, but the city plows it up so quickly, it’s as though there was no snow at all.” He shrugged. “You said you were a writer. Have you published anything?”

She inhaled a deep breath and let it out. “Not yet. I was hoping you could give me some pointers.”

“Let me buy you a cup of coffee and we can talk.”

“I thought coffee was free.”

“It is. It’s just an expression.”

“You know Barnes and Noble and other bookstores aren’t going to like you handing out free coffee.” There was a mischievous twinkle in her eye.

“I know. That’s why I do it,” Monday grinned.

~

Bill Monday and Daphne Godwin got coffee and sat at a back table.

“What do you write?” Monday asked. “Let me rephrase that, what do you want to write?”

“I’m not sure. I like short stories. On the other hand, I have always admired investigative reporting, you know, putting together the clues to reveal some deep dark secret.”

“Do you have a deep dark secret in mind?”

“There is always some deep dark secret somewhere that people want to hide.”

“That seems like it’s a long way from writing short stories,” Monday said.

“Have you forgotten your Shakespeare? Hamlet’s uncle killed his father by pouring poison in his ear. Hamlet had a traveling theater company put on a play for his uncle in which a king was poisoned in the same way. ‘The play’s the thing wherein I’ll catch the conscience of the King’.”

“Very good. So, what have you done so far?” he asked.

“I’ve been keeping a journal of story ideas and if I hear an interesting bit of dialogue, I jot it down. Maybe I can work it into one of my stories.”

“Do you write every day?” he asked.

“I try to write a thousand words a day. Sometimes it’s just a scene, sometimes it’s a conversation, sometimes it’s the description of a situation or place.”

“It sounds like you are headed in the right direction.”

Godwin stood, “I have to get back to work.”

“I hope you won’t be a stranger,” Monday said.

“Stranger than what?”

“I mean I hope I will see you again,” he said.

“We’ll see,” she said over her shoulder as she headed for the door.

#### IV: The Street Where You Live

It snowed another six inches overnight. Bill Monday was up, had a cup of coffee in his hand, and was walking around his townhouse in a robe and slippers when he looked outside. There were a dozen men walking up and down the street carrying electronic equipment bristling with wires and antennae. They blocked the traffic with police cars and orange rubber cones. Several of the men were kneeling in the street next to a gadget. One was carrying an anemometer to measure wind speed and direction. Another was lying flat on the street using what looked like a stethoscope, listening to the pavement.

Monday finished his coffee, got dressed, and walked down his front steps. “What’s up?” he asked one of the men.

“Somebody reported that it never snows on this block.”

Monday tilted his head and looked at the man from the top of his eyeballs.

“Hey, I didn’t believe it either, but the rest of the city got another six inches last night and this block is dry as a bone. Something’s got to be going on.”

“Like what?” Monday asked.

“Damned if I know,” the man said.

“Who are all these people?” Monday asked.

“The two guys in blue coveralls are from NOAA.”

“NOAA?”

“The National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration. The guys in the red coveralls are from the EPA. The guy lying on the street, listening to God knows what, is a geologist from Boston U.”

“What’s a geologist got to do with snow?” Monday asked.

“They wanted to know whether there was some kind of geologic activity on this block, a hot spring, volcanic outgassing, magma plume....”

“Magma plume?” Monday asked.

The man spread his hands, “All I know is I got a call last night that said I had to be at a 6:00 a.m. meeting with these guys to find out what was going on.”

“Who are those guys?” Monday pointed to three guys wearing sunglasses standing off to the side watching everyone else.

“The suits? I don’t know for sure. They didn’t introduce themselves at the meeting. I’ll tell you this,” the man stepped close to Monday and whispered. “I noticed slight bulges under the left side of their suits.”

“Shoulder holsters?”

“I wouldn’t be surprised.”

“And I overheard one of them call the older guy Colonel. Very mysterious. Very spooky.”

“Would I be out of line if I asked who you were?” Monday asked.

“I’m Bob Platt. I work for the city.”

“And what do you do for them?”

“I’m an engineer. I do water, sewer, infrastructure, stuff like that.”

“Then you must know Linden Conklin,” Monday said.

“He’s my boss’s boss.”

“I hear he’s running for mayor,” Monday said.

“Well not officially, not yet.”

“The engineer tilted his head toward Monday a little. “To know him is to not love him.”

“What do you mean?” Monday asked.

“He’s a self-serving putz, wrapped in a sugar coating. But, you didn’t hear that from me. We can let you move your car, but you can’t bring it back until we figure this thing out.”

“Thanks, but I don’t have a car. Well, good luck,” Monday gave the man a little wave and headed to the store.

~

It was late afternoon when Daphne Godwin walked into the store. He wanted to make a bee-line to her, to chat her up to get to know her in the most intimate way a man can know a woman. But it wasn’t to be. There was a long line of customers, and he was the only one on the cash register. He could have sent them all away, but he had chosen the quiet life of a bookseller, so he thought he’d stick to it.

He kept one eye on her as he rang up the sales. She cruised down the children’s aisle picking up one of the *Golden Book’s*, then moved onto *Harry Potter*. She spent time in the used book section. It was mostly classics, Shakespeare, Victor Hugo, Jules Verne and so forth. The more people he rang up, the longer the line got.

He looked around the store. Where were his people? They couldn’t all be in the back room cataloging inventory. She drifted into the philosophy section. She spent several minutes looking at Locke, Bacon, Aristotle, and Plato. More customers came. He literally ached to go over and talk to her.

By the time she drifted into contemporary fiction, Jimmy emerged from the storeroom carrying a stack of books.

“Jimmy!” Monday shouted loud enough to turn heads. “I need you!”

The boy put down the books he was carrying and scurried over.

“Please take over the cash register. There is something I have to do,” he said without taking his eyes off Godwin.

“Hi Daphne!” he said. His voice was high and squeaky as a schoolboy’s.

“Mr. Monday,” she nodded.

“Please call me Bill. What can I do for you?”

“I want advice on a story.”

Monday pointed toward the tables in the back of the store. “Tell me about it.”

They got coffee and sat at a corner table.

She wrapped her hands around the cup as if to keep warm. “The story is set in Philadelphia.”

“Philadelphia? Why not here in Boston? You should write what you know about.”

“Boston is too close to home for this story.”

“What’s your story about?”

“This guy is the descendant of a Norse god. And, he is living a quiet life in Philadelphia running a music store.”

“A descendant of a Norse god? Music store? Don’t you think that’s a little fanciful?” Monday asked.

“Why? People love music. And, a store is a perfect place for him to meet young musicians, and promote their careers, and other things.”

“And other things?”

“This guy loves to romance women and well... one thing leads to another.”

“So, this,” Monday held out his hand toward her, “is a romance... with the supernatural as a complicating factor?”

“I don’t know. Is this a romance?” she arched an eyebrow.

“Would you like it to be a romance?” Monday spread his hands.

“I haven’t decided yet.”

“Tell me about yourself,” Monday said. “Have you lived in the city long? How long have you wanted to write?”

“That’s a lot of questions. Maybe I should hold onto those details until I know you a little better.”

Monday made a large arc with a hand which embraced the whole bookstore. “My life is an open book. I am but a humble peddler.”

She reached across the table and gently caressed his cheek. “I find that hard to believe,” she whispered. “There is so much more to you. I feel as though you are holding onto some tremendous secret.”

He straightened up and placed his finger tips on the table. “Nope! No secrets. Haven’t got a one. So, tell me about your story. What happens? Do you have a working title?”

“My working title is ‘The God of Parking’. There is never enough parking around my character’s store. So, he uses his godly powers to open spaces for his customers and he makes sure none of them get parking tickets.”

“And then what happens?” he asked.

“An auditor from the parking authority investigates why there are never any parking tickets on his block. They get into an argument. My character uses his godly powers to make sure no parking meter in the city ever runs out of time. The city investigates and suspicion falls on him.”

“How is the conflict resolved?” Monday asks.

“I haven’t decided yet.”

“Tell me how romance fits into the story.”

“The parking authority sends a woman around to get close to my main character. She says she is a budding singer and wants his advice. They dance around the Maypole, if you know what I mean, while she gets dirt on him. What do you think?”

“It could work, if you can write witty banter between the two of them and build the suspense. So, enough about your story. Tell me about you.”

“I moved to Boston five years ago. I got a job and now I’d like to write.”

“Got a job doing what?”

“This and that, whatever needs to be done.”

“And can you tell me where you work? Or is that a secret?”

“It’s no secret. I work for the city.”

“The city is pretty big. Can you tell me where in the city?”

“I work in the Planning Department.”

“So, you must know Linden Conklin.”

“Sure, he’s my boss.”

Just when he thought things couldn’t get stickier, two men walked into the store. One was wearing a blue NOAA jumpsuit. It was cold out, but the man looked like he was dressed for the Artic. The other man was fortyish wearing a slick suit and a long, expensive looking wool coat. He had a crew cut. It was the man the city engineer heard someone call Colonel.

“If you’ll excuse me, Daphne. I have to see a man about a dog.”

“You’ve got to pee?”

“Different kind of dog,” he said.

He walked over to the men and said, “Gentlemen, may I help you?”

“Are you Monday? William Monday?” the Colonel asked.

He pointed to a portrait of himself that one of his customers painted. It was hung on the wall behind the cash register. A brass plaque with letters three inches high said, “Billy Monday.”

“That’s me.”

“Do you live at 230 Calhoun Street?”

“Yep! What’s going on?”

“We understand it never snows on your block. And we’re interviewing all the residents.”

“You have me at a disadvantage. You know my name, but I don’t know yours,” Monday said.

“He’s Tom Wilson from NOAA and my name is Mayfair, Special Services,” He flashed an ID that could have been a book club membership it went by so fast.

“Special Services?” Monday tilted his head. “Is that like catering or something?”

The Colonel frowned. “Is there somewhere we can talk?”

“Coffee bar’s in the back,” Monday led the way.

They each got a cup and sat at a corner table. It was the same corner table where he tried to chat up Godwin. By then she had vanished.

“Alright, what’s this all about?” Monday asked.

“We heard it never snows on your block, and we want to know why,” the Colonel said.

“That’s ridiculous,” Monday said. “Of course it snows on my block.”

The Colonel leaned back in his chair and flicked his hand in Wilson’s direction.



“We,” Wilson said, “NOAA went back over satellite images of your block for the last five years. It hasn’t snowed there once.”

“I can’t believe that,” Monday pretended surprise. “Boston gets forty or fifty inches of snow a year. How could it not snow on my block?”

The Colonel rested his arms on the table and leaned in. “That’s what we want to know. If it’s a statistical fluke or some naturally occurring weather pattern that’s fine. But if it’s not...”

“What else could it be?” Monday asked.

Colonel Mayfair whispered, “Let me caution you that anything we say here is strictly top secret. You can’t tell anyone. What we want to know is whether someone has figured out how to control the weather. If they have, it could be the most devastating weapon since the H-bomb.”

Monday spread his hands and leaned back in his chair. “If you just wanted to know who controls the weather, why didn’t you ask?” Monday stood and asked in a voice loud enough to be heard from one end of the store to the other, “These guys want to know who is controlling the weather.” He pointed to Wilson and Mayfair.

“It’s those godless Russians!” somebody shouted from the back of a bookstack.

“Nah, it’s the damned aliens and their UFOs!” somebody else said.

A thin man with graying hair, a tattered coat and a three-day old beard said, “My money is on the CIA, them and their black ops.”

“Give that man an aluminum foil hat!” Monday pointed to the man, then he sat back down.

“You think this is funny?” Mayfair said through clenched teeth.

“You want to go on television and try to explain your... I don’t even know whether you could call it a theory. I think we’re done here,” Monday jerked his thumb in the direction of the door.

Mayfair stood, paused for a moment, then knocked his coffee over with the back of his hand. The hot liquid spread across the table and dripped onto the floor. “Oops!” he said, and then marched toward the door.

Wilson waved his hands a little. “Sorry,” he said, and followed Mayfair out the door.

Monday grabbed a wad of napkins from the coffee bar and started mopping up the mess. When he looked up, Daphne Godwin was standing there.

“Who were those guys?”

“Just some government dorks.”

“Do you consider me a government dork?” she asked, swaying a little.

“No, but your boss is a dork. He wants to tear down my store.”

“I know.”

“Is there anything you can do about it?” She shook her head no. “Can you help me with my writing?”

Monday smiled up at her. “Maybe, if you’re good. Say, why don’t you come to my place and I’ll cook dinner for you.”



“You cook?”

“I scramble eggs and make toast. Maybe I can even find a bottle of wine somewhere,” he said.

“Let me think about it. Conklin wanted me to keep an eye on you, but I don’t think that’s quite what he had in mind.

## V: Muscle

Construction is a tough business. Unions, subcontractors, banks, clients, city officials and competitors are always trying to take a piece of you. And that's why it was important to have muscle. Otto Schmidlap was Shamus O'Leary's muscle.

Being the good muscle that he was, Otto Schmidlap went to have a talk with Bill Monday as instructed. And when O'Leary told Schmidlap to "talk" to someone, he always smacked his right fist into his left hand.

~

With all the snow and everything, most of the city was a mess. But, not Monday's block. Schmidlap cruised along looking at the business card O'Leary had handed him. Then he looked at the sign over the store's large plate glass window. It said Monday Books. Then he thought to himself, *Wow! A parking space right in front! What luck.* He paused for a second and looked around to make sure there weren't any no parking signs and saw none. There was only a white box on the sidewalk next to the street, two feet by two feet and about three feet high. It said Monday Books on it in large friendly letters. There was a large red bow on top. He pulled into the space.

The front door was heavy, brass and old. He pushed it open with his fingertips. The bell over the door signaled his arrival. He looked around for Bill Monday.

A well-dressed man with a crew cut and an expensive wool overcoat brushed past him. He was followed by a man in a blue jumpsuit.

Monday was still mopping up the coffee Mayfair spilled and glanced up to see Schmidlap enter the store.

"Jimmy," Monday said to one of his clerks, "bring in the box."

"But, you never bring in the box until the store closes," Jimmy said.

Monday tilted his head down a little. In a very quiet voice he said, "Jimmy, just do it please."

The box was hollow. It had no bottom. It was slipped over a fire hydrant so it wouldn't blow away.

"Sure boss."

Jimmy hadn't gone ten feet when Schmidlap spotted Monday.

Monday left the soggy paper towels on the table and walked toward Schmidlap. "Come to buy a book?" he asked.

"I want to talk to you!" Schmidlap said.

Monday spread his hands. "So, talk."

Schmidlap poked Monday in the chest with his finger, hard. "What the hell do you think you are doing?" He poked him in the chest again, hard. "No one muscles in on our business." He poked him again, but this time his finger felt like it had arthritis. "Owww!" he said. Then he grabbed the lapels of Monday's sport coat and pulled him close.

He could feel Schmidlap's breath on his face. "Can you take a breath mint please?" Monday said as he wrinkled his nose and waved his hand back and forth in front of his face.

"Don't play the wise-ass with me, you little sponge cake." As he said it, Schmidlap's left ankle suddenly gave way, and he stumbled backward letting go of Monday's coat and bumping into a bookcase. "Stop screwing around before somebody gets hurt."

"I don't want to screw around with anybody. I just don't want you to tear down my store. It's bad luck to force people to do stuff they don't want to do."

"People make their own luck," Schmidlap growled.

"I agree."

"So, stop doing what you are doing!" Schmidlap screamed.

"Doing? What do you mean doing?" Monday asked.

"You know damned well what I mean," Schmidlap held onto the bookcase for support. "Planting bones at our construction site so people will think we're building over graveyards. Getting bald eagles to nest at our construction sites so we've got the Fish and Wildlife Service all over our butts. And, keeping men from getting to our construction sites. That's against the law!"

"What do you mean keeping them from your construction sites?" Monday shifted his weight a little.

"We have nine projects in the city. And after your visit to Mr. O'Leary all the crews for all the sites showed up at the 34<sup>th</sup> street project."

"So?"

"They weren't supposed to go there! Not all of them," Schmidlap said.

"So, send them where they should go," the hint of a smile crossed Monday's face.

"We did... we tried. We sent them out to the other eight projects and they all ended up back at 34<sup>th</sup> street."

"Don't you have GPS?" Monday asked.

"Of course, we have GPS. But, it kept sending everyone back to 34<sup>th</sup> street."

"Then there is something wrong with your GPS. Don't you have maps?"

"Of course we have maps! Everybody laid out a route from the 34<sup>th</sup> Street project to where they were supposed to go and they still ended up at 34<sup>th</sup> Street."

"Weird," Monday smiled. "What did you do?"

"O'Leary sent everyone home."

"And then what happened?"

"The next day, everyone ended up at 34<sup>th</sup> Street again."

"Couldn't the crews find the other sites? Did they know where they were?"

"The crews had been to the other sites dozens of times before you showed up. But now, no matter what route they take, they end up at 34<sup>th</sup> Street."

"Bad luck," Monday said. "It's bad luck to tear down people's stores."

"I'll give you some bad luck," Schmidlap said. He raised a massive fist shoulder high and was about to launch it in Monday's direction when Monday stepped back a little.

Schmidlap put weight on his sprained ankle again, staggered sideways and grabbed a bookcase knocking a couple of books onto the floor.

“If your company withdraws from the contract, your luck might change,” Monday said.

Schmidlap rose up, holding onto a bookcase with one hand and said, “Luck my ass,” he took another swipe at Monday, missed, and hopped around on his good foot for a second or two before grabbing onto another bookcase for support.

“Can I get you a chair?” Monday snapped his fingers and pointed. Jimmy brought over a chair. Schmidlap sat in it.

“Why don’t you tell me what the problem is, and maybe we can work it out,” Monday said.

“You know what the problem is. We turned up old graves and Indian artifacts at three of our worksites the day you came to the office. The next day, the city found bald eagles nesting at four other worksites. And yesterday, all the crews showed up at the 34<sup>th</sup> street again,” he whined. His brash threats were replaced by resignation.

“Can’t they work on the 34<sup>th</sup> street project?” Monday asked.

“That was the first site shut down because we turned up graves.”

“And?”

“We can’t do any work there until the city archeologist signs off on it.”

“Send your people somewhere else,” Monday shrugged.

“We tried! We tried! We tried!” Schmidlap ran a massive hand through his hair. “It was just no use. What the hell are you doing to us?”

“Jimmy,” Monday looked up, “this man desperately needs a cup of coffee and bring him a muffin... make that an apple strudel.” Monday looked down at the massive hulk of a man sitting defeated on a small chair. “How could I do any of that? I’m just a humble bookseller, but...”

“But what?” Schmidlap straightened up.

“If O’Leary and Sons bailed out of the city contract, I have a feeling your luck would change.”

Schmidlap stuffed half a strudel in his mouth and chewed silently for a while, taking the occasional sip of coffee. He looked at Monday, then back at the rest of the strudel and stuffed it into his mouth.

“Hey boss,” Jimmy said. “somebody’s car is about to be towed.”

Monday glanced out the front window. “What kind of car?”

“It’s a red Dodge Charger.”

“Hey! That’s my car!” Schmidlap yelled. “I have a red Dodge Charger!” He looked out the store’s front window and a tow truck was hoisting his car in the air.

He hobbled out the front door, and yelled at the tow truck driver as he pulled away.

Monday and Jimmy followed him outside.

Schmidlap looked where the white box had been. There was a fire hydrant there now. Then he glanced through the bookstore's large glass window. The white box with the red ribbon on top was sitting just inside.

Schmidlap poked a large finger in Monday's direction. "This is your fault!" he screamed.

"More bad luck," Monday said. "If I had to guess, I'd say your luck is going to stay bad until you drop the contract."

"You can't win," Schmidlap said. "You can't beat city hall."

"Sure, I can," Monday smiled a sweet, angelic smile. A smile that overflowed with tranquility. A smile that made Schmidlap even madder.

"Besides," Monday said, "I don't want to win. I just want to be left alone."

"You little sponge cake!" Schmidlap took another swing at him, missed and hobbled around on the sidewalk for a second trying to regain his balance.

"Jimmy," Monday said, "take my car and give this gentleman a ride anywhere he wants."

"But boss, you don't have a car. You walk to work."

"Damn," Monday looked down at the sidewalk, "more bad luck."

"You wise-ass," Schmidlap reached out to grab him.

Monday took a step back, so he was just out of reach.

"Do you want me to call you a cab?" Monday asked.

Schmidlap was spitting mad. All he could do was shake his head yes.

"OK. You're a cab."

"This isn't over Monday!" Schmidlap shook his fist at the back of Monday as he and Jimmy returned to the store.

Monday walked back to the coffee bar and looked around for the lovely and exotic Daphne Godwin, but she was nowhere to be found.

## VI: I'm from the Government and I'm Here to Help You

Linden Conklin got more resistance from the store owners than he expected and called a public meeting to explain how great the project was going to be. The meeting was jammed. Store owners, their employees, and the tenants who lived in the apartments above the stores filled the hall. A handful of contractors and city employees stood against the rear wall. Four uniformed police were standing by, just in case.

A half-dozen city representatives sat behind low tables up on stage.

He picked up a microphone and addressed the crowd. "Welcome. I'm Deputy Mayor Conklin. I understand that some of you are concerned about our redevelopment project, but let me assure you there is no cause for alarm. This is going to put money in everyone's pocket." Conklin used his free hand to sweep across the whole audience.

"Yeah the contractor's pocket!" someone in the audience yelled.

"Everyone's pocket," Conklin swept his hand across the crowd again. "Remember, I'm from the government and I'm here to help you."

"Help yourself," someone in the audience yelled.

"Once I explain the project, you'll see how we can all profit," Conklin stepped next to an easel bearing a watercolor of the planned vertical mall and the parking garage which was going to replace the torn down stores. They were both surrounded by trees. "As you can see, this new mall and parking garage will enhance the beauty of the block as compared to the hundred-year-old buildings that are there now..."

A thin, older man with a three-day old beard stood and stretched a boney finger in Conklin's direction. "Don't trust him. He's with the CIA." A little aluminum foil stuck out from underneath the man's baseball cap. He turned toward the back of the room and pointed his boney finger at Colonel Mayfair. "Don't trust him either. He's from the CIA, too! I heard him talking about weather modification."

Mayfair put a hand over his face and turned toward the wall.

"Where's all this damned snow coming from?" somebody shouted in Mayfair's direction.

A woman stood and shook her fist at Conklin. "My street hasn't been plowed yet. What are you going to do about it?"

"Mine either," a voice said.

"Isn't that your department?" the woman demanded.

"We're not here to discuss snow," Conklin said. "We're here to discuss the redevelopment project. And, hopefully get you all on board."

A man in a heavy coat, wearing a hat with ear flaps, stood and shook his fist at Conklin. "If you can't even plow the snow, how the hell are you going to build that... project?"

"If you have a problem with plowing on your block, leave your name and address with my associate, Ms. Godwin, and I will see to it." He stretched out his hand toward Daphne who was standing off to one side.

A woman stood with her hands clasped in front of her said, “Please don’t tear down our store. My husband and I spent our whole lives building it up, and we want to leave it to our children.”

“This is going to be better,” Conklin pointed to the watercolor. “And, you can rent a store in our vertical mall.”

“We don’t want to rent. We own our building free and clear,” she sobbed.

The old man with the aluminum foil tucked under his hat stood again and pointed his finger at Conklin. “Why does the CIA want to tear down this block? What are they covering up?”

Bill Monday touched his thumbs and forefingers together lightly and then spread them apart a quarter inch. Conklin’s belt split. It didn’t come unbuckled, it simply split in the middle.

“We are going to plant trees around the garage to soften its look...,” Conklin said.

Monday lowered his index finger a smidge and the zipper on Conklin’s fly went down.

“We’re going to surround the whole complex with wide brick sidewalks and antique style street lamps....”

Monday put his thumbs and forefingers lightly together again and jerked his hands down a quarter inch.

Conklin’s pants slipped down around his knees. He was wearing white boxer shorts with large red hearts on them.

A roar of laughter filled the hall.

Conklin looked down at his shorts, saw the hearts and said in a loud voice, “These aren’t my shorts!” That triggered an even bigger explosion of laughter that rolled on and on as he tried to pull up his pants with one hand and gripped the microphone with the other.

“Whose shorts are they?” a woman shouted.

“Can we get back to business here?” he shouted. For some reason, his pants just wouldn’t stay up.

A man in the audience stood up and yelled, “How can we trust a man who can’t keep his pants on?”

Conklin’s face turned red. “Alright, meeting’s over!” He waved at the police. “Do something!” he screamed.

O’Leary couldn’t help laughing, even though Conklin had slipped him the multi-million-dollar contract for the parking garage.

Bill Monday turned back toward Shamus O’Leary and caught his eye. He mouthed “bad luck.”

O’Leary nodded yes and pushed his way through the crowd toward Monday. Otto Schmidlap walked a step behind O’Leary.

“How’s the ankle?” Monday asked.

“It’s O.K.” Schmidlap said.

“How’s the finger?”



Schmidlap bent it a couple of times. "It's fine."

"Good. How's the car?"

"The tow truck driver dropped it off in the next block. Go figure!"

Monday turned the palms of his hands up. "It's a miracle."

"Alright Monday," O'Leary said. "Cut the small talk. We're not here to chit-chat. How much do you want?" He was carrying a leather briefcase.

"What do you mean how much?" Monday asked.

"How much will it take to get rid of the Indian artifacts, the bald eagles, and the lost work crews?" He opened the top of the briefcase a crack. There were bundles of hundred-dollar bills inside.

Monday shrugged. "I don't want money. I just don't want you to tear down my store."

"What the hell do you want me to do about it?" O'Leary looked like his blood pressure was going through the roof.

"Withdraw from the contract. Say you can't do it."

"A contract has been signed. Money has changed hands. What reason would I give?" O'Leary asked.

"Tell them your engineer says the soil is too soft."

"They're not going to let me out of a contract because I tell them something. They're going to want engineering reports and...."

"Like this?" Monday reached into his suit coat and pulled out a one-page report.

O'Leary recognized the letterhead. It was the biggest engineering firm in the city. The report said, "The land in question is a filled-in creek bed. Even though it has supported four-story brick buildings for more than a century, the soil won't take the weight of a parking garage." The letter was signed by Martin Short.

"Who the hell is Martin Short?" O'Leary demanded.

"He's a comedian," Monday said.

"You want me to withdraw from a contract based on a letter from a comedian?" he growled.

"You want your luck to change?" Monday asked calmly. He pulled another letter out of his pocket. It was addressed to Conklin and was on O'Leary's letterhead.

"Where did you get my letterhead?" he demanded.

Monday handed him a pen. "Sign it please."

O'Leary cursed under his breath but signed the withdrawal letter anyway.

Monday tucked the letter and the engineering report in an envelope and said, "Might as well deliver this right now so your luck can start changing," he pointed to Conklin who was standing in a corner cursing out a couple of his staff people.

"And if I deliver this letter there, will be no more bald eagles?"

"None."

"No more Indian artifacts?"

"Not one."

“No graves or human bones?”

“Zero!” Monday swished his hand in front of him.

“And none of my men will get lost on the way to a jobsite?”

Monday spread his hands, “How would that even be possible?”

O’Leary balled up his fist like he wanted to smack Monday in the chops, but abruptly turned and marched off toward Conklin waving the envelope in the air as he did.

Monday watched for a minute. He couldn’t hear what they were saying, but they seemed to be shouting at each other. There was a lot of handwaving and pointing. When he turned around Colonel Mayfair and his men were standing there.

“What was that all about?” Mayfair asked.

“I’m not sure,” Monday said. “Something about Indian artifacts and bad luck.”

Mayfair stepped toward Monday, their faces were inches apart. “I don’t like you. I think you’re a wise-ass with something to hide who doesn’t want to help out his country.” He held one finger up in front of Monday’s nose. “I’m watching you,” he said through clenched teeth.

“Colonel Mayfair?” Monday said.

“What?” he snapped.

“Want a breath mint?” Monday held a pack of tic tac’s in Mayfair’s direction.

Mayfair’s eyes narrowed, and he swatted at the tic tac’s. Monday pulled his hand back and Mayfair missed them. He snarled and walked briskly away.

Bill Monday stood there as the crowd milled around him. Should he zing Conklin one more time? Or was he embarrassed enough already? That’s when the crowd parted a little, and he saw a curvaceous blonde standing about fifty feet away. She was looking down at the floor and kicking something with the toe of her shoe.

She looked in his direction. Their eyes met. She smiled. He smiled back. She was absolutely luminescent. She raised her hand to about waist height and gave a little wave.

He nodded his head. She started walking toward him.

*Come to me*, Monday thought. *Come to me*.

Her smile grew as she approached.

*Come to me*, he thought.

And then she shot right past him; put her arms around a guy standing behind Monday; and planted a lip-lock on him.

It took a second for Monday to process what just happened. He had the sudden thought that maybe his fly was down or something. He checked it. It wasn’t. While he was processing what happened, he looked off to his right. Daphne Godwin was standing there trying to suppress a laugh.

He walked over.

“Men are so easy,” she said.

“Does that apply to your boss?” Monday nodded in Conklin’s direction.

“Well,” she smiled, “he doesn’t really count. And you know, you really shouldn’t have done it.”

“Done what?” he asked.

“You know.” She held her thumbs and forefingers together just like he had just before he dropped Conklin’s pants. “You shouldn’t have laughed at Conklin. O.K. I admit it was funny, but you still shouldn’t have laughed at him.”

Monday shrugged and spread his hands. “He had it coming. It’s not just my store he wants to tear down its all the stores on the block. And what about all the people who have apartments above the stores. It’s just bad....”

“I know,” Godwin said, “bad luck to tear down people’s stores.”

“How did you...?”

“I hear things. Changing the subject,” Godwin said, “I’m big on family history.”

“Is that so?” Monday said.

“I think my great, great, great, great grandmother knew your great, great, great, great grandfather.”

“I doubt that,” Monday said. “But it would be nice to find something in common.”

“That’s the thing about history, after awhile who knows what’s true and what’s simply legend. I sent you my short story, ‘The God of Parking’. Did you read it?”

“I did.”

“And?”

“I don’t know how plausible it is to think the descendant of a Greek god is living in Philadelphia and controlling the parking on his block.”

“Greek god?” Godwin tilted her head.

“I mean Norse god,” he said.

“Have you ever tried to park in Philadelphia?”

“Well, no, but it seems too fantastic.”

“Is it more fantastic than the fact it never snows on your block?”

“Of course it snows on my block! My nephew was just pulling your leg,” Monday said.

She tapped her a finger lightly on his chest. “My boss told me to keep an eye on you. He said there was something odd about you.”

“Would it change your opinion of me if I got your story published?”

“Bribing a government official?” she smiled and raised an eyebrow.

“Helping a struggling writer and fellow Bostonian,” he said.

“Well, since you put it that way,” she tapped his chest with her finger again, “the least I can do is let you buy me a drink.”

“Done. Where?”

“I was thinking your place,” she said, “unless you want to follow up on that blonde.”

“Better and better.” He held out his arm and she put her hand on it. They started toward the exit when he stopped and asked, “Why?”

“Why what?”

“Why a drink at my place?”

“I want to see it.”

“Why do you want to see it?”

“I want know why it never snows on your block.”

“What makes you think it never snows on my block?”

“You mean besides what your nephew said?”

“He’s just a kid. He doesn’t know what he’s saying.”

“I checked with the Streets Department. In fact, I talked to the supervisor responsible for snow removal. He said they’ve never plowed your street. In fact, they took it off the list of places to plow. They just know it never snows on your block.”

“Well that’s ridiculous,” Monday took half a step back. “How could it *not* snow on my block?”

“That’s what I’d like to find out,” she tilted her head ever so slightly.

Monday looked toward the door. Colonel Mayfair and his men were watching Conklin and O’Leary arguing. Mayfair and his men walked over to them.

“That can’t be good,” Monday said.

“You want to go? Or what?” Godwin asked.

“I... want to see what’s going to happen,” he said.

Mayfair flashed a badge and talked to them. A minute later O’Leary and Conklin both pointed to Monday.

“Now it’s time to leave,” Monday said.

Mayfair, Conklin and O’Leary started walking toward them. But, Monday and Godwin squeezed out the door and vanished.

## VII: No Bones About It

It was eight the next morning when Bill Monday waltzed into Shamus O’Leary’s office. O’Leary was going over the day’s work schedule. He hadn’t even finished his first cup of coffee.

“How the hell did you get in here? And what do you want now?” O’Leary spit.

“I just wanted to make sure everything was O.K. How did you make out with the bald eagles?”

O’Leary leaned back in his chair and played with an unlit cigar. “A guy from the Fish and Wildlife Service said they weren’t eagle nests after all. They were pigeon nests.”

“And the Indian artifacts?”

“The Bureau of Indian Affairs said what we uncovered were nineteenth century trash pits. They said we were wasting their time.”

“What about the human remains?” Monday asked.

“The bones? What we thought were hand bones were just chicken bones and what we thought were leg bones were goat bones.”

“Did your men get to work O.K? Did any of them get lost?”

“They all made it in on time. Why do you ask?”

“I just wanted to make sure your luck had changed.”

O’Leary rolled the cigar between his fingers and looked at Monday suspiciously. “How did you do it? How did you make all that... stuff happen? Why did you make it happen? You said you don’t want money. What do you want?”

“I want what everyone wants. I want to be left alone.”

“I don’t suppose you’d consider working for me with all your tricks and stuff,” O’Leary rested his forearms on his desk.”

“I have no idea what you are talking about,” Monday had a flat smile and raised one eyebrow.

“So why are you here?”

“I want to know what Conklin and Mayfair talked about.”

O’Leary leaned back in his chair. “They don’t like you one damned bit.”

“And?”

“Mayfair says it never snows on your block. He says you have some kind of weather machine.”

“A weather machine? What’s a weather machine look like?” Monday asked. “And where would I get one?”

“Mayfair mentioned the Russians. Then, he said it might be them and pointed toward the ceiling.”

“The people upstairs?”

“I think he meant aliens.”

“Like undocumented workers?”

“Like flying saucer riding aliens.” O’Leary leaned forward again. “I’d stay away from him if I were you. He seems borderline psychotic.”

“What did Conklin say?”

“He said he thought you had something to do with his pants.”

“And?”

“That was Mayfair’s cue to leave.”

## VIII: Eminent Domain

Bill Monday left Shamus O’Leary’s office and headed straight for his eminent domain hearing. He was in the courtroom sitting alone behind a table. A dozen attorneys from Snick Snyderman were sitting at the table opposite him. The court clerk called the case. “City of Boston versus William Monday and Monday Books.”

Judge Cranz glared down from the bench at Monday, then took a fleeting glance at the Snick Snyderman lawyers. Cranz was a seventy-year-old, white haired judge known for his short temper.

“Mr. Snick,” Cranz asked, “what brings the Managing Partner of a major law firm to a simple eminent domain hearing?”

“Billing Your Honor,” Snick said.

“Well, at least you’re honest. Let’s get this over with quickly so it doesn’t cost the city too much.”

“Mr. Monday,” Cranz said.

“Yes, Your Honor,” Monday leapt to his feet.

“Where is your lawyer?”

“I’m representing myself Your Honor.”

“Do you realize what’s at stake here Mr. Monday? If this goes against you, your store will be condemned and torn down. Do you understand?”

“Yes, sir.”

Judge Cranz shuffled some paperwork and looked at the city’s lawyer. “Mr. Snick, I have your legal brief, but I don’t see any affidavits certifying that you gave Mr. Monday adequate notice of the condemnation proceedings, nor did I find an affidavit attesting to the amount offered for his store.” The judge continued shuffling papers.

“Your Honor, I’m sure they were attached to the brief. They were attached to my brief and the papers we sent to Mr. Monday,” Snick said.

“Mr. Monday, did you receive a copy of this legal brief and the affidavits we’ve been talking about?”

“Nope!” Monday said.

The judge stopped shuffling papers and pulled on a piece of paper stuck to the bottom of the brief. He read it, then folded it so just the letterhead was showing. “Mr. Snick, Mr. Monday, please approach the bench.” They walked up.

“Is this your letterhead?” the judge asked Snick.

“Yes, Your Honor, it is.”

The judge unfolded the paper. It had a round coffee cup stain on it. “Can you explain this note?” He showed it to Snick. “It says, and I quote, ‘Cranz is an old fart. It should be easy to slip one over on him’.”

“Did you write this note?” Cranz asked.

“No, Your Honor.”



“Do you recognize the handwriting?”

“No, Your Honor.”

“This comes very close to contempt of court, Mr. Snick.”

“Yes, Your Honor. I apologize on behalf of my firm.”

The judge waved his hand toward the city’s table. “If you have affidavits showing you gave Monday fair notice of the condemnation proceedings and that you offered him a fair price, bring them up.”

Snick retrieved a thick document. “The affidavits should be under the tabs Exhibit A and Exhibit B.” He handed the document to the judge.

“Give me a minute to look these over,” Judge Cranz said.

Snick returned to his table.

The judge paged back and forth between the two exhibits making faces as he went.

“Mr. Snick, Mr. Monday, can you approach again. Cranz leaned over to Snick and said, “What the hell are you playing at?”

“What do you mean?” Snick asked.

“These aren’t affidavits, these are copies of emails going back and forth between your firm’s attorneys. This one says, ‘Cranz was a C student in law school. The only way he got to be a judge was by paying off the mob’. Or how about this one which says, ‘Cranz wouldn’t know a law book if it bit him in the ass’.”

“I... don’t know what to say, Your Honor. I... I checked these papers myself yesterday and they were in good order at that time.”

“Personal insults and contempt of court aside, you still haven’t submitted any evidence that you gave Mr. Monday fair notice of these proceedings, nor that you offered him a reasonable amount for his store. With no evidence in the record, I must find for Mr. Monday.”

“Your Honor, would you accept testimony from Deputy Mayor Conklin? If so, I can have him here in half an hour.”

Judge Cranz was clearly annoyed. “I will allow Mr. Conklin to testify if you can get him here timely. But, as the trier of fact, I reserve the right to assess his credibility. If his testimony isn’t credible, I will have to find for Mr. Monday. Court is adjourned for one hour.”

“Yes, Your Honor,” Snick said. He raced out into the hallway and called Conklin on the phone. “Linden! Where are you? The judge wants you to testify that you gave Monday notice of the condemnation proceedings and offered him a fair price. I need you to get to the courthouse now!”

“It’s my day off,” Conklin whined. “I’m home and in my pajamas. Can’t it wait?”

“No! It’s now or never. I told the judge I’d have you here in half an hour.”

Conklin looked out his window. “It’s snowing. And it’s drifting,” Conklin said. “It must be three feet deep out there.”

“You’re exaggerating Linden. It’s snowing, but it can’t be more than two inches. Besides, you’re the Deputy Mayor. Get a snowplow to pick you up. Get twenty snowplows! Just get to court!”

Conklin called the Streets Department and asked them to send a snowplow for him, then he rethought it and told them to send three snowplows just in case. As he was taking off his pajamas and putting on a suit, he could hear the huffing and puffing of diesel equipment out front. Two snowplows started from one end of his street, another started from the other end. The snow reached four feet. A couple of front-end loaders scooped up the snow and dropped it into a string of waiting dump trucks. More snowplows arrived and started clearing the streets that led from Conklin’s house to the Courthouse. The snow got worse.

~

“Well, Mr. Snick, you said your witness would be here in half an hour. I gave you an hour. Where’s your witness?” the judge asked.

“He should be along shortly, Your Honor. His street was being plowed.”

“Plowed?” Cranz asked. “It’s barely flurrying out there.”

“Nevertheless, Your Honor, could you give us one more hour?” Snick asked.

“One more hour, Mr. Snick, and then I have to rule on the evidence in the record.”

~

More snowplows arrived on Conklin’s block, more front-end loaders, more trucks to haul away the snow. Then he called in city workers with snowblowers and hand shovels and sand trucks. And that is about the time that the blizzard hit the rest of the city. Snow came down four inches an hour. The whole city was gridlocked.

Finally, Judge Cranz appeared on the bench. “Mr. Snick, I am usually supportive of eminent domain condemnations as long as they follow the law. You had all the time in the world to file the requisite affidavits. You asked for half an hour to bring in a witness. At this point, I have given you three hours. In the absence of any credible evidence by the city, I must rule in favor of Mr. Monday, with prejudice. Do you know what that means, Mr. Monday?”

“With prejudice... does that mean you are mad at me?” Monday asked.

“No sir. With prejudice means the City cannot file a condemnation proceeding against you again for this project. Your store is safe.”

Monday walked over to Snick and said. “Can you tell Mr. Conklin something for me?”

“Sure, what?”

“Tell him it’s just bad luck.”

## IX: Mr. Mayor

By the time Linden Conklin's street got plowed out, the eminent domain hearing was over. Snick phoned him the bad news. That call was followed minutes later by a call from the mayor who asked him to stop by City Hall.

Conklin knocked on the mayor's open door and walked in. A bottle of whiskey was sitting on the mayor's desk. He had already poured himself a glass. There was an empty glass next to the chair opposite the mayor's desk.

"Linden," the mayor said, "pour yourself a glass."

Conklin poured himself two fingers of whiskey and snugged himself in the big leather chair reserved for visitors. He took a sip.

"Linden, what happened at the eminent domain hearing?"

"The court failed to condemn Monday's bookstore. Don't worry, sir. We'll appeal."

"No, I mean what happened? Why didn't the court condemn the store?"

"Snick Snyderman screwed up the paperwork."

"We've been using that firm for a long time. Have they ever screwed up before?"

"No, sir."

"Then why the screw up this time?"

Conklin spread his hands. "No idea. I'll fire them and hire someone else for the appeal."

"Linden, see this pile of messages?" The mayor held up a wad of slips a quarter inch thick. "You know what these are?"

"No, sir."

"These are complaints from your neighbors and all the people who live within two blocks of your house about snow removal equipment blocking all the streets."

"I can explain, sir. There was an exceptional level of snow fall and drifting...."

The mayor cut him off. "You know what these are?" He held up a wad of messages two inches thick."

"No, sir."

"These are complaints from all over the city saying their streets haven't been plowed because half the city's equipment was sent to your block. Can you explain that?"

"Well, I...."

The mayor threw a newspaper across the desk to Conklin. A picture of Conklin with his pants down, sporting white underpants with large red hearts on it, took up half the front page. The caption read, "City Official Moons Hecklers."

"Can you explain that?" the mayor pointed to the picture.

"I... I... don't know what happened. I was speaking to the audience, and the next thing I knew my pants were down around my ankles. It wasn't my fault!"

The mayor swirled the whiskey around in his glass and took another sip. He set the glass down and leaned across his desk a little. "Well, Linden, let's recap. The contractor that was going to build your signature project pulled out. You failed to get a property condemned that

we needed for the project. I have two hundred complaints about how you used city snow removal equipment as your own personal toys. And... you can't keep your pants on. Does that about sum it up?"

"I... I..." Conklin opened his mouth, but nothing else came out.

"I'm going to have to cut you loose. Clean out your office, *today!*"

Two policemen had been standing just inside the office door. The mayor motioned them forward. Each officer grabbed one of Conklin's arms and lifted him out of the chair.

"Sorry, Linden, you've just had a string of bad luck."

"*Bad luck!*" Conklin screamed and struggled as the police dragged him away. "*Bad luck! Don't talk to me about bad luck!*"

## X: Whether Weather

One of Colonel Mayfair's men handed him a phone. "It's General Manning."

"General," Mayfair said.

"I just read your report on weather modification. Do you know who's behind it? Do you know how they're doing it?"

"Working on it, General. I have my eye on someone."

"Will they work with us?"

"I talked to the guy a couple of times. He seemed like a wise-ass. But, we'll bring him around."

"Is this just a theory? Or is there a proof of concept?"

"I'd say he has a prototype machine up and running," Mayfair said.

"So, what has he done? Are the effects large enough to show up on a weather map? Have satellites spotted anything unusual?"

"It's the snow, sir."

"Snow? Are you saying this guy is responsible for Boston's snow?"

"Not... exactly."

"Then what?" General Manning demanded.

"He keeps it from snowing on his block."

"He keeps it from snowing. Is that it? Can he control the wind?"

"No."

"Create a hurricane?"

"Afraid not."

"Can he cause flooding? Floods would make a great weapon."

"I don't know anything about flooding, sir."

"So, who is this target? Is he with MIT or Boston U? Is he with some think tank? Does he work for a tech company? Who is he?" General Manning pressed.

"He...." Colonel Mayfair looked at his two men. "He owns a bookstore."

Mayfair's men shook their heads no very slightly.

"*What?*" Manning exploded. "You're telling me some damned bookworm is controlling the weather? I asked you to sniff around universities and private research labs for something we could use. And you're wasting your time with a book peddler?"

"Well, sir, I..."

"You are supposed to be looking for a next-generation weapons technology. I want a report on every damned university lab in the Boston area. And, then I want a report on every company doing research in the Boston area. And, then I want a report on every think tank in the Boston area. And, then I want a report on every private lab in the Boston area. Do you feel me, Colonel? Or do I need to take

over? Talk to the Mayor of Boston. We went to school together. Maybe he can help.”

“Yes, General.”

Manning hung up leaving Mayfair listening to a line full of static. Mayfair handed the phone to one of his men.

“What are you going to do?” the man asked quietly.

“We’re going to report on the universities and keep an eye on Monday. That guy is not just a book peddler. I can feel it. The bookstore is just a front,” Mayfair looked at his men. “Maybe he’s a Russian. Or maybe he’s ...” Mayfair looked skyward.

His men shrugged.

~

Bill Monday was straightening his living room when Mayfair and his men burst through the front door. “Alright wise-ass, I want to know how you’re controlling the weather!”

“*Moi?*” Monday said splaying his fingers on his chest. “How could I possibly control the weather?”

“That’s what we’re here to find out. You must be using some kind of force field or field generator or some kind of weather machine or...”

“Hypno ray....”

“What?” Mayfair spit.

“A Hypno ray makes people think they see something that isn’t there,” Monday said.

Mayfair rubbed his hands together. “Now we’re getting somewhere. Where is it?”

“What?”

“The Hypno ray!” Mayfair screamed.

“There’s no such thing as a Hypno ray, except in the *Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy*.”

Mayfair slapped Monday hard. At least that’s what it felt like to Mayfair’s hand. Of course, Monday made sure the hand never got within a half inch of his face. All he felt was a slight breeze.”

“*I want that weather machine!*” Mayfair screamed.

“I don’t have a weather machine,” Monday said. “Look for yourself!”

Mayfair pointed to one of his men, and then pointed up. The man nodded and ran upstairs. Mayfair pointed to his other man, and pointed to the basement.

A couple of minutes later the men returned.

“Well?” Mayfair demanded.

“Didn’t find anything that looked like a force field generator or weather machine of any kind, sir,” one of them said.

“Me neither, sir,” the other one said.

“Maybe the machine is somewhere else,” Mayfair said. “A warehouse or something.”

“Did you check my store?” Monday asked.

“We’ve been over it, top to bottom. It’s the first place we looked.” Mayfair looked at his men. “The machine is probably elsewhere. He must have some kind of remote to control it.”

“*Where is the remote!*” Mayfair screamed at Monday.

“O.K. Time to play ball,” Monday said. “You can have the remote. See that little table? It’s in the drawer.” Monday stretched his hand out toward a small table with a lamp on it. The table was next to a large leather chair.

Mayfair nodded to one of his men. The man opened the drawer and retrieved the remote and handed it to Mayfair.

Mayfair looked at the remote. “How does it work?”

Monday stepped toward the gadget.

Mayfair pulled it back. “Not so fast. Tell me and I’ll use it.”

“Silver button, top left. Push it.”

Mayfair pushed it and a flat panel display rose out of a credenza. “Of course,” Mayfair breathed, “you have to be able to monitor operations. What next?”

“See the silver button on the top right? Push it.”

Mayfair pushed it and the *Oprah Winfrey Show* appeared on the screen.

“Colonel,” one of his men said, “it’s a television.”

Mayfair tightened his jaw and threw the remote across the room. “Of course it’s a damned television!” As he said it, little drops of spittle sprayed from his mouth.

He slapped Monday as hard as he could. Monday stopped his hand a quarter inch before it made contact, but gave Mayfair the feeling he’d just slapped a steel goalpost.

Mayfair said something nasty under his breath and cradled his hand.

“Get him!” He said to his men. “Time for some enhanced interrogation. Take him into the kitchen. It’ll be easier to clean up the mess.”

Each of the men grabbed Monday under an arm and dragged him into the kitchen. They tied him to a chair in the middle of the room.

“Now fellas, is this really necessary?” Monday asked.

“Tell us where your weather machine is and how it works and we’ll let you go,” Mayfair said.

“But I haven’t got a weather machine,” Monday said.

“Sure you do. How come it never snows on your block?”

“Good luck?” Monday tilted his head and smiled a little smile.

One of Mayfair’s men pulled out a long, sharp knife, “Can I cut him a little? Just to get things started?”



“It may come to that,” Mayfair said, “but, put away that blade for now. Let’s try something different.”

The man laid the knife on the edge of the counter where Monday could see it.

Mayfair turned to Monday, “Let’s see if you’re still smiling when the juice starts flowing.”

“I love juice,” Monday said. “What kind do you have?”

One of Mayfair’s men opened a bag and pulled out some electrodes.

“Uh-oh!” Monday said.

One of Mayfair’s men strapped a metal helmet on Monday’s head. The other one strapped electrodes to his feet and hands. The electrodes were hooked to a controller Mayfair was holding, the controller was attached to a big transformer. The transformer was plugged into an outlet next to Monday’s microwave.

“Let’s start nice and slow,” Mayfair said. “Where’s the machine?”

Monday said, “There’s no machine.”

Mayfair pushed a big red button on the controller and sparks flew out of the wall socket. The controller went dead.

“Damn!” Mayfair said. “We blew the transformer again.”

“Not the transformer, Colonel. Look at the microwave. Its clock went off. We must have tripped a circuit breaker.”

“Fix it!” Mayfair shooed him away with the back of his hand. Two minutes later, the man returned and the microwave clock was back on. Mayfair pushed the red button again and more sparks flew out of the wall socket. The microwave went down again.

Mayfair turned to his other man. “Looks like you’re going to get your wish. Cut him when I tell you to.”

Mayfair got in Monday’s face again. “Where’s the weather machine?”

“There is no such thing as a weather machine,” Monday said.

Mayfair jerked his arm in Monday’s direction. “Cut him!”

“Where’s my knife?” the man asked. “It was right here on the counter.”

“Did you drop it? Maybe it’s on the floor.”

“I don’t think....”

“Look for it!” Mayfair pointed to the floor.

The man stooped down and looked around, under the kitchen table and everywhere. “Not here.”

“This is a damned kitchen. Get another knife!”

The man started looking through drawers. After a couple of minutes, he said, “No knives... anywhere.”

“I don’t care if you stab him with a fork. We’ve got to make him talk.”

His man stood there hands apart.

“What?” Mayfair asked.

“No forks either.”

“What do you plan to do? Beat it out of him with a soup spoon?”

That’s when a small computer monitor on the counter next to the microwave snapped on. Half the screen showed thumbnail images of the back door, front hallway, living room and upstairs. Half the screen was an image of the front steps. Monday’s sister, Sarah, was unlocking the front door. Her son, Buddy, was behind her playing a video game on his smartphone.

Mayfair raised his fist over his head signaling his men to be quiet and still. “As soon as they get inside, grab them and tie them up,” he whispered.

By the time she opened the door, there were a dozen other people on the sidewalk. They followed her in. People milled about in the living room. Somebody put on music.

Mayfair clamped his hand over Monday’s mouth.

Monday’s sister, Sarah, stood by the front door greeting guests, “Welcome to our Winter Party.”

The caterers squeezed past her carrying trays of food.

Daphne Godwin walked up the steps.

“Daphne,” Sarah said, “so glad you could come. But, I don’t for the life of me know what happened to Billy.”

“I’m sure he’s around somewhere,” she tilted her head as though she knew a little secret.

“Mr. Mayor,” Sarah said. “Welcome. I’m so glad you could come. I hope you’re not upset about that whole parking garage thing.”

“That was Conklin’s idea. I never really liked it, but I gave him a little running room.”

“And, I hear he ran off the road.”

“If a mayor wants to keep his job in Boston, he damned well better keep the streets plowed. Conklin just couldn’t get it done. Let’s just say Mr. Conklin has decided to pursue other career options.”

“I brought a guest, I hope you don’t mind?”

“Of course not,” Sarah said.

“This is General Manning. We went to school together.”

~

“Oh, crap! They’re having a party,” Colonel Mayfair said.

“What do we do with him?” one of his men pointed to Monday.

Just then, the kitchen door burst open. It was Sarah leading a parade of caterers. “And, we have extra glasses up here,” she pointed to cabinets.

Then she looked from her brother to Mayfair to his men. “What the hell is going on here?” she demanded.

One of Mayfair's men took a step toward her and twisted his ankle, reached for a chair, and crashed to the floor.

The mayor and General Manning were right behind her. Daphne Godwin followed them.

"What's the meaning of this?" Manning demanded.

Before Mayfair could say anything, Godwin made little circles with her thumbs and forefingers and jerked them down a quarter inch.

Colonel Mayfair's pants fell around his knees. He was wearing white boxer shorts with big red hearts on them.

"*These aren't my shorts!*" he screamed.

"Whose shorts are they?" General Manning demanded. "For heaven's sake, pull up your pants!"

Each time Mayfair pulled them up, they slipped back down. Finally, he bunched up a wad of material and held his pants up with one hand.

By this time, a dozen people had crowded into the kitchen to see what was going on.

"Mr. Monday, I presume?" the General said. Then he motioned for Mayfair's men to untie him. "*Will everybody please clear the room!*" the General said loudly.

Mayfair started to leave.

"Not you, Mayfair."

When General Manning, Bill Monday and Colonel Mayfair were alone, the General asked Mayfair, "Is this is the man you think is controlling the weather?"

"Yes sir, I do."

"He looks pretty harmless to me," Manning said. "No offense, Mr. Monday."

"None taken."

"Why do you think he can control the weather?"

"Because it never snows on his block."

That's when a man opened the kitchen door and said, "We're all leaving now and you better get a move on too."

"Why?" Manning asked.

"It's snowing pretty hard. There is already a good six inches on the ground."

"Is it sticking on the street?" General Manning asked.

"Sticking and drifting. A guy with a Jeep volunteered to take some of us home, but we're leaving now." The man left, and Mayfair's men returned to the kitchen.

"Colonel," Manning said, "you are relieved of command as of now. Since you are so interested in snow, I'm going to have you reassigned to a weather station in Greenland. You two," Manning pointed to Mayfair's men, "get back to headquarters. I expect an after action report on what you and the Colonel have been doing. I have a Humvee out front, I'll make sure the mayor gets home. Mr.

Monday, please accept your government's deepest apology. And my hope that this whole incident will be our little secret."

As soon as Manning, Mayfair and their men left, Monday said, "I'm glad a lot of people showed up for the Winter Party. That put the brakes on whatever Mayfair was planning. But... I thought the party was tomorrow night."

"It was," Sarah said. "Daphne suggested we move it up a day. She also said her great, great, great, great grandmother knew our great, great, great, great grandfather."

"Not possible," Monday said.

"Wasn't your great, great Apollo?" Daphne said as the corner of her mouth curved into a smile.

"What makes you think that?" Monday asked.

"Because my great, great, great, great grandmother was Diana."

## **THE END**

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