

HOPE

AARON ZELMAN & L. NEIL SMITH

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This book is dedicated to all those Americans over the past two and a half centuries who have cared enough—and been brave enough—to defend individual liberty wherever and whenever it was threatened. Our special acknowledgement to James Bovard, who has inspired so many people to embrace the Bill of Rights.



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Do you hear the people sing? Singing a song of angry men? It is the music of a people Who will not be slaves again! When the beating of your heart Echoes the beating of the drums, There is a life about to start When tomorrow comes!
—Herbert Kretzmer, *Les Miserables*

INTRODUCTION

THEY tell us—physicists, philosophers and the producers of science fiction movies—that there is not just a single universe out there, but many. Many many. Possibly an infinite number. We live in a *multiverse*.

They tell us.

In each of these universes, history has followed a different path, sometimes only slightly, a bit more in others, in a few, spectacularly more.

In some universes, it's tea you have there in front of you, not coffee. In some, computers were invented earlier and the label on your laptop lid says "Babbage". In some, the Whiskey Rebellion sent George Washington and Alexander Hamilton to the wall. In some, Napoleon won at Waterloo and you're reading this in French. In some, the Nazis conquered Britain, invaded America, and you're not reading this at all.

In some universes, some unlikely people have been President of the United States: Benjamin Franklin, Caesar Rodney, Aaron Burr, Daniel Webster, William Jennings Bryan, Edward Everett, Edward Everett Horton, Charles Lindbergh, Thomas Dewey, Walt Disney, well you get the picture.

In some universes, my father Alexander Hope ran for President in 2008, and won. This book is about how that happened, and what happened afterward.

Faith-Ann Pondero
Colorado Springs, Colorado
May 11, 2017

CHAPTER ONE: SHEILA HENSLEY

Painful as it may be to hear it, there's nothing special about the people of this country that sets them apart from the other people of the world. It is the Bill of Rights, and only the Bill of Rights, that keeps us from becoming the world's biggest banana republic. The moment we forget that, the American Dream is over.—Alexander Hope, *Looking Forward*

HIGH above the mirror-polished hardwood floor, thickly forested in folding Samsonite chairs, red, white, and blue banners hanging on all four gymnasium walls proclaimed:

HOPE—FOR AMERICA

“A political rally?” Sheila Hensley proclaimed in disbelief. “You’ve brought me out in this cold and slush to a political rally?” She was a stylishly tall, well-dressed, slender and attractive woman few would have guessed was in her early 60s. It was difficult to see any gray in her ash-blonde hair. The tweed-jacketed man beside her was of about the same age, but he was losing his hair, and was a trifle shorter than she was. “Do you have any idea how many of these I’ve attended over the past 40 years?”

Hundreds of people were milling around the room or visiting in small groups. The air smelled of wet coats and Chicago in November. The flags that hung around the gymnasium were not the familiar 13 stripes and 50 stars of the 21st century United States of America, but the same stripes and the circled 13 stars of the nation’s painful birth years. An enormous blue and white banner over one of the basketball hoops, exhorted:

HOPE FOR NEXT YEAR!

and

HOPE FOR PRESIDENT 2008

“Plenty would be my guess,” her companion answered amiably as he fondled his unlit briar. Thornton “Kitch” Sinclair was a professor of history at a private college here in Chicago and a lifelong activist of the libertarian persuasion. He knew that Sheila had once been married to one of the state’s Democratic Party movers and shakers. “Although I’d be willing to bet that not one of them was for any third-party candidate.”

“Unless you count the Gene McCarthy campaign in ‘68,” she replied, agreeing with him. Recorded music being played from somewhere up near the front of the big room brightened the atmosphere. She thought she recognized something lively from *Les Miserables*.

“I don’t count it,” Kitch told her. “McCarthy was running for the Democratic Party’s presidential nomination.”

“About a million years ago,” she sighed.

“About a million years ago,” he agreed.

More and more people seemed to be entering now, mostly young people, chattering, laughing, some of them stopping at a table to the right of the doors to acquire buttons with the candidate’s name and face on them, stickers with winged horses that were somehow associated with the campaign, or little 13-star flags on what looked like teriyaki sticks.

Sheila and Kitch stood just inside and slightly to the left of the two-story double doorway opening onto the recently remodeled gymnasium at St. Gabriel’s—the Church of St. Gabriel Possenti of Isola—located in a rather old, comfortable-feeling middle-class Chicago neighborhood. The mini-convention he’d brought her to was being held across a street full of muddy snow at the Piper Arms Hotel, but there was more room here for the public appearance of the candidate.

“And how many of those years, my dear,” he went on, “have you had the undeniable feeling that this country is ... well, the expression, I believe, is ‘FUBAR.’”

She smiled, brightly-colored memories four decades old crowding into her mind. “Fouled Up Beyond All Recognition”? Only you didn’t really mean ‘fouled’.”

“You’re right,” he conceded, “I didn’t really mean ‘fouled’. How many, Sheila, how many?”

“About the same million,” she answered thoughtfully. “Or at least for the 40 that I’ve spent going to political rallies. Kitch, you know it’s funny—funny meaning ‘grotesque’—that I’ve always felt that way, starting back when I was a hippie, supporting ‘Clean Gene’ from the streets, continuing when I became the respectable wife of a Democratic Party kingmaker, and even more so, after the divorce, after John died, and I started being, well, something else, I guess, whatever it is.”

He took her hand. “We all started being something else after John died.” John Greenwood had been a lifelong friend to both of them, a classmate of Sheila’s in high school, a classmate of Kitch’s in college, best friend to the lat-

ter, the love of her life to the former until—to Sheila’s eternal dismay—he’d found his calling. He’d become a Catholic priest and eventually the monsignor here at St. Gabriel’s. He’d been killed in Israel by terrorists, but not without giving them a fight.

She realized all over again: this had been his church.

Kitch sighed, “Well, I’m sorry for dragging you here, Sheila, but I had a reason.”

“Yeah?” she answered with mock severity. “Well it had better be a good one. I know a place on the lakeshore where we could be eating lobster right now in front of a stone fireplace.”

He sighed and shook his head, pretending—at least partly—to be torn between dinner and politics. “It is, I assure you. There was a time, you know, when people didn’t feel that way, that FUBAR way I mentioned. There must have been a time like that. Maybe it was before we started hearing all these nasty rumors about the vice president. Maybe it was before before the election of 2000. Maybe it was before before Waco, before Watergate, before the War in Vietnam, or before the Kennedy assassination.”

“Maybe it was before both world wars or the Depression or the Federal Reserve Act of 1913,” she grinned, shaking her own head. She’d heard all of theis from him before, many times. But it was one of the reasons she ... she—what *did* she feel for Kitch, anyway? *I won’t think about that now*, she ruefully quoted Scarlett O’Hara, I’ll think about that tomorrow.

“Maybe it was before the War between the States,” he went on, startling her. “I don’t know where we went wrong and Sheila, I *teach* the stuff! But I *know* there was a time in America when people had greater freedom and a less oppressive life than they do today. A time when the sky seemed to be brighter and the air smelled cleaner and everything, everything tasted sweeter, simply because there was no one to put a tax on it or tell you in minutest detail how it’s bad for you and you shouldn’t have it.”

She started to speak; he went on before she could. “Now there’s your *real* pollution, Sheila, too blasted many people-per-million are professional busybodies and dogooders who believe that everything tastes better if they piddle in it!”

“Like the sophomore senator from New York—and former First Lady—who wants to be the first female President of the United States?” Sheila asked rhetorically.

Kitch nodded. “The *sophomoric* senator, a perfect example of the species. Well, Hope’s the fellow to put a stop to it, at least I think he is!”

She arched a cynical eyebrow at him.

“But you couldn’t be more wrong about one thing, Sheila,” he finished softly. “You never were a hippie, never. To me, you always smelled of bathsoap and yellow roses.”

Speechless, Sheila looked heavenward into the rafters of the gymnasium. How could you *not* love a fellow who was this romantic (and in his 60s, no

less) and was as cute as a hobbit—which he greatly resembled—besides? Without waiting for any reply from Sheila, Kitch touched her elbow gently and they headed toward a small knot of individuals gathered around a folding table, still at the back of the enormous room, where he thought that he'd glimpsed somebody familiar.

"Father Joseph?" Kitch tapped on a shoulder.

A small, wiry, bearded man in his 30s, wearing a black jacket, shirt, and priest's collar turned toward them. Kitch had always thought he looked rather like Al Pacino. He held up a small plastic cup. "Who do I complain to, Kitch? I believe there's actually *punch* in this punch!"

CHAPTER TWO: JOSEPH SPAGELLI

Chief Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes was wrong. You have an absolute and perfect right to shout "Fire!" in a crowded theater—and to accept responsibility for the consequences.—Alexander Hope, *Looking Forward*

"I'll give you punch!" a familiar voice threatened mockingly. It was an old man who raised his hand, only to lower it again and thrust it enthusiastically toward Kitch. Most likely in his 80s, he had a long white beard and a yarmulke. The heavy coat he wore had an almost military look to it.

"Ascher!" Kitch exclaimed, highly delighted, but not especially surprised, to see his two old friends here. How long had it been since this extremely odd couple had gone into "business" together? Could it really be almost a decade?

"You remember Rabbi Liebowitz, don't you, Sheila?" Ascher, an ardent anti-Nazi partisan during World War II, had once been fired by a Reform congregation for being politically incorrect enough to openly advocate armed self-defense.

"And his comical sidekick, Father Joe," put in Spagelli. John Greenwood's former assistant, Spagelli now worked with Ascher for the mysterious and controversial Ralston Foundation, dedicated to teaching effective self-defense—including self-defense with firearms—and a special set of ethics to go with it, to inner-city boys and girls. Although the general crime rate, and gang-shootings in particular, had fallen off sharply in areas where it was active, the foundation had been the subject of extremely hostile treatment by the establishment media over the years.

Old Ascher seemed to thrive on it.

"I remember them well," she answered. "A priest, a rabbi—all we need now is for a Protestant minister to show up and we'll have the material for some really classic jokes."

Kitch was about to point out a particular Lutheran clergyman he was acquainted with, up front, addressing a crisp-looking redheaded 20-something female in a severe gray suit whom he felt he somehow ought to remember, but he was stopped by the rabbi.

“If it’s jokes you’re looking for, young woman,” Ascher told her, producing a startled expression on her face, “we have all the jokes we need in this coming election!”

“What do you mean, Rabbi?” Kitch asked with counterfeit innocence, knowing exactly what Ascher had meant.

“It’s actually a religious event—the Second Coming of Bozo! To begin with, we’ve got a possible sexual scandal deeply involving the Republican frontrunner, Vice President Chesley Chambers. (You know, it’s too bad the old vice president had to resign and go back home to Wyoming; I rather liked him.) And—dismayingly far ahead in the polls at the moment—an inexplicably charismatic former First Lady whose Senate voting record makes Diane Feinstein resemble a John Bircher, and who now openly promises to take America all the way down the Marxist drain!”

“So much for Socialist Party ‘A’ and Socialist Party ‘B,’” Kitch grinned. Maybe that’s where America went wrong, he thought to himself, when political parties—the Federalists and anti-Federalists—began to form. Many historians thought so. Then again, how could such a thing have been prevented in a free society?

“Well the election’s still a year away, and we’ve got Hope,” said Father Joseph. “No pun intended, of course. A very decent, highly principled guy whose chances of being elected approach those of the proverbial cellophane snowball in a locale that the theologically sophisticated claim not to believe in any more.” He finished with a Russian accent, “What a country!”

“Do you believe in Hell, Father Joseph?” Ascher asked.

“Yes I do, Rabbi, I’ve been there many times.”

“What,” Sheila asked, “no rimshot?”

“The man’s platform,” Kitch said, mostly to Sheila and attempting to ignore the theological horseplay, “is shockingly simple. ‘Hope for America’ consists of no more than one man’s promise to stringently enforce the Bill of Rights—exactly like the highest law of the land it happens to be.”

“A policy,” Sheila replied, her guard up now at the thought of yet another political hero—in a lifetime full of them—inevitably with feet of clay. “A policy you clearly believe will put us back on the ‘right track.’”

Kitch turned to Sheila, almost pleading. “I think I might weep if such a man could be elected. It’s exactly what we were just talking about. Everybody—right, left, and middle—knows that there’s something terribly wrong with this country of ours. And that in itself should tell us something.”

“Like?” She was frowning at him. Why was this funny little man so easily capable of changing her mind—and turning her head?

“Like maybe,” he told her, “it’s true. Like maybe it’s something really deep and fundamental that went wrong a long time ago, right at the country’s beginning. Hope’s a history professor like I am, Sheila, only instead of specializing in Middle Eastern literature like I did, his field is American history, which is about as academically popular these days as planetary astronomy.”

Pretending indifference, she said, “I’m afraid you’ve lost me, darling.”

“As an historian, Hope ‘remembers’ a time when you could start your own business by hanging out your shingle, without getting a fistful of permits. When you could write a book that criticized the government and no thug-agency would threaten the retailers who sold it. When you could lock your door and say you wanted to be left alone, without the SWAT team blasting you and your house to bits. When you could dig a hole—even fill one in—in your own back yard without even once seeing helicopters and machineguns sent by the Environmental Protection Agency.”

“And as a consequence, he believes that vigorously enforcing the Bill of Rights will go a long way toward fixing everything that’s wrong with America?” Still skeptical, Sheila looked Kitch deep in the eyes. “And you agree?”

“My dear, I remember a time like that, myself, although admittedly I was very young. Why, you could leave your front door unlocked, buy unwrapped candy, and let your kindergartner walk to school without an escort because nobody would even dare think of molesting her. And you certainly didn’t need a license from the government to exercise your Constitutional rights.” He nodded his certainty. “Yes, Sheila, I agree with him.”

Sheila sighed, pushed her arm through his, and drew close to him. “Then I suppose I do, too, Kitch. Two great historians can’t be wrong, can they?”

Rabbi Liebowitz laughed out loud. Father Joseph exclaimed, “I certainly wish all of my conversions—political or otherwise—came as easily!”

Kitch blushed. “Well, I *have* been working on her for rather a long time.”

“I can see that you have!” the priest and the rabbi laughed together.

There was a thoughtful silence.

“Not to change the subject,” Sheila told Father Spagelli, “But I thought that you weren’t ever supposed to walk on a basketball court like this in your street shoes.”

“This is the 21st century. This court’s covered in some kind of thick, self-healing polymer. Look down: where we’re standing we’re half an inch above the paint. All it requires is that every week they ride some kind of little machine over it that warms it up a little and takes out all the scratches.”

“Sort like a land-Zamboni.” Sheila had always been a hockey fan. She said it was John Greenwood’s fault. He’d played hockey in high school and college, and coached youth hockey as a priest.

Spagelli looked puzzled. “Sort of. I never looked at it that way before.”

Sheila nodded. “And that’s what you all expect this Hope guy will turn out to be ... “

“What?” she’d momentarily lost them all.

“A sort of political Zamboni.”

Ascher laughed. “Let’s hope he goes a lot deeper than a few surface scratches!”

“Let’s.” Spagelli agreed. “There are deep cracks to be fixed, as well, and not just in the Liberty Bell.”

“You know,” Ascher told Sheila, “I came to this country just as soon as I could after the war. I’ve been a citizen since 1952. And in all of that time, I’ve never voted for the man I *wanted* to be the President. I’ve always voted against the man I *didn’t* want. And now I’m tired of voting for the lesser of two evils, my dear. The lesser of two evils is *still evil*. I want to vote for someone who isn’t evil at all. Alexander Hope is the first candidate I can support with a clear conscience.”

Father Joseph nodded. “Ascher isn’t the only one who feels that way. You remember our old friend Albert Mendelsohn?” Albert was John Greenwood’s Jewish uncle, another ex-partisan, and a diamond merchant currently living in Belgium. “He can’t vote, but he’s encouraging all of his American colleagues to contribute heavily to the Hope campaign. In fact, Albert’s brother Ruven is here in the States this very minute, actively raising money for Hope.”

Sheila was startled. “Is that even legal?”

“As long as it’s good old American money,” Father Joseph laughed. “I don’t think they allow Chinese government contributions any more, and Hope wouldn’t be in line for them in any case.”

Kitch shook his head in disbelief. “How old are Albert and Ruven Mendelsohn, anyway?”

“How old, you ask? How old?” Ascher drew himself up to his full height and width. A very big man, even at his age, Kitch wouldn’t have wanted to fight with him. “Why neither of those two young fellows is any older than I—“

“Shh!” somebody behind them whispered abruptly. Kitch noticed that there was organized movement at the front, now, not at a podium, but at another folding table where the severe young redhead sat beside a middle-aged man in a gray suit.

“Professor Sinclair, you’re wanted up front for the introduction. Mr. Hope’s about to speak!”

CHAPTER THREE: ALEXANDER HOPE

Who does this guy Bork think he is? Look closely, for yourself, at the Bill of Rights—the First, Second, Third, Fourth, Fifth, and especially the Ninth Amendment. The whole damn thing is about privacy, and a willful

refusal to see and understand that represents the lowest form of intellectual dishonesty.—Alexander Hope, *Looking Forward*

FAITH-ANNE had been right about the suit, Alex thought as he rose to take the battered lectern in the little Catholic gymnasium she'd arranged for him to speak in. (What was the name of the church again? Saint Gabriel Possenti of Isola. Odd, yet oddly familiar, too.) He'd always been a bit frugal (maybe even more than a bit) when it came to buying clothes.

He wasn't a large man (and didn't know that he impressed people that way). At five feet nine, he weighed 175, and, thanks to a health club his daughter had found, and incessant nagging on her part, he stayed in good shape. He had a full, healthy head of wavy brown hair that had to be cut entirely too often, was well tanned—something he made no special effort at—and his eyes were the intense azure of the inside of a sunlit iceberg. One of his female students had said he looked like Mel Gibson. Another had said it was Charles Bronson. At his age, he'd take either as a compliment.

He was also extremely wealthy, but had never managed to get used to it. There were few things he hated more than wearing a suit and tie. A child of the 60s and a westerner, he preferred jeans and cowboy shirts from Sears. But his daughter was right. The more you spend on a suit—in this case, an Oxxford—the more comfortable it is. And if you have your shirts made—an expensive luxury he'd probably never get over—then even ties seem perfectly comfortable.

From moment to moment it startled him to look up and see people watching him in what felt like his pajamas. It was like that dream where he was walking down the street, crawling through the jungle, addressing the board of directors, attending a faculty meeting, or lecturing in the classroom stark naked, and nobody seemed to notice, although that never saved him from waking up shaking and terminally embarrassed.

“... ladies and gentlemen, it gives me intense pleasure to introduce your candidate and mine, Alexander Hope!”

The audience exploded and rocked the gymnasium with their cheering. He was startled all over again to see that they actually appeared to be interested in what he was about to say.

The introduction had been as brief and modest as he could persuade Kitch to make it. Even as a courtesy, Alex never let anyone refer to him as “the next president of the United States”. His old friend and professional colleague of the past dozen years shared his political convictions—had helped lead him to them, in fact—and on that basis had persuaded him to make Chicago one of his first stops after his surprising nomination in Denver by the Free Libertarian Party of America. Kitch was a good man, right to the core. It was a pleasure to accommodate him.

So now it was time to demonstrate to his old friend that he—and thousands of others who'd put their trust in Alex to take the FLPA and its ideas

further than they'd ever gone before—hadn't made some horrendous mistake.

“Ladies and gentlemen ...“

Briefly he glanced left. His 23-year-old daughter and campaign manager stood at one end of the little stage watching the audience for their reaction to him. How many Christmas and Easter pageants had been performed here, he wondered, year after year, decade after decade, attended by parents almost as proud of their offspring as he'd always been of his?

At the right, an older friend than Kitch, John Pondoro, was doing the same thing, but for a very different reason. Secret Service protection had never been offered to an FLPA candidate in its 37-year history, nor would it likely have been accepted. (There were no Old Media television cameras here tonight, either, nor even a radio microphone, although his own party would be webcasting this speech live over the internet, and NetPlanetNews.com was carrying it, as well.) But Alex was acutely aware that under the big man's jacket hung a .45 caliber Glock Model 21 semiautomatic pistol—hideously illegal in Chicago—and that John was prepared to use it to save his candidate's life if it became necessary.

Big John had saved his life more than once before, in another country, far, far away. He was another man, like Kitch, whose central values had been tested and were solid.

John's son Cap—30-year-old Peter Hathawy Capstick Pondoro—was out in the crowd, “watching it from the inside”, as he put it. He preferred a handbuilt .38 Super automatic. Cap had his own way of doing things, and to his father's occasional frustration, it seemed to work. He and Faith-Anne had already knocked heads because she insisted on organization and efficiency. Cap was only interested in results.

One other person should have been here, but she was still in no condition to travel, and wouldn't be for some time. Those who were responsible for that would be made to pay for it.

Now Alex looked straight ahead, cleared his throat, and spoke.

“Ladies and gentlemen, fellow children of the American Revolution, let me begin by answering the two questions that I'm usually asked first. Yes, Hope is my real name, and, no, I'm not related to Bob Hope.”

Polite laughter rippled through the crowd. The remark wasn't very funny, but it had broken the ice reliably in business meetings and first-day classes for years.

He started again. “The next question I'm usually asked is, ‘Do you really expect to be elected President?’ And if you listen very closely, you can hear three more little words that they'd love to add: ‘you silly man’.”

This time the laughter was louder and more spontaneous. Now it was time to make his first real point. “And the truth is, I think, unless some miracle were to happen, that the odds greatly favor the election of the Democratic candidate—“

The hall erupted with booing. He'd expected that and patiently waited it through.

"The odds greatly favor the Democratic candidate, as I said, or the Republican candidate. We're talking about the U.S. Senator, here, the former First Lady. And we're talking about the sitting Vice President, although I suppose I might have chosen some other participle. So let's be as real as we can, shall we?"

"What I'm here to do is to spread the FLPA's message of freedom—its heart and spirit—far and wide, in order to make it just that much easier for that miracle I spoke of to transpire *someday*, for somebody who follows me along this particular path. And I'm asking you to help me do that."

Not much reaction there, he thought. Folks didn't like to hear their candidate say he didn't think he could win. But any other opinion would be that of a megalomaniac or a self-aggrandizing liar, and he was accumulating a reputation for the truth, no matter whose ox was gored—even his own.

"So will you help me?" he demanded, "help me spread the FLPA's message of freedom?"

He earned a much better reaction that time. People like to be asked for help. That kind of help, anyway. This kind of people. Now he'd begun to approach that proverbial altered state of consciousness, to feel a sort of warm glow build around him, and a comfortable golden haze, that he usually associated with speechmaking or a particularly good day teaching class. He'd read somewhere that some people would rather face death than address the public in this way.

For him, it was his only real vice.

"I'm a teacher," he confessed jokingly to his listeners, "a college professor. I can't help it, so let's review, shall we? What *is* the FLPA's message?"

Somebody yelled, "Freedom!" Others agreed noisily.

He put a hand up. "Some people might observe tonight, to this particular audience—in this particular place—that I'm preaching to the choir. But my daughter ... " He indicated Faith-Anne with an outstretched hand and people burst into applause and cheering.

"... my daughter says that the choir are the only individuals who show up for church reliably, and that they deserve to be preached to, if anybody does. So I'll risk boring some of you a little bit by summarizing the beliefs that we of the Free Libertarian Party of America share among ourselves. And then you go out and preach them to somebody *other* than the choir."

He took a deep breath and finally dived in. "Our message—this belief that we all share—consists of two very simple ideas. Two very dangerous ideas in their own way. Or at least King George III thought so."

General, subdued laughter. The sitting president was the third individual named George to occupy that office.

"The first idea is that this nation was built—tacitly, perhaps, implicitly—on the concept of absolute self-ownership. For better or worse, an individual

is the exclusive owner—the sole proprietor, if you will—of his life and of all the products of that life, be those products the sweet fruits of his labors or the bitter smoke from his chimney. The former signifies an individual’s rights, the latter, his responsibilities.”

That statement got Alex his first real applause of the evening, although it almost certainly wouldn’t have done so with any other group, he thought.

“The second idea is that for more than two centuries, the concept of self-ownership has been embodied in and protected by the first 10 amendments to the U.S. Constitution, commonly known as the Bill of Rights.”

More applause this time, and some cheering. As usual, his audience consisted mostly of young people—college kids and a handful of high schoolers—and it heartened him. It hadn’t been very long since the FLPA had been a greying—dying—group, populated and controlled by those whose interest in politics had originally been kindled in the 60s. And it was said—some people said, anyway—that the change had come because of *Looking Forward*, a book he’d written a few years ago, detailing the ways that stringent enforcement of the Bill of Rights would restore a civilization that was dying, too.

A book he often thought of as having gotten him into this mess.

“One approach, then, lies in reeducating the police and other authorities. They must be brought to understand that the Bill of Rights is not just a laundry list of arbitrary rules that they have to get around somehow in order to do their job. No, no, it is the highest law of the land, and it must be *enforced*.”

He raised his voice and thumped a hard hand on the lectern. The crowd erupted as he knew they would. He’d given minor variations of this speech at least a dozen times so far, and by now he could probably have delivered it in his sleep. That didn’t mean he didn’t believe in what he was saying—he wouldn’t be here if that were the case—it only meant that the unconscious, automatic part of his mind believed what he was saying, too.

And that left another part of his mind free to reflect on the long train of events that had brought him here from his home near Denver, Colorado ...

CHAPTER FOUR: AMELIA MORROW

Some Founding Fathers, like John Adams, were deeply religious. Thomas Jefferson was a “deist”—which is what an 18th century agnostic called himself if he didn’t want to be burned alive. Thomas Paine was an atheist, Ben Franklin was a member of the Hellfire Club. A Jew, Haym Salomon, bankrolled the American Revolution. To claim that our country was founded by Christians alone is to insult the spirit and grandeur of the First Amendment.—Alexander Hope, *Looking Forward*

NOBODY actually spat on Alex when he came home from Vietnam in 1971. He knew some guys that it had happened to, one serving six months for fracturing the nose and both cheekbones of the spitter with the back of his open hand.

Mostly they just ignored him, out of uniform or in, exactly as they ignored thousands and thousands of his fellow veterans—many of them still teenagers—of a repulsive little war that, even fresh from the heat of it, Alex couldn't make himself believe should ever have been fought.

For a moment Alex looked up and let his eyes mindlessly follow the foot traffic here in the San Diego Public Library as he attempted *not* to calculate where it would be safe to conceal himself among the ceiling-high racks, and where might be the best place to lay an ambush with crossfire. Didn't those idiots over there by the copy machine know any better than to expose themselves that way? Somebody had told him, on the day he was released from duty, that this would go away eventually. He certainly hoped so, because it was mentally exhausting to deal with.

What the Marine Corps—which in 1969 had bestowed a battlefield commission on him to lieutenant—hadn't known was that he was still a teenager himself. At 13, Alex had lied about his age—what now seemed at least century ago—to get himself a job at Miller's grocery store. Dad had just died of emphysema. Mom had been too distraught to do anything more than just sit at home staring at her dead husband's picture. Dad's pension—he'd been a Union Pacific fireman for 20 years—hadn't quite made ends meet. So Alex had gone to work at Miller's.

He'd let them think he was an undersized 15.

And now here he was, six years later, footloose and fancy-free (or stranded high and dry, depending on how you decided to look at it) here in sunny California, too stiff-necked to feel ashamed of the way that he and his comrades had just spent the last two years of their lives, but at the same time, bitterly disillusioned with the United States government's motives for prosecuting a Southeast Asian war in the first place. Sixty thousand lives wasted—most of them too young to have tasted much of real life—countless more lives forever shattered, And only God knew how many abandoned when the choppers finally fled the jungles, mountains, savannahs, and city streets of Vietnam for the last time.

At the moment—technically still under orders and on termination leave—he was sitting at a long formica-topped study table in a downtown branch of the library, thumbing his way slowly, and without much enthusiasm, through a colorful 18-inch pile of college catalogs, attempting to decide what to do with the remainder of his life. But just at the moment, his eyes were shut. His elbows rested on the smooth, cool tabletop, and his fists against his cheeks. His thoughts kept going back, unbidden, to the insane war that he'd been fighting, unbelievably, only ten days ago.

Ex-President Lyndon Baines Johnson had avoided his own military hitch, putting in a cosmetic and highly-protected six months in the Pacific theater during World War II before he was conveniently called back to Congress by his mentor, Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Sometimes Alex wished that he were more religious. Truly, he'd enjoy believing Johnson's hairy adipose would eventually end up bubbling, popping, and squeaking in the hottest skillet Hell had to offer.

Whose orders were you "only" following, you alcohol-soaked old butcher?

"Excuse me?" asked a voice, and a very attractive voice, at that. *Oh, no! Had he actually spoken those deliciously seditious thoughts out loud?*

"Er, sorry, Miss." He looked up. A girl—fully as attractive as her voice—was sitting across the table from him, way down at the other end, wearing a pretty, printed summer dress. He wished she were sitting a lot closer. "I was only talking to myself."

"Learn anything you didn't know?" It wouldn't take him long to learn to love the way her eyes crinkled at their corners when she said something like that. She was tiny, he realized, no more than five feet two, and slender, with a cloud of curly honey-blond hair around her face. Just now she wore a pair of enormous wire-framed glasses perched on her upturned nose.

He laughed, picked up his college catalogs, and casually—he hoped—moved down the table toward her, carefully staying on his own side. He could see her better that way, anyhow. This was his first prolonged conversation—at least he hoped it was prolonged, and only his first—with a Caucasian female, in over a year.

To his surprise, he noticed as he set his all-but-forgotten books down on the table again, that she didn't have any of her own. What she did have was a long, open-topped box full of paper cards maybe eight inches long and three inches wide. He knew that they were computer cards. She'd been reading them like they were pages in a book. He hadn't known that people could do that.

"I was thinking about Lyndon Johnson," he told her, for lack of anything better to say. Above all else, he knew he didn't want this conversation to end.

Her eyes crinkled again. "Not very politely, I'd guess. Just back from Over There, soldier?"

"Marine," he corrected her automatically. "I'm a Marine. And yes. Last week, in fact." He extended his hand. "I'm Lieutenant—no, *Alexander Hope*."

"Hello, No Alexander Hope. I'm Amelia Morrow." She eyed his college catalogs threatening to topple onto the floor. "Trying to decide what to do with your G.I. Bill, is that what brings you to our esteemed public library?"

He liked the way she talked. It sounded like back home, somehow. She certainly didn't sound like a California girl. He liked to watch her mouth work as she talked. Best of all, he liked the way she hadn't asked him if he were related to Bob Hope. He'd seen Bob Hope in 'Nam, on tour for the USO. He could take Bob Hope or leave him. Thanks for the memories.

He nodded, wondering when someone was going to shush them. “How about you?”

“I work across the street.” She pointed, but he couldn’t make out which office she meant. “It’s a zoo over there. I come here to check my cards in peace.”

He shook his head in genuine wonder. “You can really read that stuff, Amelia?” He believed he’d never heard such a beautiful name in his life before now. He discovered that he was making one of his famous snap judgements about her character—snap judgements that had seldom betrayed him.

“Yes, Alexander, I can, although we have a new machine on order at the bank that prints the contents of the card along the top edge.” She extracted a reel from her oversized purse and unrolled a foot of what was on it. “Paper tape—like for a real skinny player piano?” She laughed with him. “I can read that, too, but you know what?”

The girl’s voice dropped to conspiracy level and she leaned in toward him with a look both silly and serious. As she did, she slid a big, square, card-looking thing from her enormous purse. It was manila-colored, with some matte-black something inside, visible through a couple of oddly-shaped holes, and must have been eight inches on a side. “You’re looking at the future, Alexander. It’s called a ‘floppy disk’.”

Alex shook his head as if trying to rid himself of ... he didn’t know what he was trying to rid himself of. Did Amelia have any idea how irresistibly cute she’d looked when she’d shown him “the future”? She *had* to know.

“Call me Alex.” He glanced at his watch—11:45—time to take a chance. “Have you had lunch, Amelia?” Then, before she answered, “Will you have lunch with me?”

Her eyes crinkled again, “I’d be pleased to, Alex.” He put the catalogs away. She gathered her purse and cards. They left together, and from that moment, they never spent more than 24 hours apart for the next 30 years.



Even 30 years later, Alex never understood why Amelia had left the library with him that day. The crime rate was horrible, and he might have been some kind of crazy. As it turned out, he *was* some kind of crazy—crazy about Amelia. He’d never known that it was possible to feel this way about another person, and he never really looked at another woman for as long as Amelia lived.

As it happened, Amelia Morrow—soon to become Amelia Morrow Hope—had three great inborn talents. She was good with anything that had anything to do with mathematics. She had a better feel for the future than anyone he’d ever met. And she was an unfailingly accurate judge of character—even better than he was. She told him often afterward that she’d taken one look at him and known with an absolute certainty that he was the man that she would spend the rest of her life with. Nothing mystical about it, she

was always careful to add, just an instantaneous preconscious summation of all the factors involved.

“Did you get that bit from *Atlas Shrugged*?” he’d always ask her with a laugh.

She’d always laugh and reply, “No, from Mr. Spock.”

Still, Alex never understood why Amelia loved him. He understood precisely—with an absolute certainty—from the first moment that their eyes met, why he loved Amelia. His young bride (a whole six months younger than he was) was both beautiful and brilliant, brimming with untapped talents, with a positive hunger for doing things the right way the first time, and with an energetic enthusiasm that she brought to every aspect of their lives together.

“Look,” she told Alex the very first evening, during their first dinner together. He was eating lasagna as if he hadn’t had a decent plate of it in years, which happened to be the case. “The people I work for are bankers. They all think that computers are nothing but great big machines for counting things. And they’re right—but also, they’re wrong. What computers are really for—what they will be for someday—is *communicating*. They’re a brand new way of using the telephone that Alexander Graham Bell never dreamed of, and before too long, Alex, everybody will have one.”

Alex blinked. He’d read that some expert somewhere had declared that there would never be more than a few dozen computers in the world. Who needed more than that? Now he couldn’t help imagining his mother’s tiny frame house west of Denver filled from wall to wall with tall metal and glass cabinets with their blinking lights and whirling reels. At least in the summertime she’d enjoy the air conditioning that those monsters couldn’t operate without—although how she’d feed the team of PhDs and graduate students needed to keep it running, he couldn’t guess.

“I know exactly what you’re thinking,” she told him, and at least in part, she was right. “The machine I work with is about the size of a large conference table—okay, a *very* large conference table. But only a few years ago, the same machine would have taken up several big rooms and used tens of thousands of vacuum tubes—and it would have been a much, much dumber machine than mine. Every year, Alex, these things get smaller and faster and cheaper.”

“And?” He leaned on his elbows and looked at her across the red checkered tablecloth. He loved to hear her talk.

“And if someone *planned* on the assumption that they’d get small enough and cheap enough to buy and use at home, let’s say for getting Junior’s report card straight from the school, or Grandma’s recipe for oyster jelly—“

He sat up. “Yech!”

“—straight from Grandma, or an incriminating picture from the New Year’s office party ... “

He nodded enthusiastically. “It’d be like buying Ford stock while Henry was still working on it in the horsebarn. Or G.E. when Charles Steinmetz was still ...”

“You’ve got it! Oh, Alex, you’re the first person I’ve ever spoken to who actually got it! By the turn of the century, everybody will do their shopping over some kind of picture-phone-computer network on which merchants will display and describe their goods and services. If someone were to decide right now to become a pioneer in the consumer electronics business—always keeping that future in mind and never swerving from it—then by the time that they’d helped make that future arrive, they’d be rich!”

“Communications, Amelia” Alex asked her with raised eyebrows, seeking confirmation.

“Yes, Alex, communications,” she answered.

“Not counting.”

“Well, counting, too, Alex, but mostly communications.”

“Og understand!” he said in a deep, stupid-sounding voice, and pounded the table. “Og start chipping floppy disk! Have *many* floppy disk when millennium arrive!”

She laughed.

He laughed.

They laughed and laughed together until dawn.

CHAPTER FIVE: FAITH—ANNE HOPE

You can’t repeal the Second Amendment, any more than you can repeal any of the other nine. It was a package deal, you see, an absolute prerequisite to ratifying the main body of the Constitution. Repeal one, you repeal them all. Do that, and you repeal the whole Constitution—and with it, any legal authority that the government has to exist (let alone repeal the Second Amendment).—Alexander Hope, *Looking Forward*

AMELIA said, “And do you know what they told me?”

For Alex, the process would always feel like surfing.

“They told me what you always tell me—that moving parts are the enemy! They told me we could be having memory without any moving parts in as little as 10 years!”

Alex snorted. He’d heard that kind of talk before. This time it was something called “bubble memory”. He’d believe it when he could hold it in his hand—having bought it for a buck a meg. He hated moving parts, and did consider them the enemy, but for now everybody was stuck with them, and probably would be for some time to come.

He told her so. As always, she listened and (not quite as always) eventually agreed with him. He and Amelia had quickly found their way to the leading curl of the technological wave and had slid right to the top, ten toes hanging over the edge of the future, usually by making the right decisions together.

Amelia would go and talk to her fellow “nerds” everywhere they were to be found in those days, crunching numbers for downtown banks, sorting people for universities, waiting until the smallest possible hours of the morning for share-time on the big machines for their own pet projects.

Everywhere Amelia went, she listened to her colleagues gripe or dream, and then she and Alex would turn those gripes and dreams into ideas for products that made life a little easier for the nerds, while pushing technical progress more and more toward the direction—communication—that she’d outlined for him in the very beginning.

“Okay, then,” she sighed, “how about this?” As usual, they were sitting up in bed, with Johnny Carson on the *Tonight Show* making in-jokes that only he and Ed McMahon were laughing at, her steno pad between them, filled with scribbling and doodling it had taken him two years to learn to read.

The programmers and techies that she’d been talking to tonight—programmers and techies who were always ready to talk to a pretty girl because they hardly ever got to see one—had been stealing computer time to play a game that was sweeping the cybernetic underground from coast to coast, loosely based on television’s *Star Trek*, a show both Alex and Amelia had watched ardently and avidly before its perplexing cancellation, and still felt considerable kinship with. They believed that they were on a kind of trek, themselves.

Just now they were trying to figure out how to market such a game to a general public who were acquainted only with much simpler items like Pong, the popular new electronic table-tennis game. The trouble was that games like Pong were played, for the most part, in bars and restaurants, or they were smuggled in to play on company computers at work. Very few individuals had computers at home.

“Talk to a couple of programmers,” he suggested to Amelia. “Maybe we can have something ready—already written—when the right home machine comes along. I don’t think it’s going to be that Sinclair thing we looked at yesterday.”

The couple’s first commercial product had been a new kind of paper tape (they’d found it being used for something else altogether in the textiles industry) that took cleaner punches and was several times more tear-resistant. They’d been about to produce similarly improved punch cards, when Amelia had pulled the plug on that project, and at the same time had adroitly avoided cornering the world supply of eight-inch floppy disks.

Instead, what they now called the Hope Corporation (Amelia had designed a logo using the head and winged shoulders of the flying horse Pe-

gasus) became one of the first commercial enterprises to market five-and-a-quarter-inch floppies.

By this time, however, their main interest was in modems—for “modulator-demodulator”—the backbone of computer communications. Together, they clung to the leading edge of that wave, too, from 300 baud acoustic couplers, through 1200, 2400, 4800, 9600 baud, on up to 28.8, 33.3, and 56.6 megabyte devices. Their little corporation sold communication cards and other kinds of network equipment, and quietly underwrote research in unbreakable encryption. Amelia’s original aim was refined: not just computer communication, but communication for private individuals that no government, or anybody else, could ever intercept or interfere with.

Their unusual partnership allowed them to enjoy each other to the fullest. Amelia did the “research” on midnight excursions deep into electronics-filled basements and 24-hour coffee bars all over the region, where a whole new kind of life was being lived on the frontier of what would eventually be called “cyberspace”. Southern California was getting to be a more dangerous and crime-filled place to live in every year, so Alex started going with her

Once Amelia told him what to look for, Alex went out and found the product that seemed called for, often by combining items of technology from unrelated areas that had no one had ever put together. More and more frequently, he and Amelia set unheard-of specifications and had new technology created that had never existed before.

Finally, they ventured out into the field together to sell their wares, turning their sales trips into second, third, fourth, or fifth honeymoons. Alex jokingly reckoned that in their first 10 years together, they swam in every motel swimming pool from Fairbanks to Key West and from Tijuana to St. John’s, Newfoundland. It had been too cold to swim when they went to England, but they’d taken a hovercraft to see the Roman ruins on the Isle of Wight. Amelia argued that with their mosaics, the Romans had invented the idea of pixels.

Years before that, Alex had earned a bachelor’s degree in history on an ROTC scholarship. Subsequently he’d earned his master’s degree in the military, through correspondence courses with the University of Maryland. And as they were building their business together, Amelia had made him stay in school. After all, that was how they’d met, she insisted; and it was always important to finish things.

He’d made the mistake, he often joked, of telling her about two men in his company in Vietnam who’d been “Black Muslims”, but went on *Hajj*—the religious pilgrimage prescribed by Mohammed—and become full-fledged Moslems. They’d told him that the Prophet had proclaimed, whatever a man’s station in life, be he a prince or a pauper, that he should acquire a second trade to keep him centered in the real world. Many years later, Alex had found out that the Prophet had actually meant a manual trade, but by then, thanks to his Amelia and the G.I. Bill, he had a doctorate in history.

Every year, Alex discovered that he loved Amelia more, and he correctly believed that she felt the same way about him. Every year, he enjoyed being married to her more, and although it soon appeared that they would never have children, to them, that was only another reason to keep trying in all of those motel honeymoon suites across the continent.

Every year they made more money, identifying problems, inventing solutions, and selling the result—watching cyberspace expand around them like the Big Bang universe, until nearly everybody they knew seemed to be involved in it.

At the same time that they seemed to be getting richer faster and easier all the time—in ten years their fledgling Hope Corporation went from a smelly, black-widow-infested garage in the back yard of Amelia's maiden aunt's house, to a corrugated metal rental structure in an industrial park just outside the city limits, to a modest office suite in downtown San Diego, to an entire floor in the second tallest building in the city, finally to their own tall, ultramodern edifice with copper-tinted windows in a wholly new high-tech community—it seemed to get harder and nastier in other ways.

It wasn't just that there were local police officials and building inspectors and others like them who had to be bribed on a regular basis if they wanted to stay in business. In his youth—and especially after seeing the way that things worked in Southeast Asia—Alex had considered himself a man of the world, enured to a moderate amount of graft and political corruption.

But what got under his skin from the beginning were the “political reformers”, mostly in the legislature up north, later on in Congress, who believed that they had some right (and regrettably did have the power) to tell him who he could and couldn't hire—so many of this color, so many of that nationality, so many of this sex, so many of that age—absolutely without regard to whether they could do the job or even speak the language.

Before he knew it, thugs with three-piece suits, hardhats, and clipboards were invading his offices and shops without any kind of Constitutional warrant, prying into everything from office chairs to air-conditioners, forcing him to install special facilities for those whose physical disabilities made them unqualified to do anything more than make coffee for everybody else—for which he was fined when it was discovered. He was also fined if a bathroom sink happened to be an inch too high or too low, or if a toilet held too many gallons in its tank, or if an extension cord was visible on the floor behind a desk, or if a concrete column in the second sub-basement was painted an unauthorized color.

He was even fined because the air in his building had too many molecules of various “hazardous” chemicals (mostly from the Xerox machine), although it contained less than ten percent of the same chemicals that were to be found in the air outside.

When he pointed out that—in order to comply with the government imposed hiring quotas—he'd have to fire great numbers of blacks, Asians,

Hispanics, and women, nobody wanted to hear it. Or they simply threatened him with hostile inspections and audits, making it clear that *something* would be found that would allow them to shut him down for good, if he didn't simply shut up and do as he was told. In their bureaucratic arrogance, they didn't seem to care that then there would be no jobs for anybody.

Somewhere along the line, Alex began to sense a growing ... well, one could only call it envious resentment, in those around him and Amelia. But of what? Of the 16-hour days they had put in for decades? Of the risks they'd taken, often with everything they possessed? No, all of that was somehow overlooked and set aside. What people envied, and resented them for, were the *results* of all that effort, as if the results had simply materialized out of thin air, and the effort itself had never been expended,

What surprised, dismayed, and angered him most was *who* it was that seemed to be doing the resenting. The so-called city fathers didn't disturb him. They were nothing more than a dreary collection of tax-consuming parasites who couldn't have been elected to be cesspool cleaners if the voters had known the least fact regarding their lives and careers. They were constantly at him, accepting the gifts he gave the city—parks, playgrounds, libraries, even a giant concert hall, intended mostly for his employees—while viciously attacking the profits that made such gifts possible.

But that wasn't what astonished him. After all, what was politics itself, but a process of stealing what people earned or created, and then giving it to those who were incapable of earning, or unwilling to earn, for themselves? No, not welfare mothers, but the bureaucrats who spied on them and handed out the checks.

There were his many competitors and fellow businessmen who made it worse for everybody by being everything that Karl Marx might ever have accused them of (several made a practice of finding pretexts to fire senior workers near their 19th anniversary, to avoid paying them their full pensions), while simultaneously sucking up to the very politicians who pretended, publicly—especially around election day—to be their class enemies, but played golf and went to cocktail parties with them the rest of the year.

Alex didn't play golf. He and Amelia went hunting, mostly in Wyoming, and didn't talk about it in San Diego.

No, what bothered Alex most were his own ungrateful, brainwashed employees, people he'd thought enjoyed working for him, but who had organized a labor union against him, and then found every possible excuse as individuals to sue him and his corporation for everything from on-the-job-hangnails to the sexual inequality "implied" by his having provided them with separate bathrooms. On the day that the Hope Corporation was reported by the media to have made its first billion dollars (strictly on paper—everything was tied up in inventory and "receivables") the number of these evil, bloodsucking lawsuits had quadrupled.

Always, his lawyers advised him to settle.

Always he refused to give in to blackmail.

Usually, he won.

Even so, Alex soon began to regret not having gotten his college degrees in the law. He also regretted having chosen to start their business here in California where they'd met, especially since Amelia was no more a Californian than he was. He'd been born and raised in Morrison, Colorado, a little town just west of Denver best known for having given its name to a geological layer full of dinosaur bones stretching from Canada to Mexico.

Amelia had been born and grown up in Laramie, Wyoming.

Both of them considered themselves westerners, and understood perfectly that California wasn't a western state at all, but a colony of the socialist east coast—or of some European communist police state.

And then, in the spring of 1985, everything changed.

One Sunday morning, Amelia had awakened him, informing him she had coffee waiting for them in the living room. He put on a bathrobe and followed her. By now they had a roomy apartment with an ocean view that they used as much for work as for living. However this Sunday, they'd vowed to swear off work altogether and go see the ocean liner *Queen Mary*, anchored permanently in Long Beach, and Howard Hughes' gigantic seaplane the *Spruce Goose*, something they'd talked about doing for years but had never done.

Amelia let him drink his first big cup of coffee and his second. Then she'd taken his hand gently, saying, "Come here, darling, there's something I want to show you in the bathroom. He'd gone, having no idea what she was up to—and why the bathroom?—and what she'd shown him was a pregnancy test.

"When I missed my period, I took the test the first time just to see. That was yesterday. This was to make sure." She threw her arms around him. "Alex, you're gonna be a daddy!"

For every one of the nine years that they'd been married, Alex had believed that the happiest day of his life—the happiest day that could ever possibly *be* in his life—was the first day that he'd made love to Amelia.

He discovered now that he was wrong.

Their tiny baby daughter had been born early in December of 1985. They'd brought her home, placed her under the Christmas tree, and taken pictures of her that they'd always treasure. Their Christmas present to themselves, she was, not nine months in the making, but nine long, hopeful years.

They'd named their little girl for Alex's mother Faith—still back in Morrison but planning to fly out as soon as possible—and for Amelia's mother Anne, dead for the past five years. She'd known Alex (and never quite decided if she approved of him, he thought) but would never know the granddaughter whom she would have adored and spoiled thoroughly.

Having watched with a kind of slow-motion horror what had become of government education in the state of California—propaganda camps for so-

cialism and breeding grounds for illiterate criminals—they vowed that their little Faith-Anne would never so much as set foot in one of them.

Over the next years, however, any thoughts they'd had of leaving California had gotten set aside, somehow, and Faith-Anne gradually became an integral part of the family business, contributing ideas that were increasingly less childish, and startling people who didn't know her (and even some who did) with her wisdom and maturity. Friends who were enthusiastic about Frank Herbert's *Dune* half-jokingly called her an "abomination".

Eventually, one of her precocious ideas developed into a highly popular combination home cordless and cellular telephone that made the Hopes ten times as wealthy as they had been (and earned them ten times the resentment from the media and politicians). Faith-Anne finished UCLA at 16 and, recognizing the family's vulnerability, went on from there to law school.

For Alex, it seemed only a moment between those happy successes (and the struggles that went with them) and the sudden loss of Amelia in 2005, to breast cancer. For three decades, she had given all of her bright energy to his life. She had also given him any meaning his life had ever possessed. For a year afterward, the only thing that kept him from simply joining Amelia in death was his only child, his grown daughter, Faith-Anne.

Then he had an idea. Faith-Anne had inherited all of her mother's sharp-minded business sense. The company didn't mean as much to him as it had before. In fact, without Amelia, it meant nothing. Therefore—in a move harshly criticized from coast to coast in newspapers and trade journals—Alex handed control of the Hope Corporation over to his 21-year-old daughter.

And moved back to Colorado.

CHAPTER SIX: CHANGELLOR VAN CLEAVE

The Second Amendment was written expressly to intimidate government officials and keep them in their place. The fact that politicians and bureaucrats, regardless of their party, detest it and want it obliterated proves that it works.—Alexander Hope, *Looking Forward*

IT had been six years and it still hurt every day.

If anyone had ever thought to ask Alex, before Amelia died, what she meant to him, he would immediately have told them "everything". And he'd have meant it. And he'd have been right. But before Amelia died, he hadn't known what "everything" meant.

He found, after she was gone, that he unconsciously associated Amelia with his “rebirth”. The world before he’d been shipped off to Vietnam didn’t seem real to him—it hadn’t seemed real a month after he’d arrived in Southeast Asia. Emerging again into the bright, noisy, colorful “real” world of the United States, of southern California, of a new business, and above all, of Amelia, Vietnam no longer seemed real.

Alex had been literally living a new life.

And now that life was over, because the partner, the lover, the best friend he’d lived that life with—the scent of her hair, the sound of her voice, of her laugh, the face that he adored and had come to know better than his own—was gone. All that Alex could see ahead of himself now was bleak and one-dimensional—a cold, gray world of overcast and ashes.

For a longer time than he thought possible, Alex went through a process in which—regarding some event at work, regarding a movie or a piece of music, regarding something he’d seen in a newspaper or heard on the radio—his first reflexive thought, a habit of 30 years, would be, “Just wait’ll I tell Amelia!”

Then, before that thought was quite completed, the unthinkable truth, the unbearable truth (no adjective was adequate) would hit him, and it was a little like losing her all over again—although not quite as bad as waking up every morning, expecting her to be there, and discovering in a heartbeat that she wasn’t and never would be again.

Alex had fled the west coast and the memories it evoked without very much thought about where he would go or what he would do. Almost instinctively—like a salmon or a migrating bird, he thought—he’d headed back home. There wasn’t much objective reason to do that. Both of his parents had died years ago. He had no brothers or sisters. And somebody had subdivided the foothills he’d wandered happily as a boy, .22 rifle hanging from his hand, following his dog after rabbits and rattlesnakes. There was only his folks’ little frame house in Morrison that he’d held onto, mostly out of sentiment.

And that was it.

Of course he didn’t have to *do* anything. As the wheels of his corporation’s LearJet had touched down on the asphalt at Jefferson County Airport (Denver International Airport, far to the east of the capital city, was nothing but a monument to political arrogance and corruption; he avoided it whenever he could), his daughter had called him by internet video to inform him that his net personal worth had just crossed the billion dollar mark.

Alex would have given every cent of it—and gone a billion times further into debt—to have Amelia back. But to whom do you make an offer like that? He wished he knew. He’d have made it to the Devil himself, if he’d believed in the Devil. He looked out the little airplane’s window as it taxied to a rental hangar without seeing what was outside.

“Now you’re absolutely sure you’re going to be all right, Daddy?” Faith-Anne asked him in their personal realtime chat area, hidden securely within

the depths of the Hope Corporation website. Her expression on the laptop screen before him was worried. “Isn’t there anything I can do for you?”

Was there anything *she* could do for *him*? Suddenly, Alex felt hideously guilty for abandoning his little girl to fend for herself at the corporation headquarter in San Diego. After all, Amelia had been her mother, and Faith-Anne’s loss was at least as great as his—in all probability, far greater. Although their Faith-Anne was 21, and an unusually mature 21 at that, at this particular moment, her father kept seeing her in his mind at age four, all orange pigtails and freckles, valiantly fighting back tears when she’d taken a spill at the local ice skating rink.

“Nothing, dear, thank you”, he spoke softly into his laptop—a product of his company, ironically, a model called the “Amelia”—as the jet slipped into what was now the Hope Corporation hangar. It was all he could think of to say to her, although he desperately wished it could be more. “Come see me when you can, Boss.”

“LOL”, she replied, a very old internet expression meaning “laughing out loud”.

He’d taken the company car he’d arranged to be there, a 1999 peacock blue Dodge Durango with the restrained Hope Corporation logo stenciled on the doors in yellow. From the hanger, he’d driven himself from just northwest of Denver to just southwest. He’d always hated I-25 where it passed through the city, but there wasn’t much choice. On the other hand, catching sight of Coors Field, home of his beloved Blake Street Bums, always seemed to cheer him up. To him, they were the home team. He’d never really felt at home in San Diego.

But Alex had never been suited to inaction, and doing nothing only made him dwell on his unbearable loss. Amelia wouldn’t have liked that, not at all.

Alex had arranged for power, gas, and water to be turned on during the flight out here. He’d picked up some groceries at the local King Soopers (Miller’s was long gone.) and mooched around the modest two bedroom house he’d grown up in for less than 72 hours before he decided that there had to be more to life than sitting here and watching the hairsprayed mouth-breathers on Denver’s various TV news broadcasts make even bigger idiots of themselves than they were already. They wouldn’t have lasted another day on the air if only 10 percent of their viewership had even the most elementary education in subjects like logic, economics, Constitutional law, history—

Suddenly, he knew what he had to do!

He glanced at his wristwatch—an original Omega Speedmaster Professional with a winged horse engraved on the back—a gift from Amelia on their 10th anniversary. There was a lot of history, one way or another, associated with that watch. It was too late today. He’d start first thing in the morning.

Amelia would have loved this!

★ ★ ★

Gallatin Memorial College suited Alex perfectly.

It was private, conservative-leaning-to-libertarian, and small. It had originally been constructed from native sandstone well outside the city limits, just about a century ago, but now found itself entirely surrounded by quiet, green, tree-shaded residential communities. Best of all, it was here on the west side of the city, less than ten miles from his boyhood home in Morrison.

Taking no chances, he'd called his daughter the same evening he'd had his idea. "Faith-Anne? Hi, honey. I'm just fine—or as well as can be expected, anyway. You're doing your hair differently, aren't you? Look, kiddo, I guess that there's something I want you to do for me, after all."

Delighted, she'd tried to fill him in on the details of current company operations, but he didn't care, and he wasn't very subtle about saying so. He had every confidence in her, and he had this idea he found himself suddenly excited about—when he'd thought that he'd never feel excited about anything again.

"Okay, Daddy, shoot!" Faith-Anne had every confidence in him, as well, and on top of everything else, she still called him "Daddy", a title he felt he'd earned and was far prouder of than other titles he'd worn, "Sergeant", "First Lieutenant", "Chairman of the Board", "President and CEO".

"Okay, kiddo, I want you to use one of the dummy corporations I had set up—I think the Ralston Foundation would be a little too blatant; use something else; make it up if you have to—to endow an academic position at Gallatin Memorial College west of Denver. Here are the details ..."

Faith-Anne was good at details, just like her mother. And unlike her mother, she was also a lawyer. Together, by phone and laptop for the next two hours, they revised and refined the qualifications of the endowment until they had become so narrow they could only fit one man: Alexander Hope, PhD.

For the next two weeks, as half a dozen grey-suited, power-tied, briefcase-wielding attorneys for a California something-or-other that called itself the Thomas Paine Scholastic Foundation arrived at Denver International Airport and helicoptered across the city to bestow its corporate largesse upon the astonished administration of Albert Gallatin Memorial College, Alex allowed himself the first real vacation he'd taken in 30 years.

Thinking of Amelia every step of the way—showing her the sights of his hometown as if she were walking with him or sitting in the car beside him—he went off to see the Denver Zoo, the Natural History Museum, the Botanical Gardens, and the tall, gray art museum he could remember as a kid. He even went to see the new ocean aquarium and the Butterfly Pavilion and the poor, pale ghosts of Elitch's Gardens and Lakeside Amusement Park.

He drove the peacock blue Durango, and his memories of Amelia, down to Colorado Springs to see the Air Force Academy, Cheyenne Mountain Zoo, the Will Rogers Memorial, the former home of Robert A. Heinlein, the Rodeo Cowboy Museum, the cliff dwellings, Seven Falls, the Bug Museum (where he thought about getting himself a cute, furry, pet wolf spider—and

then rejected the idea; the only thing in the world that terrified Faith-Anne was spiders), and the Cave of the Winds. He found that he missed the Clock Museum, which had been shut down many years ago, and what he'd always called the Hall of the Wax Presidents.

He even saw a couple of Rockies games, both of which they lost. And finally, it was time.

One morning he got up, showered, shaved, ate a healthy breakfast, put slacks on instead of the jeans he'd grown used to again, found a conservative shirt and tie, a professorly corduroy jacket with leather elbow patches, and went to claim the job he'd created for himself. One of many bright spots: nobody at conservative Albert Gallatin Memorial College would be offended when he drove a great big peacock blue SUV into their parking lot.

★ ★ ★

“*The Alexander Hope?*” As in, *the* Howard Hughes, or *the* Bill Gates.

“Dr. Van Cleave,” Alex told the man behind the desk, “I assure you that I don’t expect to be treated any differently than any other applicant.”

On the wall behind the fellow’s desk there hung an enormous color photograph of the damaged Apollo XIII service module. Alex didn’t know what that flight meant to Van Cleave, but it had always been important to him as the supreme example of courage under fire and the ability to “think on one’s feet”.

The Chancellor of Albert Gallatin Memorial College, and the head of its philosophy department was a tall, thin man of about Alex’s own age, with snow white hair, a beard, and a moustache that belied his otherwise youthful appearance. Surprisingly, the man wore cargo slacks and a tan bush jacket.

“But you’re a unique individual, Mr. Hope—”

“Call me Alex.”

“Alex, then. You’re a unique individual, Alex. You *have* to be treated differently—and so does everybody else.” He glanced through Alex’s papers once again, those associated with his three degrees in history, as well as perhaps the briefest resume he’d ever seen. It mentioned Alex’s educational background, the Marines, and the Hope Corporation.

“Besides,” the Chancellor went on, “we have something that may interest you. It’s an endowed chair in history, but it has to be given to a man with a military background who’s also been successful in business.”

“Which is defined as ... ?” Alex knew perfectly well.

“Having made,” Van Cleave grinned at him, and Alex knew that the man understood exactly what was happening here, “more than a billion dollars.”

Alex grinned back. “Would you care to see my Dun & Bradstreet or my tax returns?”

★ ★ ★

The college catalog referred to it as “The Meaning and Spirit of the American Revolution.” After teaching the course for five years, Alex had been surprised and delighted to learn that it was one of the most popular classes on campus.

Of course Albert Gallatin Memorial College was no ordinary campus. Still, it pleased him that they’d had to find a larger venue for this section every year, and that the young faces in the first several rows continued to be bright and eager.

“Today, ladies and gentlemen” he opened a book he wouldn’t look at again for the next hour, leaned over the lectern, and told them—all 250 of them—“is the fifth anniversary of my arrival here at Gallatin Memorial, as well as the fifth anniversary presenting this class, which, in turn, was a major reason for my wanting to teach at Gallatin in the first place.”

They occupied what used to be a dissection theater, a splendid hall from another era, built of golden oak, with a 60-foot skylighted ceiling, brick floors, and granite tabletops. Before him, the seats rose in a horseshoe shape and stadium-style, for 30 rows. Then there was a balcony with another 10 rows. Students entered there, or through doors on the landing beneath the balcony on either side of the hall. There were doors behind him, as well—for a fast getaway, he always joked—at either end of a wonderful set of enormous blackboards made of genuine slate in several oak-framed layers, sliding up and over one another. The acoustics were absolutely perfect. There was no need for a microphone, or even to raise his voice.

“A lot of individuals these days,” he said, “both in academia and politics, pretend to have difficulty understanding what the Founding Fathers meant when they wrote the Constitution, and especially the Bill of Rights.”

He heard a sort of rustle go through the class as they settled down to listen. At that, it was a lot better, he thought, than hearing them snore.

“It seems to me that you have to be desperate to advance your political agenda—pathetically desperate—if you’re willing to appear so dullwitted and ignorant that you’re unable to comprehend the clearest thinking and the cleanest writing ever, in the history of the English language.”

He’d once read through the Declaration of Independence, inspired by H.L. Mencken’s silly 1920s street-slang translation of it, with an eye toward rendering it more accessible to the 21st century ear. What a mistake that had been. He hadn’t been able to think of a single substitute for the common—and uncommonly beautiful—words that Thomas Jefferson had chosen, even as tweaked painfully afterward by the Continental Congress.

“So for the benefit of mental malingerers like that, as well as our own, for just a minute, let’s put ourselves where the Founders found themselves after the Revolution and see if we can’t figure out for ourselves just what they were getting at.”

He stepped out from behind the table where his book lay and began pacing slowly in front of it.

“Let’s give it a try: following a 20-year cold war, and a shooting war that lasted for nine years, you’ve just completely flabbergasted yourself, and everybody else in the world, by humiliating the regular military and the mercenary forces of the most powerful and ruthless empire the world has ever witnessed, a culture that has pretended for centuries to be the most refined and genteel civilization known to mankind, but which has raped and pillaged and enslaved its way across the face of this poor, suffering planet since Henry Cabot rediscovered Newfoundland in 1497.”

Alex always enjoyed throwing that in. Newfoundland had been the very first dominion of the British Empire, founded in 1688 by Sir Cavendish Boyle—the funniest name Alex had ever heard. He and Amelia had been to Cabot Tower on one of their sales trips, a big stone chess rook of a building, standing on a coastal hill high above old St. John’s, from which Guglielmo Marconi had sent his first historic wireless signal in 1901.

That had been a good trip. His mind returned to Colorado, and the present. “Now, Founding Fathers and Mothers, you you find yourself writing a document—the basic legal foundation for your new country—hoping to make sure that the abuses of power that caused you to fight the Revolution to begin with can never happen again.

“Let’s start with what’s often regarded as the most outdated and least important of the first 10 amendments to the Constitution, commonly known as the Bill of Rights, the Third Amendment, which forbids the quartering of troops in people’s homes in times of peace, or in times of war ‘but in a manner to be prescribed by law’—which necessarily implies just compensation; considering the nature of the 18th century practice, that pretty much precludes quartering of any kind under any circumstances.

“If you’re the “beneficiary” of this kind of government attention, you can bet that your livestock will be slaughtered first, to feed the troops you’re quartering, or herded off to grace some officer’s estate, along with any rolling stock—wagons or carriages—you have. At the same time, your crops will be pulled from the ground—even if they’re not ready it will deny them to the enemy—and your orchards cut down for firewood.

“Of course all of your furniture and personal property will meet similar fates, the smaller items—the gold locket with hand-cut silhouettes of your mother and father—vanishing into the voluminous bulk of the military uniforms of the time, the larger items hauled away to that officer’s estate, on your wagons, pulled by the oxen you’ll never see again.

“But that’s only the least of it. And you can pretty much expect your daughters, your sisters, your aunts, your wife, and even your mother to be bringing more English babies into the world in a few months—that is, if they aren’t simply beaten to death, or gutted from crotch to sternum by British bayonets, once they’ve been used by the officers and thrown to the troops afterward.”

He always listened for a reaction at this point, and was usually rewarded with a few gasps or groans, followed by a shocked silence. Over the past two centuries, British redcoats had almost become friendly figures, like Canadian Mounties, or Smokey the Bear, instead of the European-style army of rape and pillage that they were.

“Remember, we’re not speaking of Nazis, here, or of Cossacks, or even of the Mongol Horde. We’re talking about the “kindest, gentlest” empire in the world. Does the Third Amendment seem so obsolete and insignificant now?”

Murmuring, of a sort that told him he’d gotten through, filled the room.

“Okay, then, maybe you’re ready for this one.

“If you’d just been through all of this—you, your neighbors, and friends—would you write yourself a Second Amendment guaranteeing a right to own and carry weapons to a state-approved militia? Or would you try to safeguard the natural and inherent right of any human being to defend yourself and your family *against* the state—no matter who disapproved of it or how hard they they tried to twist and distort your words and intentions afterward?”

Somebody yelled, “You bet your ass I would!” Alex suppressed an unprofessionally grin. He knew who the shouter was and would deal with him appropriately later on. When the laughter had finally died down, he went on.

“Obviously, at least one of those among us has learned something from history. Now despite all of the sighs and lies of the so-called news media, despite the blithering of Hollywood “personalities” so empty of mind and spirit they have to be filled with other people’s words and ideas—and even movements from place to place on a set—despite the posturing of a judiciary that’s a national disgrace and desperately in need of scouring out with flamethrower and firehose, despite all of that, anyone who holds to the former interpretation of the Second Amendment, and denies the latter, simply admits to the world that he’s ignorant, stupid, crazy, or every bit as evil as the English atrocities that forced the Bill of Rights to be written in the first place.”

He closed the book before him.

“No formal assignment today, ladies and gentlemen. Go home and think about what I’ve said.”

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE AUSTRIAN MAFIA

Any politician who won’t trust you with the weapon of your choice clearly cannot be trusted with the power he desires over your life.—Alexander Hope, *Looking Forward*

“YOU want to *what?*”

Sitting at his desk, Alex peered up over his reading glasses at his four favorite—and brightest—students, who had crowded themselves into his tiny office. In a transparent attempt to flatter him, each of them carried a copy of *Looking Forward*, the book he’d written his first year here at Gallatin Memorial. He wondered where they’d come by their copies. The book was currently “O.P.”—meaning “out of print”.

Before him, spread across the blotter, was his lunch: an open tin of difficult-to-get tiny sardines, packed in two layers in soy bean oil (these days, most of the sardines you could buy in grocery stores were big enough to reel in on a hook and line), a box of saltines, and a plastic screw-topped bottle of Coca-Cola.

Now if only this cubicle had room enough for his four young guests to sit down. As it was, the quarters were so close that they probably couldn’t *fall* down. At least he had a window, looking out at “garden level” onto the college commons. (In the summertime, a classical Greek play was always performed here, invariably billed as “The Tragedy of the Commons”; it was an economists’ joke.) That window was the only thing that kept him from believing that his office had once been a broom closet.

Ernie Hanover answered him. “I was just listening to the MP₃ recording I made the other day of your lecture on the Third Amendment—I wanted to preserve whatever version of it you delivered on your fifth anniversary here. Professor Hope, nobody else has your unique take on history and the issues of the day. We want to nominate you for President!”

Ernie was an energetic, perpetually pink-faced young man with short, curly hair that wasn’t quite red. Uncaring of current fashion, he wore bleeding Madras shirts he must have inherited from his grandfather, black rimmed glasses, and hushpuppies. Unlike most people who rattled on at 300 words a minute, he almost always made sense.

This time, his history professor thought, might prove to be an exception.

Alex mused out loud. “President? Of Albert Gallatin Memorial College? When we already have a fine Chancellor in the person of Dr. Van Cleave? You know we don’t do things democratically here, Ernie. Is this an armed mutiny? Are you aware of what a good shot Chancellor Van Cleave happens to be? We’ve been antelope hunting together, and believe me, I know.”

He raised his right hand, made a pistol of it, pointed it at Ernie, and dropped the hammer—his thumb—simulating recoil.

Ernie clutched his chest and groaned dramatically.

“No, no, Professor Hope!” Katie Harris shook her head. She was a pretty brunette with fascinating eyes, bouncy ringlets around her face, too sexy a voice for someone of her years, and the highest grades in any of his classes. She was usually quick on the uptake, and would someday be valedictorian, but she didn’t seem to understand that he was joking with them now. “President of the United States!”

Alex had seen the local news this morning. (He usually turned the sound off and turned the closed captions on; for some reason it was easier to take that way.) He knew exactly what they'd meant. He even had a pretty good idea what they were up to.

Together, these four and a small handful of others constituted what everybody on campus referred to as the "Austrian Mafia". On their own time, they all studied and discussed the ideas and works of the famous Austrian-school economists Ludwig von Mises, Friederick Hayek, and Murray Rothbard. Sometimes they would publicly debate the equally ardent followers of "Chicago monetarists" like Milton Friedman, whom the Austrian Mafia infuriated to insanity by loftily dismissing as "Neo-NeoKeynesians."

"Are you involved in this conspiracy, Mr. Thomas, Mr. Douglas?"

Rick Thomas and Mick Douglas—commonly known as "Rick and Mick"—nodded their heads enthusiastically. "Guilty as charged!" Mick told him, grinning from ear to ear. He was a broad-shouldered kid with a crewcut and would likely have been on the football team, if Gallatin had had one. Instead, he played tennis and golf, games Alex didn't care for or understand the appeal of.

"With oak leaf clusters!" Rick agreed. He was the oldest, having served in the Air Force before starting school. Rick was a fifth year undergraduate creating his own course in "praxeology", a formal study of "human action" of which Austrian economics was a part. With long, prematurely white hair, he was the usual ringleader when these four were up to no good. "And with a Republican candidate apparently up to his neck in some kind of internet nastiness, and a Democrat candidate who happens to be the most thoroughly hated woman in America, you might even stand a chance, if we can get you the nomination."

"And how do you propose to accomplish that?" Alex asked, although he knew perfectly well. These were good kids, he thought. There was more character in this room than in the entire state legislature.

"At the Free Libertarian Party of America's National Convention," Rick said.

"This coming Labor Day weekend," Mick added.

"Right here in Denver!" Ernie shouted.

"Be there," said Katie, "or be—"

"Somewhere else," Alex finished for her, forked a sardine onto a cracker, salted it, and took an icy swig of Coke to wash it down.



Alex had only been to one political party convention before, in 1964, when he was 12 years old. He'd spent part of that summer with an aunt and uncle. Among other adventures he'd had with them, they'd taken him to the Alabama state Republican Party convention that had helped place Senator Barry Goldwater's name in nomination as the GOP candidate for president.

He could still recall Goldwater's stirring words (which he learned later were written by Karl Hess) spoken at the GOP national convention that year: "Extremism in the defense of liberty is no vice. Moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue." He also recalled the squeals of outrage those words had elicited from network commentators and Goldwater's most bitter enemies—liberal Republicans. Alex even had some campaign buttons from that year—one said "Goldwater-Miller", another, "AuH₂O"—and an unopened can of "Gold Water", a lemon-lime drink of some kind, he'd always assumed.

The candidate himself hadn't been in Alabama (Alex had almost seen him the following September in Denver; his parents, both Democrats, had forbidden it). His Republican uncle joked for years afterward that Alex's father had warned him if he voted for "that insane warmonger" Goldwater, America would end up in a land war in Asia. Sure enough, his uncle had voted for Goldwater (Lyndon Johnson had been elected in a 60-40 landslide), and that's exactly what had happened in Asia. So much for conventional wisdom.

Alex could still remember the giant concrete indoor arena, most of it underground, in which that state party convention had been held. He recalled the noise and the music, the bright lights and the bunting, the balloons and the bumper stickers—and thousands of individuals gathered together for the first time, every one of them hot, sweaty, and exhausted (in a building which wasn't air-conditioned), but filled to bursting with enthusiasm and good cheer, looking forward to a future they believed would restore ownership and control of their own lives to them.

Now, to Alex's disappointment, this convention wasn't anything like that. It was being put on in a hotel ballroom in downtown Denver. Most of the attendees were over 50, graying, bored, and tired of life by appearances, still going through the motions for reasons they probably couldn't have articulated. Now that he thought about it, he knew dozens of individuals who'd been active in the FLPA and dropped out, including his own daughter and the Chancellor of Albert Gallatin Memorial College.

Looking around, he began to understand why, and wondered, all of a sudden, if he was doing the right thing. The Free Libertarian Party of America had been around since 1971 and had never won more than 900,000 votes for its presidential candidate—most of the time it was less than half of that. Everybody he saw looked as if they understood that nothing revolutionary was happening here today, nothing revolutionary had ever happened here, and nothing revolutionary was ever going to happen.

A conspicuous exception seemed to be the Austrian Mafia: Katie Harris, Ernie Hanover, Rick Thomas, Mick Douglas, and a handful of friends their own age, who greeted them delightedly as they entered the hotel.

Wandering through the high-ceilinged hotel lobby with his favorite students, Alex was shown a dozen sales tables laden with political pamphlets, books, magazines, DVDs, VHS cassettes—*The Fountainhead* with Gary Co-

per, *Harry's War*, Edward Herrmann's anti-IRS movie, Michael McNulty's documentaries about Waco—and CD ROMs containing the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, the Federalist Papers, the Covenant of Unanimous Consent, the original Articles of Confederation, and other documents vital to the freedom movement.

He also saw tables heaped with healthfoods, megavitamins, amino acids, enzymes, and other substances whose purveyors asserted to be life-extending.

Most of all—something he found both amazing and gratifying—Alex saw his own book, *Looking Forward*, not just stacked on tables, but in people's hands as they sat and read in the lobby, tucked under their arms as they went from place to place. He made a mental note to contact his publisher—where were all these copies of a supposedly out-of-print work coming from, anyway?

Thanks to a photo of the author printed on the back of the dust jacket, he was recognized immediately, and spent the next two hours at three different booksellers' tables signing books for their customers, as well as for those who'd already purchased the book and wandered by. It was the first time he'd ever signed books for people he didn't know and he enjoyed it immensely.

Meanwhile, Ernie and his cohorts had disappeared for a while, probably buttonholing likely allies, Alex thought, getting a feeling for the floor of the convention, attending to the formalities (and vastly more important informalities) of entering his name as a contender for the 2008 presidential nomination of the Free Libertarian Party of America.

Abruptly, an extremely shapely female 10 or 15 years his junior, handed Alex a copy of his book to sign, and pronounced, in a deep, breathy voice, "This is a gift for a dear friend of mine, Professor Hope. Please sign it, 'To D.G.M'. I'm utterly fascinated with your ideas, Professor. Maybe after you're through here, we could go have a drink and discuss them."

She wore a tight black sweater with a deeply plunging neckline and a pleated peasant skirt, with a concho belt. She also wore turquoise and silver earrings, necklaces, bracelets, and rings. Alex had always liked southwestern jewelry very much, but ... He signed the book as requested, raising an eyebrow, "In the bar over there?"

She shrugged, giving him what she must have imagined was a sly, sexy expression. It probably worked on others; it didn't work on him. She wasn't unattractive, but she was wearing too much perfume and too much bric-a-bac. Her fingernails were absurdly long, painted black, and trimmed square on the ends. In classical China, those nails would have betrayed her as an aristocrat, helplessly dependent on the useful hands of others. A bigger problem, of course, was that she wasn't Amelia. "I have a fifth of Chivas in my room."

"I appreciate the offer," he told her, "but I have a meeting in a few minutes with the people I came here with, and I don't know when it'll be over. "Perhaps we can have a drink in the bar some other time." He handed her the

book he'd just signed. "Thanks a lot, I hope your friend D.G.M. enjoys it." She nodded, mumbling something he didn't understand, and left.

After a while, he discovered that he was signing fewer books and was encountering, instead, all sorts of people who, it gradually dawned on him, had gotten wind of what his students were up to, and had come to check him out. As he stood beside the table of "Invisible Hand Books", speaking with a young woman passionately interested in a free market space program, a paunchy, middle-aged, balding figure approached and curtly interrupted her. He was fairly tall, and wore a neutral tweed sports jacket and glasses.

"You know," he said to Alex, ignoring the young woman altogether, "I've talked to thousands of libertarians over the years. I've never met a single one that your book brought into the movement." Although he didn't look like the cartoon character, the man's petulant, nasal tone somehow made Alex think of the overweight ponytailed guy on *The Simpsons* who ran the comic book store.

"Is that so?" Alex replied, thinking of the dozens of tattered, dog-eared copies of *Looking Forward* he'd signed this afternoon. He'd seen a million of this guy over the last 30 years. The computer industry was full of them.

"Oh, I'll admit that you're a moderately decent writer—although not in the top 100 pro-freedom writers of all time—probably not even in the top 250. Everywhere I go, I look in bookstores and I never see your book in any of them. It's very unusual, seeing so many copies of your book in one place. Do you think they're actually *selling* any of them?"

"I didn't know you cared," Alex laughed. "Who the hell are you?"

The man looked wounded that Alex didn't recognize him. "Why, I'm Forrey Nadalindov," he replied. "Despite the fondest wishes of your little children's army, I'm the next presidential candidate of the Free Libertarian Party of America."

Children's army? Alex wondered how Ernie and his friends would care to hear that. He rather liked the sound of it, himself. This party looked ready to start guzzling Geritol and collecting Social Security checks. It needed fresh blood desperately. It needed "children" like his students—and the young woman Nadalindov had just treated so rudely.

Momentarily ignoring the man, Alex turned back to the girl. "Have you read my book? I've proposed shutting NASA down and repealing any laws and regulations that prevent private space launches."

"No, Dr. Hope," she told him, a little embarrassed. She wasn't quite pretty, but Alex thought he saw something in her eyes—call it a thousand lightyear stare. "I'm an electrical engineering student at Colorado State University and I don't have much time or money for outside reading, right now."

He picked up a copy of his book from the table, nodding at the proprietor and leaving a 20 dollar bill in its place. Opening it to the title page, he signed it, and added, *To my newest friend, the electrical engineer: Ad Astra per Ardua.* "Read it when you have time, on me."

Nadalindov sniffed. “So that’s your secret, Hope—you *give* them away!” Alex grinned. “I’d be happy to give you one, Forrey.”

“I already have one,” Nadalindov sniffed. “A first edition. I bought it wholesale at DiscountBooks.com.”

Another fan heard from, Alex thought. He parted company with the engineering student and Nadalindov and was heading to the bar for a Coke—nothing more than that today—when he heard his name being pronounced behind his back.

“Dr. Hope? Alexander Hope?”

He turned to see a very pretty young Asian girl smiling at him, carrying a laptop computer, a tiny handheld recorder, and a copy of *Looking Forward*. He surprised himself by noticing, as well, her uptilted nose and prominent cheekbones, her beautiful almond eyes, and that her short skirt and light sweater revealed a nice little figure. Her big wire-rimmed glasses made her look impossibly cute (about a nine on what he thought of as the “Mighty Mouse’s Girlfriend Scale”), and her glossy, shoulder-length ebony hair was filled with reddish highlights.

Alex shook off a strange feeling of guilt. What’s wrong with me, he thought, it’s been six years; can’t I even *notice* a pretty girl? This one’s at least 30 years younger than I am, he answered himself. She’s barely older than Faith-Anne. Nevertheless, he smiled back at her—it wasn’t that difficult. “Is there something I can do for you, Miss ... ?”

“Oh, I hope so, Dr. Hope! I’m Dana Li, NetPlanetNews.com. Katie Harris told me I might find you down here. May I have a few minutes of your time?”

“For the record, you mean?” As the former head of a billion dollar corporation, Alex had plenty of experience with the media, all of it very bad. He felt especially on his guard because this reporter was so attractive and ... well, the only word for it was “perky”. He was a sucker for perky.

“For the record,” she replied. “I’ve done my homework, and to my knowledge, nobody’s interviewed you yet as a candidate for the FLPA nomination. I’d like to be the first, if I may. Don’t worry, Dr. Hope. I’m New Media, I won’t bite.” Her eyes crinkled at the corners when she smiled, and she smiled with every sentence that she spoke. He was a sucker for that, too.

Now he was doubly on guard.

“Well, be gentle. Where do you want to do this, in the bar?”

She shook her head. “Wrong climate altogether,” she told him. “Katie said you’ve taken a suite for the weekend. I suppose that we could—”

Alarm bells went off! Alex thought of at least 16 different horrible outcomes to that suggestion. “Why not do it right here in the lobby? It isn’t as noisy as the bar, and there are lots of comfortable chairs.”

“Great!” Her eyes crinkled again. They crossed the lobby, found two overstuffed chairs at right angles to each other, and sat. She opened her laptop and typed a few strokes, then held up her recorder, a familiar-looking palm-sized

silver instrument. “The most expensive two words in the English language are ‘cellular modem’. I’m online right now to NetPlanetNews.com. This chip recorder is just for backup. Do you mind?”

“That chip recorder, a Hope Corporation FA-i8, I see, is just in case I deny what I’ve said to you later on. Okay, I don’t mind at all. Go ahead and interview away.”

She laughed, and that was even better than her smile, tinkling and melodic. This kid was positively *dangerous*. Happily, he made a point of never saying a word he didn’t mean, seldom changed his mind, and had nothing (that he knew of, anyway) to hide.

She nodded and was suddenly serious. “I’m sure you know by now that you’re a newcomer in a field of seven contenders for the FLPA presidential nomination. Only two other candidates really count, Abe Horrwyryn, who was the FLPA nominee back in 2004, and Forrey ‘Nada’ Nadalindov.”

“Nada?” Alex asked, unable to suppress a chuckle.

“Not a nickname he’s very proud of, but it’s what everybody seems to call him. Dr. Hope, each of those two, Horrwyryn and Nadalindov, has a much longer history in the FLPA than you, and, at this point, many more supporters. Is it fair to say that what you bring to the party, so to speak, is that you’re a billionaire who can finance his own campaign?”

Alex laughed. “Is that what they’re saying in there?” He indicated the ballroom where the business of the convention was supposed to be happening.

“It’s what they’re saying in the hallways—“ She typed for another few seconds.

“Where the real business is going on?” he asked.

Several people drifted up to listen where they sat in the lobby. The internet reporter didn’t seem to mind, and Alex had no objection. One of them was Rick Thomas, who quietly set a Coke before Alex on the low table in front of him. Little by little, they began to gather a crowd. Alex suspected it was as much to look at the highly decorative Miss Li as to hear him speak with her.

“And your answer is?” she persisted, fingers hovering over the keyboard.

“What I bring to the party, Miss Li, is whatever knowledge and experience I’ve acquired as a businessman and academician. I have a reputation, which I’ve earned, for truthfulness and integrity, and unlike many FLPA candidates I’ve seen, I’m not afraid to deliver the ideas this party was built on to the public, without euphemizing them or pulling any punches.”

She grinned a little. “That may not be quite as popular a quality around here as you think, Dr. Hope. Do you think you can you run on the current FLPA platform?”

“I read the 2004 platform last night.” His tone was neutral.

“And what was your impression?” She looked up at him expectantly. Her eyes were black, as if they had enormous pupils, and they sparkled.

He shrugged. “I found it cautious, timid, even a little cowardly,—all of those the very last things the platform of a third party ought to be.”

“So what platform will you be running on, then, your own?”

“Something really radical and confrontational. My platform will be the first ten amendments to the Constitution, commonly known as the Bill of Rights.”

She raised her eyebrows. “But even that needs some interpretation, doesn’t it? Haven’t people wrangled over the meaning of the Bill of rights for two centuries?”

“Only judges, lawyers, and politicians, who fear the freedom it guarantees, and are willing to deliberately misinterpret—willfully misunderstand—every single line of it, every sentence, every word, to take that freedom away.”

“So what’s your plan to keep them from doing that?”

“Well, just for starters, every time I speak publicly, or give an interview like this, as a candidate or as president, I’ll remind you of your 1000-year-old right and duty as a juror to weigh not only the facts of a case, but the law. If you think it’s unconstitutional, unjust, or just plain stupid, then you can refuse to convict and throw the law out.

“And my administration, Miss Li, will help you as much as it can.”

CHAPTER EIGHT: DECLAN GHILLIE MOURE

You can have a Third Amendment, protecting your home and property from being looted by the government, or you can use RICO and asset forfeiture to illegally deprive drug dealers, and others you happen not to care for, of access to their “scumbag” lawyers. Your choice.—Alexander Hope, *Looking Forward*

THE fifth ballot had just been cast and counted.

The numbers stood almost exactly where they had the previous four ballots: Abe Horrwyrn 40%, Forrey Nadalindov 35%, Alexander Hope at not quite 20%. The remaining 5% was distributed between a retired Special Forces officer, a female Olympic weightlifter, a hairdresser from El Rancho Cucamonga, California, and “None of the Above”—not necessarily in that order.

It was quite a field, Alex thought, watching the proceedings on the hotel’s closed-circuit television channel. He’d heard that C-Span was covering parts of the convention, as well, but he didn’t know what parts. He’d traded a couch

in the lobby for another upstairs, and was now observing events from a large suite he'd taken on the top floor of the building.

Despite the fact it was September, to Alex, it felt like spring. He wished he didn't consider it improper—it would have been a conflict of interest on her part—to ask Dana Li up to watch with him. It would have been a perfectly respectable invitation: the whole Austrian Mafia, Ernie, Katie, Rick, and Mick, were in and out of the suite from moment to moment, conferring with him or simply taking a break from the convention floor (or the more-important hallways) and getting a bite to eat. He'd ordered several cases of soda and a dozen pizzas from the only company he could find—Rocky Mountain Pizza Belly—that didn't forbid their delivery drivers to carry weapons for self-defense.

Still, Dana—Miss Li—had a job to do, he supposed, and she was doing it. A few moments ago he'd caught an enjoyable glimpse of her, interviewing the lady weightlifter whose platform, as near as he could tell, consisted of nothing but a threat—at least that was the way that he interpreted it—to get the Free Libertarian Party of America back in shape.

Or else.

"*Oof!*" Ernie startled Alex, landing on the couch beside him as if he'd fallen from the ceiling. The young man had been wheeling and dealing downstairs for hours, but except for a slight sheen across his forehead, appeared as fresh and energetic as if he'd just arrived at the convention.

"Sorry, Prof! I thought you'd appreciate a quick summary of what's going on down there on the floor. Say, are those smoked oysters I see on that pizza?"

Alex nodded. "We have some with anchovies, too. You're right—at the moment they look deadlocked to me, and they have been all day. How many ballots will they cast before they just—"

"Give up?" Ernie waggled his eyebrows. "They won't do that. They can't do that. They have to decide tonight. And there are some rumors down there—"

"Carefully placed in circulation by you?" Alex raised his eyebrows.

"Prof, you wound me!" Ernie laughed wickedly and picked up a slice of pizza. "Both sides are pretty rattled by now. They never figured on any more competition than the one-percenters are giving them. They know each other pretty well, and the gloves are well and truly off. They're spilling every dirty lie—or dirty truth—about each other they've been saving up for 30 years. The trouble is, all they know about you is good. You're rich, committed, a widower for the ladies, and a veteran for the men.

"He hasn't much to offer the FLPA's smattering of pacifists and gays," Katie answered, entering the room. She sat in the big chair opposite Ernie and inspected the pizza closely. "Smoked oysters? Yuck! But he isn't any threat to them, either. And he hasn't said word one about abortion."

"And he shouldn't, if he can avoid it," Ernie said.

Alex shook his head. “I’m right in line with traditional FLPA policy on that one. Abortion remains legal, but not one penny of tax money ever gets spent on it again. Not that it matters, but I’ve seen opinion polls indicating that 85% of Americans would go along with a compromise like that, just to end the perpetual wrangling and get on with other things.”

“Abortion,” Ernie quoted his favorite professor around a huge bite of oyster-laden pizza, “is the issue the left counts on to keep the freedom movement divided.”

Katie said, “By the way, Dana Li said to tell you hello.”

“Er, why not have some root beer with that pizza?” Alex suggested abruptly. “It’s from Hop’s—they just started bottling it this week.”

“Dana said,” Katie persisted, “be sure to watch NetPlanetNews, because—”

“Look at this!” Mick Douglas burst into the room, followed by Rick Thomas. “Somebody out there—in cyberspace—likes you!”

Mick held out his PDA—his handheld “personal digital assistant”—but had to wait as Alex found his glasses and put them on. It was a wireless internet device, logged on to NetPlanetNews.com.

FRESH BLOOD AT LAST

By Dana Li <mailto:danali@nnpn.ccom>

Exclusive to NetPlanetNews.com

Regular readers of this column know that I make no secret of my philosophical convictions. Like most of those who earn their living and live their lives in cyberspace, I am an unabashed libertarian. And like most philosophical libertarians, I have been unhappy, for quite a while, with the slim pickings that the Free Libertarian Party of America has been inclined to offer us in the way of presidential candidates.

This election year promised to be no different. The contest was to be between one of the half dozen original founders of the FLPA, and the FLPA’s candidate from last time, both bone-weary has-beens, any imagination, enthusiasm, or magic they ever possessed used up long ago. It was almost enough to make a person want to vote Republican. Almost.

But at the very last minute, along came a knight in shining—if virtual—armor, an individual with experience creating and running a multibillion dollar high-tech corporation, a father and husband (sadly widowed some six years ago), a former soldier who has now become an author and a teacher.

The subject that he teaches is individual liberty.

The man I’m punching these keys about, of course, is Alexander Hope, author of *Looking Forward*, which has reenergized the movement by reconnecting it with its radical Revolutionary roots, author, as well, of the Hope Corporation, whose products have given us all a new ease, mobility, power, and freedom, here where we work and reside in cyberspace. I’m writing this on one of his “Amelia” series of laptops now, named after his late wife, who he modestly insists was the real genius of the Hope Corporation.

Here is a man who—unlike that increasingly bizarre recluse Bill Gates has become—understands liberty and wants it for others, as well as himself. Here is a man with a program, taking time-honored treasures like 10th century jury nullification and the 18th century Bill of Rights to new heights in the 21st century.

Will the FLPA exercise the socialist virtue of recycling its worn-out hand-me-downs, or will it try something shiny and new?

Only time—and internal party politics—will tell ...

★ ★ ★

“Hey, Prof?”

Alex stirred, realizing he’d fallen asleep where he sat, waiting for the next ballot to be taken. Katie and Mick and Rick were gone. There’d been some kind of parliamentary delay while procedural votes were taken on the floor: whether to extend the balloting process to tomorrow, Sunday, which had narrowly failed; whether to break for a long overdue lunch, which had passed almost unanimously.

“What is it, Ernie?”

“They’ve adjourned for lunch—and extracurricular politicking. Declan Ghillie Moure would like to see you.”

Alex blinked. “Who?”

“Declan Ghillie Moure, Abe Horrwyryn’s personal aide. Some people think he’s the real brains of the operation and that Horrwyryn is just window-dressing.”

“Okay, give me a minute. Would you mind stacking those pizza boxes and putting the empty ones out of sight?” Alex stood and stretched, grateful he’d carefully draped his jacket over the back of an upright chair. He went to the bathroom, checked to see how wrinkled his shirt and tie were, inspected himself for pizza stains, then ran a hand through his short hair and rinsed his mouth out with water.

He emerged and shucked into his jacket, still basking in the glow of kind words from a pretty lady, grateful that after today he could go back to his western shirt, bluejeans, and his comfortable Montana’s Yellowstone Trail cowboy boots of water buffalo calfskin.

“Okay,” he told Ernie, as he went to the Mr. Coffee. It was empty. Alex began looking for paper filters and the coffee packets. To his delight, the filters were in a cabinet under the counter, atop a freshly-opened can of Chock Full O’ Nuts, “the heavenly coffee”. That would be Katie, he guessed. “Let him in.”

The figure Ernie invited in was that of an overaged preppie, with odd, chipmunk-like jowls. He was a head shorter than Alex (who wasn’t very tall, himself) and wore dark slacks, a navy blue, brass-buttoned blazer, and collegiate tie. He stepped—nervously, Alex thought—across the room, eyes dart-

ing this way and that as if he expected to be ambushed by Viet Cong. *Somebody should tell this little guy the war is over*, Alex thought.

Ernie raised a hand to let Alex know he was leaving.

“Great to meet you at last, Mr. Hope!” The newcomer, carrying a copy of *Looking Forward*, extended a hand which Alex had to set the coffee can down to take. He went back to making coffee. “I’m one of your biggest fans, Declan Ghillie Moure,” he said almost breathlessly. “People call me Ghillie. As Hannover has probably told you already, I work with Abe Horrwyne.”

“That’s what Ernie tells me, all right,” Alex answered. “I’m making coffee. Would you care for some? You’re sure? Then what else can I do for you, Ghillie?”

“Just like that?” the little man blinked. Apparently Moure was accustomed to doing business in a more roundabout—“devious”, Alex thought—manner. He noticed the way Moure fidgeted and couldn’t seem to stand in one place for more than a second or two, and wondered exactly what that signified.

“Just like that,” he repeated. He hadn’t become a billionaire by being roundabout. His Japanese customers and vendors, who made being roundabout a way of life, hated bargaining with Alex, but they loved doing business with him.

Moure was silent for a moment. “Okay,” he said at last. “Okay, Abe and I would appreciate your help breaking the ballot deadlock down on the convention floor. It’s about to set an all-time record for the party and we don’t like it. Abe’s willing to offer you the Vice Presidential position in exchange for your delegates. Is that straightforward enough, Mr. Hope?”

The coffee machine had finished its gurgling and Alex had been pouring himself a cup. Now he nearly spilled it in an attempt to keep from laughing out loud. He turned, as slowly and carefully as he could, and retrieved the little carton of half-and-half out of the minifridge.

“Maybe it helps that I’ve come to the party from the outside,” he observed thoughtfully. “Do you remember who Cactus Jack Garner was, Ghillie?”

Moure wrinkled his brow in momentary concentration. “Cactus Jack—you mean John Nance Garner, one of Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s vice presidents.”

Alex nodded, exactly as he would have to one of his students who’d answered correctly. “Do you remember what he said about the vice presidency?”

“I do,” Moure winced. “That it wasn’t worth a bucket of warm spit.”

Alex laughed. “Only he didn’t say ‘spit’, did he, Ghillie? And if that’s true, can you imagine what a vice presidential *nomination* is worth—from a third political party that’s never gotten more than 900,000 votes?”

“But, but ...” Moure was speechless. Alex didn’t realize, as yet, that it was an uncharacteristic condition for the little man. “I don’t get it. Why would you even want the FLPA presidential nomination, then? You’re rich and famous enough that you could—”

“Could what? Run as a candidate for Socialist Party ‘A’, the Democrats, or for Socialist Party ‘B’, the we-try-harder Republicans? I want the FLPA nomination because I promised my friends that I’d try to get it.”

The expression on Moure’s face changed to ill-concealed disgust. “Hannover, you mean, and his little playmates. Well I can tell you, Hope, they’re going to be sorry that they did this to Abe ... and you are too!”

Alex shook his head. “Can’t you see they’re doing it *for* the FLPA, Ghillie? For the cause of individual liberty—remember that old thing? They think Abe shot his bolt last time when he only got 384,000 votes from 100,000,000 voters. They think it’s time for somebody else.”

“Just you wait—” Moure stopped abruptly as they both noticed on the television that the sixth ballot had just taken place downstairs. Horrwyryn had received the same 40% as before, Nadalindov’s 29% was six points fewer than he’d had for most of the day—and Alex now stood at 25%.

The deadlock had begun to break. Without another word, Moure turned on his heel and left the suite. The copy of *Looking Forward* that he’d brought with him to flatter Alex with lay forgotten on the countertop beside the coffee-maker.

Alex opened it to the title page. It had been signed, in his own handwriting, to “D.G.M.” Of course it had. Maybe he should have Ernie return it, Alex thought. Then again Ghillie wouldn’t want the book. He made a mental note to find out what he could about Moure and his overdressed girlfriend from Dana.

Er, make that Miss Li.



“So how about it, Hope? Accept my offer of the veep nomination, break Horrwyryn’s hold on the FLPA, and I’ll give you a clear shot at the top spot in 2012.”

Nadalindov had followed Moure to Alex’s suite by less than an hour, during which he’d had a number of phone calls. The Special Forces colonel unceremoniously announced his withdrawal, ceding the votes of his tiny group of supporters to Alex, an ex-Marine he said he could respect. Alex had thanked the colonel as graciously as possible, asking him to dinner later in the week. Morrison was famous for The Fort, which specialized in exotic game. The colonel had thanked him and accepted.

He’d also heard from the lady weightlifter, who wanted the number two position on Alex’s ticket. Prompted by Katie and Rick, who were taking a break, he’d informed her that he regretted that the FLPA was unique in voting for their vice presidential nominee separately, and that, lacking the well-oiled machinery of Horrwyryn and Nadalindov, he had little to say about who his running mate would be.

The guy from El Rancho Cucamonga had asked Alex where he stood on professional licensure and homosexual rights, his two pet issues. Alex had

said he opposed all professional licensure, and that he believed homosexuals had exactly the same rights as everybody else—and no more—see the first ten Amendments to the Constitution. Apparently he'd said the right thing. The guy became excited and promised to throw his support to Alex. Alex thanked him—and invited him to dinner at The Fort with the colonel. The table conversation should be interesting.

He'd invite his students, too, and possibly Dana.

Better make that, "Miss Li", he corrected himself again.

He'd fielded other calls until Ernie, Katie, Rick, and Mick came to tell him that they were talking downstairs about extending the late lunch break into an early dinner. Alex suggested that they all go to a nearby Japanese restaurant where the chef cut everything up and cooked it at your table. He could see that Ernie, at least, deeply regretted telling him that he had "places to go and people to kill" before the seventh ballot.

The other three all pleaded similarly and left with him. It's true, Alex thought, gazing out the suite's 30-story window, it's lonely at the top.

Then Nadalindov had come. He'd dismissed the Cactus Jack Garner quote. "You can make anything you want of the vice presidential nomination, Hope, that's the beauty of running with a third party. I'll campaign my way, you campaign yours. When it's over we'll go back to our lives."

"You make it sound very attractive, Forrey," Alex lied. "But what could the next presidential candidate of the FLPA possibly want with the leader of a little children's army who's only a moderately decent writer, not in the top 100, not even in the top 250, who's never brought a new member into the movement, and whose book is never in any bookstores you visit—although you seem to have a copy yourself? Want me to sign it for you?"

"I ... er ... uh ..."

"My very thought, Forrey, and eloquently put. Clearly you don't need me. Your three or four delegates from Mensa Club should be more than enough to put you over the top, and you shouldn't miss the support that you threw away when you were needlessly rude down there to a bright and committed young woman who's here representing the Space Colony Foundation. I just had a call from her, by the way. That was her five percent, for the most part, that I took from you on the sixth ballot."

Nadalindov gasped. "You haven't heard the last of this, Hope!"

"That's what Ghilly Moure said. Why don't *you* two get together?"

Nadalindov started to say something, but was interrupted when Ernie broke excitedly into the room. "Prof—" He stopped when he saw who else was there. "They're about to start the seventh ballot."

"I should be going," Nadalindov said, sarcastically adding, "Good luck."

"Sure," Ernie said before Alex could. "Break a leg, Nada."

As the door slammed shut behind the angry man, Ernie sat down on the couch to keep an eye on the TV. Alex joined him. "I talked to lots of people down there just now, Prof, who are fed up with Tweedle-Dum and Tweedle-

Dumber. They think that you could get the FLPA up above the million votes mark for the first time in history. It wasn't very hard. I just refer them to your book, to the Bill of Rights, or to Dana Li's column."

"Or to my credit rating?" Alex laughed.

"Hey, it's like chicken soup," Ernie replied, "it couldn't hoit." He turned to greet Katie and Rick, just coming in. "How's it going down there?"

Rick shrugged. "Can't tell, Ern. Just say it looks interesting—in the Chinese meaning of the expression. Say, Dr. Hope, isn't that your girlfriend on the tube? You know half the people I talked to were taken by that item she did on you. She can do one on me any time she wants!"

Katie hit him over the head with a sofa pillow.

Girlfriend? Ridiculous! Alex didn't know what to say. It was a crazy kind of day all around. Sure enough, Dana Li was down there on the floor, interviewing delegates who were about to vote.

"It's now or never," Katie declared, leaning toward the screen.

This time, probably because he was paying attention now, the balloting seemed to take forever. On the first ballot, he knew, voting had proceeded alphabetically, beginning with Alabama, then Alaska, and so on. The second ballot reversed the alphabet. It had alternated that way until, on the seventh ballot, they were back to plain old alphabetical again.

Ernie leaned over his PDA, hurriedly making notes as the spokesman for each state FLPA's delegation came to the microphone to announce their vote. Under longstanding national rules, a state's delegation could divide its vote, and "None of the Above" was always an acceptable choice.

"Horrwyrn's losing some support," Ernie told them as the fifth or sixth state voted. "I don't know if it's enough. Nadalindov, too. More 'None of the Above' votes, though. Somebody down there doesn't like you, Prof."

Alex let it pass. He was getting nervous and it bothered him. He arose with as much dignity as he could, went to the bedroom he'd claimed, took his shoes off and lay down atop the coverlet, pulling a pillow from under it before he put his head down ...

★ ★ ★

"*What?*" Alex sat up in a kind of shock. Someone outside was pounding on the door he didn't remember shutting. He could hear all three of them out there (he remembered wondering what had become of Mick) screaming as if the building were going up in flames. "Wait just a minute!"

He put his shoes on and opened the door.

"We did it! We did it!" Katie was jumping up and down. She threw her arms around him and kissed him on the cheek.

Ernie thrust a hand at Alex. "Congratulations, Prof. You got 52% to Horrwyrn's 25% and 'None of the Above' beat Nadalindov."

Alex was astonished (and more than a little dismayed) at how childishly pleased the victory made him. He was about to say something when Mick crashed into the suite, as agitated as his three friends put together.

“We know, we know!” Rick told him.

“No you don’t. Alex, Dana Li’s been found in one of the service corridors, beaten half to death!”

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