



PROLOGUE —  
NEARLY TWENTY-SIX YEARS AGO

## The arrival of dawn brought the departure

**E**ven while the rosy skies of dawn partially colored the room, she knew today would not be a good day for her. She studied her surroundings, filled with the old, rich furniture just coming into focus, and she saw the starkness of the walls. The curtainless windows allowed the light but were not positioned to give her a view of the surrounding countryside from where she lay confined to bed, too weak to move. Luxurious linens and down pillows gently supported her. The renewed coppery scent reminded her she was fading further with the ongoing hemorrhage. If she stayed still the pain was tolerable. She refused to whimper as that would only bring pain meds. He would give her meds to prevent her suffering if she asked.

Each passing minute caused the fractured light to bring another item into focus, the detailed statues on the mantel displaying exquisite old-world, intricate craftsmanship. Several children had been crafted out of marble and still sat high up on the mantel out of the reach of visitors. She recalled being allowed to touch each of them when she had reached a certain age, under the watchful eye of her mother. Each one had a story,

which she had carefully memorized, that spoke of the expectations of children. Lofty goals for children to reach toward, but likely never obtain. It had been so different then.

There had been love, she was convinced. Briefly she wondered if her mother would have been proud of her. Her father certainly wasn't, especially when they fought bitterly. What father would have forced his daughter to this horrible end, just to feed his ego? He was brutally harsh, but she knew he had glimmers of compassion. She'd seen them. The bright spot for her now had been that she had survived the birth two days ago.

As she shifted slightly, pain shot through her lower body. Though the doctor had examined her several times, he had been unable to stop her bleeding. A hospital would have been the prudent course of action, but her father refused. The nurses checked her frequently and had been instructed not to let her suffer. Still, she refused most meds in the hope that she might see her baby just one time. The baby had been taken away for care and checking while her body had failed her.

After twenty-some odd hours of labor, she had been too tired to open her eyes to catch even a glimpse when the baby finally emerged. She had rested some while they tended her rent body. The doctor, old and weathered, was a trusted friend of her father. He was much more practiced with fixing gunshot wounds or other battle-incurred injuries than birthing babies. The nurses that now tended her had no midwife or birthing experience either. They were kind, caring, and kept her as clean and comfortable as possible, except for not answering her questions about her baby. Nothing but silence.

The door opened, and the glow from the hallway was a backdrop to the outline of the man who was still bigger than life to her. Even as much as she idolized this man, her father, she was angry that he had ultimately caused her destruction. As she

watched, he gracefully crossed the room in several measured steps and sat down in the chair positioned at her bedside. Even sitting, he was a commanding figure and a force with which to be reckoned.

He reached over and stroked her silken blond hair, which the nurses had cleaned and combed for her after the ordeal, then gently asked, “My beautiful daughter, how are you feeling? Do I need to ask those cows to give you some laudanum? It will help ease you, I am told.”

Her eyes shimmered as she shook her head and murmured, “No, Father, I would rather see my last dawn. I am not as strong as you, but I will not fail on this.”

As he held her hand, an almost remorseful look passed briefly across his face as he responded, “No, my daughter, you are very strong. Far stronger than your mother. You delivered a very healthy, robust child who will grow up with the best schooling and best training that I can provide. That is my promise to you, my daughter.

“Your mother failed so many times to carry a second child to term, a battle she and your brother lost when you were seven. She gave me you yet failed to provide any more children.”

Her eyes blazed as she implored, “Father, may I see my child, know its name? I don’t even know if it is a boy or a girl. Please, I need to know.”

“My daughter, it is a healthy baby that you delivered. This offspring will be the most brilliant child our family will produce. After all, the father’s seed was hand selected to insure brilliance. Along with your refined elegant looks, this child will be superb. This child will continue my bloodline.”

Adelaide briefly closed her eyes and envisioned her baby. She felt her body weakening further yet was determined to finish her discussion with an uncloudy brain. Her lips formed a small,

perfect smile as she opened her eyes and slowly asked, “Father, is the baby perfect, like a little pearl? Is the skin ivory and flawless with a face round and perfectly formed?”

He smiled as he reassured, “Yes, it is a very pretty baby, very tiny, but I sense it will be a force to be reckoned with under my tutelage. Your child will lack for nothing.”

Her weakened voice replied, “Thank you, Father. Please don’t force this child into the calling if he or she doesn’t possess the skills. I beg you.”

His eyes blazed, then smoldered, “The child will get only what it earns and deserves. The child will be loved, but not coddled. The child will know your best traits, though I will not speak of your failings, if that helps ease your mind.”

“Yes, Father. That would be best since you won’t give the name or let me hold my baby.” Adelaide closed her eyes briefly again, gathering some of the last of her strength, even as she felt life seeping from her body. The tinge of old copper was stronger now to her. She wondered for a moment if he noticed and dismissed it as something he would ignore. Death was nearly his closest friend. Sad but true.

Then she quietly begged, “Father, when my little pearl is eighteen, will you give him or her my box of mementoes? I would like to share the cherished books, the few pieces of jewelry, like Mama’s ring and my necklace. I added my necklace when I went into labor to keep it all together. Keep it until the child is grown, please.”

“Yes, daughter. It is good, this tradition of the memento boxes. It reminds the women of the family of their role in passing down traditions from mothers to their children. The small books of learning, that have made us so great, are important to pass along. From your grandmother to her child, and now from you to your child. It is part of the way our perfect order for the

world is shared. Eighteen seems a long way off, but by then your baby will be shaped, educated, launched on their mission, and the memories will only serve to make for even more determination to succeed.

“It is a shame, my daughter, that you will not see twenty-one. That your body failed, even though your mind is strong and clever. You can take comfort that you successfully created the possibilities that we will take forward in our cause.”

Her thoughts went back to the time she had disobeyed his edicts, and the results of her rebellion. Then she wondered if the information she had planted would reach her child and be enough to change the possible outcomes. She would not fear that now but do her best to ensure that the information would get to her little pearl. The life drained even more quickly from her as she continued, “Father, thank you for my life. I am sorry we fought so bitterly. Treat my little pearl as you said and promise me, he or she will get my box as we just discussed. Promise me, on my death.”

He gripped her hand and raised it to his lips. Then he placed a kiss on her already cold skin, almost translucent, the room fully illuminated from the light of day. It was an infrequent gesture of tenderness that was very foreign to his normal demeanor. He emphasized, with conviction, the last words she heard before she passed away, “I promise it will be as we agreed, my daughter. I forgive you for fighting my demands. Your little pearl will do better and succeed where you failed.”



## CHAPTER ONE

# In search of Nostradamus

**T**he first interrogator requested, “State your name for the record, please.” The man nervously responded, “Clayton Dough. Now, for my records, what am I being charged with? You two haul me in here flashing some badges but no paperwork to say what you think I’ve done wrong. I want to know the accusations being leveled at me, and most importantly, who is making them.”

The second interrogator smirked and said, “We told you, we are from the SEC, which stands for the Security Exchange Commission. We have suspicions of insider trading activity in the stock market, and your name keeps coming up. You were agreeable to come here and discuss this topic. Now it sounds like you are going to lawyer-up to derail our investigation. Are you going to answer our questions or not? Your assistance in this matter goes a long way in the eyes of the court. Make it easier on yourself by making it easier on us.”

After a few seconds, the first interrogator added, “How about we start with yes and no questions, and let’s see if we can communicate. Can we try that, Clay? May I call you Clay?”

Clay nodded.

The first interrogator then questioned, “You work at the Oak Ridge Supercomputer facility, correct?”

Clay nodded.

“Your wife, Charlotte, works in the facility as well, correct?”

Clay nodded and replied, “Yes.”

“You have been doing stock trades, including futures, fairly heavily for the last six months, correct?”

“Yes.”

“And doing quite well on your bets, yes?”

Clay hesitated, then confirmed with a sigh, “Yes.”

The second interrogator asked, “You want to tell us how you are placing future stock trades with one hundred percent accuracy? In our experience, you simply don’t have that kind of success unless you are cheating with insider trading information.”

Clay chose his words carefully, “Which trade are you referring to? I have placed many trades for several different publicly traded companies.”

The second interrogator exclaimed, “All of them! What do you think, we’re stupid?”

Clay smirked and replied, “Yeah, I think you are stupid. Now stop and think. I’m competing with seasoned traders with faster machines that are plugged into the pulse of Wall Street. I’m here in Tennessee, placing trades on multiple publicly traded companies, and not one corporate insider friend at one of these companies, much less all of them.

“Your best guess is that I have insider trade knowledge from all of them, to win at placing stock futures. I think you need to cast a serious eye at being a comedy writer with your silly assumption!”

The first interrogator raised his hand to slow his partner down and commented, “We are fairly sure that something is going on with your gains, as is evidenced by consistently placing stock future bets that always pay off. The odd thing is, it’s for the same amount every month, practically to the penny. I mean, from one

standpoint your trades look like an annuity that keeps paying you the same sum of money each month. We think that's odd.

"Here you are in heartland USA with no Wall Street friends, no high-speed Bloomberg trading terminal, and no corporate higher-ups feeding you insider information. Yet, you have beaten the odds playing in the field of equities and won where there is no mathematical formula that should work. Please enlighten us on how you consistently win without insider trading secrets against the random walk theory of the stock market?"

Clay smiled slightly and queried, "Gentlemen, what am I being accused of if not insider trading? I've already told you that I don't have the contacts in multiple corporations at the scale you are suggesting, to extract insider information or to allow me to win at stock futures. If we are done here, I need a ride back to work."

The second interrogator checked his phone, apparently for an incoming text message. He shook his head in expected anticipation of the message and suggested, "It looks like you need to arrange a pickup at school for your children, since your wife Charlotte has fled. Oh, and with all your monies, it would seem."

Clay, alarmed, asked, "What do you mean, fled? Are the children safe? John needs to go to remedial math today, and Dosie needs to go to her dance lessons! Why would you possibly think Lottie took our money?"

With a satisfied smirk on his face, the second interrogator explained, "When we come in to talk with a suspect, we stake out all close associates and spouses to see if it triggers a rash response. I guess, when you were seen being marched out of the building, word traveled fast, and your wife dumped everything to retrieve your funds, clearly indicating that something is wrong. I think it was a nice touch that she also purchased a single one-way airline ticket to the Caymans. I am pretty sure that in her mind, Clay, you, John, and Dosie are expendable even though

you are her family members. Odds are, we can get a very good explanation from her on what exactly you two are up to. Now, since you are already here, you could tell your story first. That would tend to help your cause, don't you think?"

In one last ditch effort to hold out against the SEC interrogators, Clay insisted, "You lie! Lottie wouldn't run, nor would she abandon our kids. You're fabricating this story to try and get me to say something! Well, it won't work! I'm not telling you how it works, and I'm not looking for any investors for my program!"

The second interrogator smiled a chilling smile and, reaching for his cell phone, dialed a number. Once he connected, he stated, "Put her on, please. Hubby doesn't believe we have her in custody, or that she would roll on him."

After putting the call on speaker phone, Clay heard a woman's voice barely able to speak for crying. "Clay, Clay, are you there? I'm sorry...I'm so sorry...it's all over..."

Stunned for a few seconds, Clay finally lamented, "It was a proof-of-concept exercise. I had programming access on the supercomputer here at the Oak Ridge facility. I cobbled together a routine to see what would happen if you fed in all relevant data on a publicly traded company to see if you could predict which way the stock price would go.

"You can never beat the information speeds of the professional traders on Wall Street. I figured, what if I looped in a big data application, gave it direction to sort through every relevant piece of data from all possible sources, and then grade how the stock price would vary. Then I tempered that by placing bets, so when they won, it would not stick out like a sore thumb. I didn't think about the consistent profit results being a red flag as well. I kept adding in refinements that basically allowed me to reliably predict future stock prices. So reliably, that I starting using my own money based on the results from the supercomputer. I chose different stocks each month so as not to attract attention."

The first SEC interrogator looked incredulously at Clay and questioned, “You built a program to predict the future price of a publicly traded stock? You used a supercomputer to predict the future?”

Clay looked thoughtful for a second and said, “In a manner of speaking, yes, it was predicting the future. You would understand that the future is a product of today’s events. The trick is to capture all of today’s events for processing the possibilities of what will happen tomorrow. The more intersect points and germane information fed into the program, the farther out you can see.

“The program, however, is very myopic in that it only yields results for the asked questions. It doesn’t warn you that if you do all this, the SEC is going to show up and bust your chops.”

The interrogators smiled at each other as if congratulations were in order.

Then the first interrogator turned to Clay and clarified, “In answer to your first question, you are not being charged with anything. We cannot prove insider trading, but we can’t let your program live either. The funds are not yours because they were obtained from an unfair advantage of being able to predict the future.

“Let’s take you back to the facilities and extract it as evidence. As long as we have the entire program, and you promise never to recreate it, I think we can let you have your life back. Agreed?”

Clay’s remorse caused him to start weeping, then he whimpered, “Yes, of course! Thank you! Thank you!”

STR	↑	+0.50
PKW	↑	+5.50
SHX	↓	-0.00
LCO	↓	-7.00

The woman answered the phone, “Hello, this is Lottie Dough.”

A voice answered, “Mrs. Dough, the police are here to speak with you. Can you come up front, please?”

Once she arrived, Lottie walked up to the policeman and asked, “Officer, I’m Mrs. Dough. What’s the problem?”

The officer said, “We have some unfortunate news for you. Let’s step over here where it is a little more private.

“We found your husband, Clay, shot through the back of the head not far from this facility. You two work together at this facility. Is there any reason why he would leave in the middle of the day on foot?”

Lottie collapsed into the closest chair in shock. The officer tried to steady her with reassuring words of condolences. The on-duty guard rushed around the security desk to assist.

As if on cue, the receptionist took a call and promptly put the call on hold and said, “Mrs. Dough, there is an important call holding for you. They say they are from the SEC and want a meeting with you at your earliest convenience.”



## CHAPTER 2

# Changes and shifts in the wind often bring unexpected storms

**O**tto started the day with his review of the overnight correspondence after he'd arrived in the operations center. He absentmindedly ran his fingers through his stock of white hair as he organized his thoughts. He was a very elegant European-bred man, who dressed well and commanded respect without even trying. His wit and congeniality had made him very popular in dealing with his customers. Otto was fluent in finance, multiple languages, and reading people's souls. Most of the family had returned the day before yesterday but had spent yesterday recovering from the travel. The whirlwind wedding and lively parties had kept them all busy for a couple of weeks. The trip to Texas had been declared one of the best vacations they had ever shared.

Otto and his longtime associate Wolfgang were the oldest elements of the family business. The business had been founded after a rather frantic escape from Poland during World War II by their families. Their acquisition of the Enigma machine had become the basis for the financial institution they began. The family business, coined internally as the R-Group, had been long diversified with banking, real estate, shares in various thriving

businesses and, the most relevant these days, the cyber security and information division. The closely held family business had customers everywhere on the globe but still maintained the lowest profile of any company.

The business was controlled by the family members with voting conducted to accept or reject potentially high profile or risky work orders. The fundamental mission of the R-Group stemmed from fighting the Nazis as well as helping to keep the wealth intact for those who actually earned it. They helped individuals and even governments fight against human injustice and helped maintain a level of balance between powers. At times they walked a very fine line in fighting the evils they encountered. Over the years the team had increased their financial prowess, exhibited insightfulness of people overall, and were adept at staying farther ahead of the technology curve than any government.

Otto was the proud father of both his recently married daughters Julie and world-renowned encryption guru, Petra. Recently feeling his age and the need to complete the grooming of the next generation of R-Group leadership, he had taken a bit of sabbatical and turned the reins over to Petra and Jacob. Petra was beautiful, talented, well-educated and, amazingly, had fallen in love with Jacob, the grandson of his oldest friend, Wolfgang.

Jacob, a brilliant programmer, had been raised in the United States by Wolfgang's wife and daughter. Jacob had grown up protected but was well-schooled in the best programming methodology that his mother could provide along with a strong sense of ethical behavior. He had also learned to base his decisions upon a well-grounded moral compass. He had met his grandfather, Wolfgang, after his mother had died, and the ranks of the hackers had converged to try to sway Jacob's talented abilities into their nefarious efforts. Otto smiled as he reflected on all the testing, he had personally conducted to make certain Jacob could fit

into the business. Jacob had earned his position as a voting member of the family business.

Lastly, Quip was the third in the next generation of family business leadership. He was also privately educated by his grandfather, Ferdek, who had passed away some time ago. Quip had spent most of his youth and adult life with education, earning his doctorate at a very young age and creating computer processing inroads. Until recently falling in love with a well-educated communication specialist, Eilla-Zan, he had only focused on building the technological capabilities of the R-Group. Quip was the brilliant creator of the core computing functionality known as ICABOD, or, the *Immersive Collaborative Associative Binary Override Deterministic* system. Over the years, Quip had expanded the capabilities of ICABOD and was constantly increasing its computer power. He and Jacob had both added programs and routines that allowed ICABOD to consume and analyze huge amounts of data.

Long before Big Data became fashionable, ICABOD had been able to acquire multiple digital data elements and file them by category as well as type. It was amazing the amounts of standard data records, video streams, communications, and other data records that ICABOD could process. Recently ICABOD had started to display awareness skills that had both Jacob and Quip reviewing ICABOD's programs and making certain that solid check points for the machine were in place. It was an increased worry for Quip, as he had discussed with Otto before the wedding.

Otto was pleased that nothing really pressing had occurred while they were all out of the country. The standard services they provided to customers continued, with some support provided by the contractors on their payroll for routine activities. Eilla-Zan's father, Andrew, or Andy as he was more fondly referred to, was a perfect example of such a contractor. Andy provided

communications support for older style PBXs as well as Unified Communications with his team that included Eilla-Zan, or EZ as Quip called her, and Carlos. Carlos was the brother of Julie's new husband, Juan, which returned Otto's focus to the items he wanted to cover in their morning meeting.

There were several items that the core team of Wolfgang, Petra, Quip, Jacob, and himself needed to discuss and make direct decisions on direction. The key items he needed to address included: follow up action on the members of the Dteam that had threatened Carlos when he had been masquerading as Dakota; how much of the family business could they allow Julie to share with Juan and possibly Carlos; how much of the family business could Quip share with EZ; ICABOD's growing maturity as a digital being; and perhaps a new role for Otto himself. The team had done so well when he was on sabbatical. But he missed the excitement, and frankly his wife, Haddy, had lovingly told him he needed to work some and get out from underfoot.

Jerked away from his musings, he smiled as Petra and Jacob stopped briefly to check in at his office door before they proceeded toward the conference room. Otto picked up his notes and followed a short distance behind. Wolfgang was already seated and had Quip on the speaker phone. Quip would be returning to Zürich soon with Eilla-Zan, which was the other reason for the discussion topic in this morning's meeting. As the children found love and married, the role of the family business would need to be protected. Otto was spoiled when Jacob and Petra became involved, as they both had blood ties to the family business. He sighed realizing things sometimes changed.

When they were all seated, Otto smiled and began, "I trust everyone slept well. I, for one, think the wedding, though filled with activities, was a delightful family vacation."

Quip muttered over the speaker phone, “That just keeps getting better, except for early morning conference calls.”

Otto replied, “I am sorry for the early hour, Quip, but we needed to get some customer requests handled, and find out what, if anything, was missed. We rarely are all gone at the same time from here.

“I had a few topics that I thought we needed to touch on. One of the topics is, are Julie and Juan coming back here before the twins are born or is the doctor forbidding her travel? If it is the latter then Haddy will be on a plane soon, I suspect. What can we do to get her close to her primary doctor?”

Petra interjected, “They are on their way back as we speak. Lara and Carlos gave them a chartered flight so she could be at home and near her doctor. Mom already knows and is preparing the house for their arrival from here and having the staff set up a nursery, as well as using as much as possible from when we were babies. Haddy is totally in her element.

“Best of all, we can all visit easily when the babies arrive, yet the new couple can have their newlywed privacy.”

Jacob grinned and added, “I’ve never seen your family home, so I am really looking forward to taking a weekend trip to congratulate mom and dad when the time comes.”

Wolfgang looked pleased as he piped in, “It has been such a long time since any babies or youngsters were around, I am really looking forward to their arrival. Julie and Juan looked so incredibly happy at the wedding.”

Quip agreed, “They did look totally in love. I am so glad he was rescued, and the babies will have their dad. It was a cool venue at the winery in Texas, Petra. Great suggestion! EZ said she wants to go back there for a holiday some time.

“Julie believes she has a few more weeks before the babies arrive, and I, for one, wouldn’t dream of doubting her. She has

continued to prove herself as one tough cookie. Even the guys from the three letter United States agencies commented on her during the wedding reception.

“What else is on your list, Otto, because I have a couple of items as well that I think we need to discuss.”

“The other item on my list is frankly a bit delicate in my mind.” Otto continued, “It has to do actually a bit with Julie and Juan, as well as a bit with you and Eilla-Zan. Quip, I am concerned about how much of the operations and family business information we share. I want to be honest here. I don’t think that couples should keep secrets from each other, but I want to make certain that we remain protected and well insulated from the scrutiny of outside eyes. Historically, we tend to walk a very fine line at sharing or holding information from those outside of our family.

“Even Julie, with her work, has only asked to have the information needed for her to complete assignments on our behalf. I don’t know how much Juan will question or just accept on faith. And, well, Quip, your relationship with Eilla-Zan seems to be progressing to the next level with her agreement to live here with you. How is a level of guardedness going to work with her? I chatted with her a great deal during the wedding, and her inquisitive nature is as dramatic as her fiery red hair.”

Quip chuckled, “Otto, I couldn’t have said it better myself. This was one item on my list. I wanted to get input from both you and Wolfgang on the right way to approach this very subject. I think that you with your wives were a bit different as the lessons learned from the war were shared between families. You had the same foundational values, so the risk was minimal.

“Wolfgang, Jacob’s mom, your daughter, didn’t have enough time with Jacob’s father to have an issue. Both my parents died early so I have no idea how they handled it. Otto, you and Haddy have always worked together.

“Even with friends like Bruno, there have been lines that are simply not crossed, though we have helped him more than once due to his Interpol work. I am uncertain how much risk that I want EZ to have by knowing more than she should, especially after her being kidnapped.”

Wolfgang cleared his throat and offered, “This is a tough subject that each of us will always worry about. Though you make good points regarding a shared history, we each struggled a bit. It is a matter of both protection for those we love and wanting to share everything. Jacob and Petra do have a very different case. Then you look at the testing that Jacob went through with Otto in advance of being shown anything. As well as, he had to pass through your tests, Quip.”

Jacob agreed, “Yes, that was a confusing and tough time, but well worth it. I would suggest that each couple take it a step at a time without being so open to all the details of the business. Julie wouldn’t risk her family for anything. I believe that Juan would respect that decision. Both Carlos and Juan have had help from our infrastructure even though they are not aware of the details.”

Petra suggested, “Quip, would you open up about every capability that ICABOD has to EZ at this point, or would you be more inclined to provide the information needed for each of our assignments?”

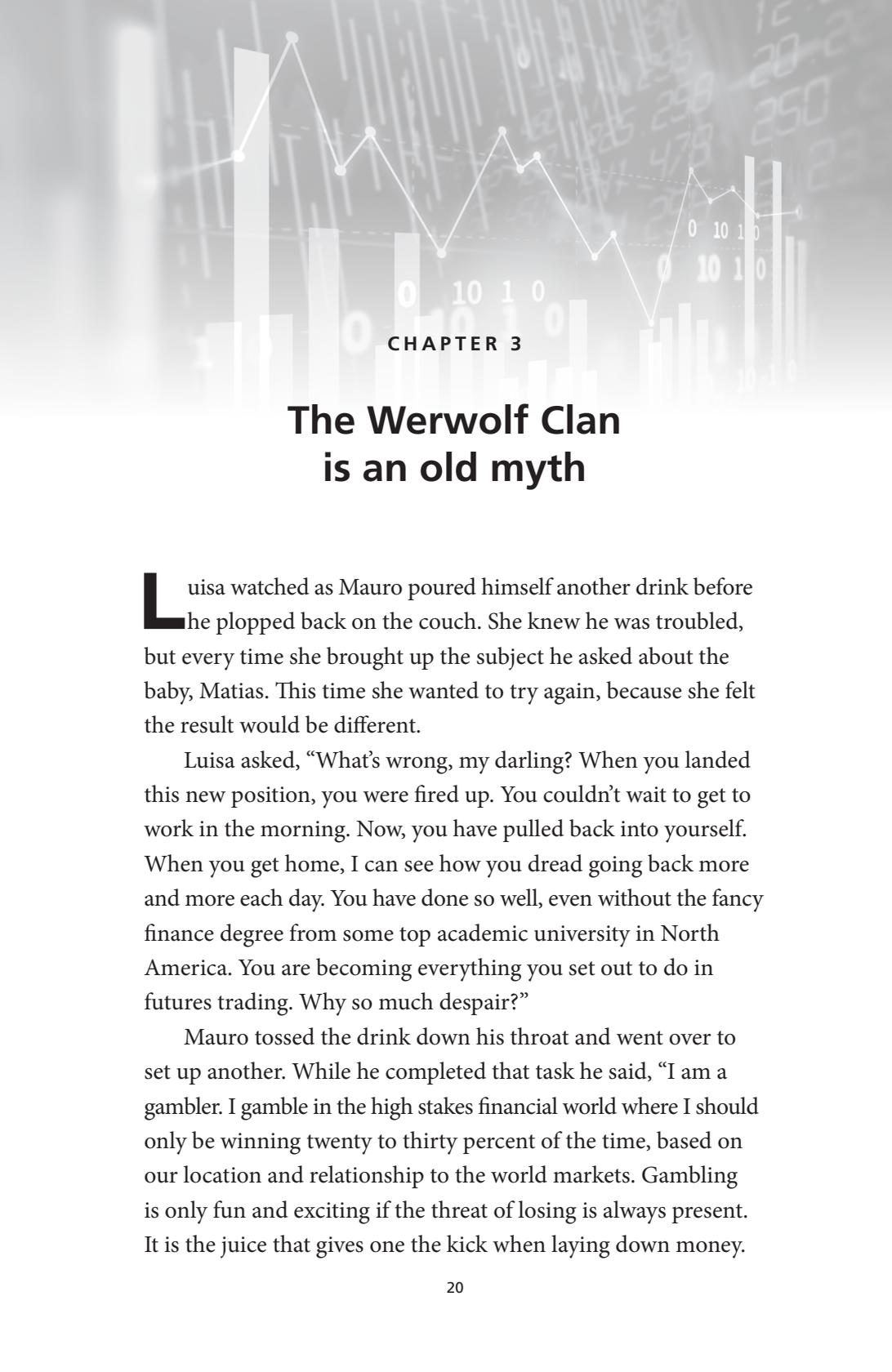
“Obviously, I wouldn’t give EZ access to ICABOD. Heck, it took me a long time to grant access to Jacob. She also doesn’t really need ICABOD to enhance her unified communications expertise. She is one of the best, no doubt. My inclination is just the information she needs.”

Petra nodded, then continued, “Exactly. We have a check and balance in place already that outlines the tasks accepted, how and who works them, and that has always been kept very

close. The agreed vote is required. It is work, and some of it can be discussed while other parts simply cannot.

“Another example is Julie’s and my relationship with Lara. I consider her a friend, but she doesn’t know everything. Julie adores doing the fashion design thing with Lara part time, but again, doesn’t tell her everything. It simply isn’t necessary as a part of the relationship.”

Otto looked thoughtful and asked, “Do you think that we should talk to Julie and get her opinions on the boundaries that she would be comfortable with in her marriage? Quip, I think you are mature enough that you will set the right boundaries with EZ. If something comes up that makes that an issue, I or, I am sure, Wolfgang would be happy to lend an ear.”



## CHAPTER 3

# The Werwolf Clan is an old myth

**L**uisa watched as Mauro poured himself another drink before he plopped back on the couch. She knew he was troubled, but every time she brought up the subject he asked about the baby, Matias. This time she wanted to try again, because she felt the result would be different.

Luisa asked, “What’s wrong, my darling? When you landed this new position, you were fired up. You couldn’t wait to get to work in the morning. Now, you have pulled back into yourself. When you get home, I can see how you dread going back more and more each day. You have done so well, even without the fancy finance degree from some top academic university in North America. You are becoming everything you set out to do in futures trading. Why so much despair?”

Mauro tossed the drink down his throat and went over to set up another. While he completed that task he said, “I am a gambler. I gamble in the high stakes financial world where I should only be winning twenty to thirty percent of the time, based on our location and relationship to the world markets. Gambling is only fun and exciting if the threat of losing is always present. It is the juice that gives one the kick when laying down money.

The not knowing for certain if you are right or wrong when you place a trade.”

Luisa puzzled at him, “But, my darling, you haven’t lost a bet in six months of oil futures trading. Now that the organization is moving into currency arbitrage and you have not failed at any positions you have taken; I don’t understand why you are miserable with that record.”

Mauro sat back down with his fresh drink and explained, “It is no longer gambling if you don’t lose. I thought, when they gave me this position, I would be my own man, run the analysts the way I wanted. I envisioned that I would proceed based on my instincts and their research. But I am just an order desk posing as their front. I don’t really matter because I simply do what I am told to do. I place orders based on their directions. People look at me thinking I am the chosen one according to The Prophecy as recorded in the scriptures of financial invincibility. My angel, I am nothing more than a prop completing trades that are already known to be correct. Do you understand how bitter this pill is to swallow?”

Luisa’s eye widened as she questioned, “What do you mean, the trades are all just handed to you for execution? How can that be? I and all the rest of the analysts pour over hundreds of reports, dig into financial backgrounds, and talk hours upon hours with market makers looking for insights for you to make a decision! You’re telling me that everything we do is useless and has no impact whatsoever on the firm’s trades?”

Luisa let the statement hang for a minute and then began to look scared as the reality set in. She hesitantly continued, “Mauro, what you just told me is, for the last six months you have been handed flawless trade future information that lets us win every time. Someone or something is telling you the future?”

Mauro sipped his drink and confirmed, “Correct. It didn’t start off that way. Everything looked so promising at first, and they were so accommodating, based on past favors done for their people. Now the favor they are doing for me is a trap that I didn’t see coming.”

Luisa looked confused as she asked, “What do you mean, a favor that became a trap? Who are these people, my darling?”

Mauro mused, “It is a long story that contains a slippery slope. It started way before me.

“At the end of World War II, the German S.S. higher ups could see the war was lost. They started moving people and resources out to countries that would be more sympathetic to their cause and not have to comply with extradition requests from the Big Three. With German manpower dwindling, those in power started recruiting younger men to fill the ranks. The 12th S.S. Panzer, the Hitler Jürgen Division, had fought ferociously in Normandy, which changed the conventional thinking about sixteen and seventeen-year-old soldiers. I read that after the battle of the Ardennes, an impromptu group of German fanatics assembled. They were hastily trained, poor armed, fanatics turned loose to defend Germany no matter what.

“They were known as the Werwolf Commandos. The rumors of them in history has been colorful at the very least and extremely elusive. Essentially, they were made up of mostly ten to fifteen-year-old boys with little chance of success, but they committed to the cause. When the end of the war approached, the S.S. pipeline for exodus really increased. As many Germans left the continent, the Werwolves were picked up and transported as well. The S.S. pipeline got out some very important S.S. personnel, including Otto Skorzeny, with a great deal of those refugees ending up here in Argentina. The irony was that they set up shop in this country as ‘consultants in the intelligence business.’

They even received assistance from some of the Italian Catholic clergy to help get them onto ships and then drift out of the reach of the Allies. This is where my grandfather came in.

“My grandfather felt sorry for the Werwolf Commandos, particularly those that were children and of the Catholic faith. From Germany, he facilitated their underground railway to Argentina. These children never forgot his family name or how he had assisted them. When our family also immigrated to Argentina, they renewed that debt of gratitude. In the end because my grandfather facilitated their lineage, the second and third generation Werwolves felt duty and honor bound to our family line. These are the people from whom I take my instructions that are now commands which I cannot refuse.”

Luisa, growing frightened, swallowed and implored, “My love, we cannot stay any longer! We must run, all of us, and escape these circumstances! I remember the cruelty of the German S.S. when I studied my history. I know how those evil men took advantage of this country when they set up shop in Argentina. I have no doubt that these children of the Werwolves are potentially worse than their original masters.

“I will not have you so miserable and we cannot take anything from these people! Our son cannot grow up in their shadow!”

Mauro smiled fatalistically, then said, “What a wonderful idea, my dove. But tell me, where do we run to that ruthless fanatics with a history of violence, who can see the future, wouldn’t hunt us? I even thought about sending you and Matias away to be safe. But I knew that once they discovered you had run, they would hunt you down, and we would be become prisoners. Even though we have no psychological freedom, at least we have some level of physical freedom to come and go.”

Mauro sighed heavily and looked lovingly at his wife as he explained, “No, my darling, we are trapped here for the time

being and maybe indefinitely. Let us stay the course and see if fate will lend a supporting hand.”

Luisa’s eyes brimmed with tears as she agreed, “Yes, my love. Thank you for telling me. Now I, at least understand your misery.”