

THE NIGHT OF THE CRY OF THE CAT

Fred Fraikor

Judith Celeste Wasserman sat on a mountain peak sandstone slab, her feet precariously dangling over a cliff that dropped 1200 feet into a gaping mountain chasm. She took a very deep, slow breath of cool air, exhaled, and opened her eyes to gaze again on the vastness of the Sangre de Cristos range and the other Colorado Rockies that stretched 360 degrees around her. She leaned carefully forward and glanced down. Far below her hiking boots, she could make out the shimmering reflections of a mountain stream flowing wildly in a series of rapids and pools to a glacial lake. She thought to herself, *“one shove of my hands and I could freefall down, hit the huge boulder in the center of that pool... Probably die of fright before my body smashed and broke over the rocks.”*

But Judith had no intention of suicide or dismal forebodings of death. It was a beautiful summer Sunday in late September and she relished not just the exhilarating scene from her mountain perch but she also basked in her new career right on this mountain with a promising future of adventure and exploration far from her childhood home in Manhattan.

Actually, she thought wryly to herself, only Celeste Wasserman was perched here on a “lunch break” in her very favorite spot on this mountain peak. Judith was the name that her father and mother had devised at birth to assure Grandmamma Wasserman, the grand matriarch of all the Wasserman clan back in Queens, that the new daughter would be properly raised with Jewish traditions and heritage. That was a minor façade since Grandmamma’s youngest son, Jacob, was pretty much an agnostic as a tenured Professor of History at Columbia. His wife, once a very liberal Hillel co-ed and music major with aspirations of an opera career, was ultimately betrayed with a “murky mezzo” voice that stifled that goal. Instead her mother had inserted “Celeste” as the middle name of their new baby in hopes her daughter would become the opera diva in the Wasserman family - Aida was one of her favorite operas and “*Celeste Aida*” was a famous aria of love from that opera.

“Celeste Aida, forma ivina, misti coserto di lucee fior...”
(Heavenly Aida, Fair as the sunrise, Soft as the starlight touching a flower...)

She was a heavenly baby, her mother gloated in the hospital. Celeste was an appropriate name, even though her husband wryly noted that the Aida’s ending wasn’t all that appealing, what with Verdi’s lovers being walled up and buried alive in a tomb at the opera’s last scene. Nonetheless, Heavenly she was, and Celeste she would be. Still, no

one dared to confront or confess such devious thoughts to Grandmamma about baby Judith.

Judith's middle class childhood was followed by the usual mother and teenage daughter conflicts, but nothing ever arose that chats with sympathetic Daddums couldn't overcome. Still, as a student who did the daily subway commute to a private high school for four years, she felt increasingly stifled and more than ready to escape and explore the world. She had, as her father often said, "a very vivid imagination." But she wanted more than just the "adventures of the mind," that intellectual sphere where her father ventured and often spoke fervently to her of his quests: "*If we can definitively prove that the Earl of Oxford wrote Shakespeare's plays, not some unknown merchant from Avon, wouldn't that be exciting?*"

Certainly, but not to Celeste. She wanted to be outdoors, not in the library. Archaeology seemed at first as perhaps a natural match for adventure. Her parents certainly deemed that could be an appropriate college path for Judith. Her father even had the right connections to an Anthropology department in what he deemed to be a good Ivy League University. Everything was set for the new Laura Croft, Tomb Raider.

In her sophomore year, Judith Wasserman abruptly switched to a major in Geology with no explanation to her parents other than "sifting through sand doesn't pay much."

They were all gone now. Both her parents had been killed in a plane crash on an anniversary trip to Italy in her senior year. Grandmamma had passed away quietly in her 96th year just after the beginning of the new millennium. None of her cousins and myriad of other relatives had her interests and none of them had ever been friends and now were just names and addresses on an email list. An only child, she was truly on her own.

So when she won a graduate fellowship to Colorado School of Mines near Denver, it was J. Celeste Wasserman who registered for classes in the Graduate School, not Judith. It was Celeste who found the delightfully tasteless apartment in the loft of an old closed bowling alley. It was Celeste who worked part-time in a microbrewery and got a little butterfly tattoo on her left butt cheek. It was Celeste who dated Daniel-the-Postdoc but who experimented by sleeping once with a grad student from China, another from South Korea and a muscular football player from Africa to see if sex with them was different and would result in more intense orgasms. (It wasn't and it didn't.)

It was Celeste who worked two summers for a mining firm in Denver and earned a trip to the Canadian Klondike with the field geologists and loved every minute of the two weeks. It was Celeste who learned a little technical climbing on North Table Mesa and snowboarding on the ski slopes on those few weekends she emerged from the university library. And it was Celeste who completed her Master's Degree in Geochemistry with a

thesis on trace elements in Platinum-bearing ores that immediately earned her a job with a global mining corporation.

It truly was global. Her monthly check arrived at the site on the east side of this nameless mountain in Colorado from an American mining company with headquarters in Denver. But that company was merely a small subsidiary of a huge French-Canadian Corporation in Montreal which in turn was privately controlled by a Swiss holding company rumored to have Japanese and Chinese partners. She already knew her next assignment with the Corporation would be in China. Fun!

So J. Celeste Wasserman knew a great deal about the rocks around her this afternoon in southwest Colorado, including this particular rock, this singular sandstone slab that was her very favorite place to bask in her private lunch retreat from her job at this mine site.

Pulling her knees up to her chest, she slipped her hands under her butt and brushed away the grains of silica from her jeans. Silica grains were still wearing ever so slowly away from the brown surface of the sandstone. She ran her right hand over a sinusoidal wavy pattern that ran across the entire twenty feet or so of the exposed surface of the ledge. Smooth, wavy ripples. And they really were ripples. Ripples from an ocean sea that caressed a white sandy beach that ran for thousands of miles across an ancient land during the Cretaceous. An ocean relic that millions of years later was lifted by the thrusting Rocky Mountains more than two miles into the sky and left here, a geological throne for Celeste from the days of the dinosaurs.

It was her first fun discovery of sorts on this mountain. A personal one to be sure, of no great scientific value, but one that brought a thrill, that feeling of finding a treasure. When she first spotted the sedimentary rock she knew it was very much out of place among the igneous granite crags of the supporting mountain - her ledge was the last remnant of a completely different geological time.

She had carefully searched the surface of the slab for dinosaur tracks, traces of fossil, all of which were common in the Dakota Sandstone Hogbacks not far from her old apartment near the campus. But Her Stone, Her Special Ledge, had none. Still, she could sit back and picture a herd of plodding Triceratops right there, just behind her at the edge of huge, towering primitive fern trees instead of the stunted bristlecone pines. Lurking in the blue lagoon just off shore in front of her would be a giant plesiosaur, undulating slowly under the waves, ready to pounce.....

BEEEP!!! BEEEP! BEEP!

The alien sound of the satellite cell phone startled her so that she instinctively shot out both hands and grabbed the sandstone around her. She pulled the intruder out of its

holster, stood up, backed away carefully from the edge and spoke softly at first, perhaps not to awaken the dozing marmots on the boulders nearby.

“Hello?”

“Celeste? This is Hank. I’m at DIA……wait, let me call you back. I’ve got another call coming from headquarters.”

It was her boss, Henry (Hank) Wray. *He should be on the road driving back here by now*, she thought. She knew he had met with some Corporate officials yesterday in Montreal and was scheduled back this afternoon, *so if he’s calling me there’s got to be some delay*. Hank was a man of few unnecessary words.

He was a great first boss, she thought, while holding the phone to her ear and walking slowly among the rocks back down toward the semblance of a trail to timberline. Hank’s title was Site Mining Superintendent but he was more than that. He was a mentor for Celeste. Thirty-five years of experience in mining among not only these mountains, but also in places in South America, Australia, Indonesia, South Africa. Places that Celeste wanted to see in her career.

And Hank was the perfect gentleman. A genuine “Howdy Ma’am” type. Educated as a mining engineer, he still had a bit of a western twang, but probably not nearly that of his father, a coal miner all his life in Wyoming or his grandfather, who did hard rock mining in Cripple Creek, or his great grandfather who came to Leadville to find gold and ended up running a grocery store. “During the bad times,” Hank once told her, “they all ended up in retail.” “I reckon I’ll end up as a greeter in Wal-Mart too, Little Lady, if’n the Corporation shuts down its American operations in this economic crisis.”

She was indeed a “little lady” standing next to his strapping frame and she took no offense at that sexist-sounding phrase. She was a petite brunette, standing 5’4” in running shoes. Not skinny, she was a nice size 8 in dress size. A 38, well o.k., size 36B bra, but with an underwire uplift she could hold her own in a cocktail dress. Her dark long hair - her mother’s daily brushed joy - was cut short to better fit under a construction hard hat.

Hank stood 6 feet 5 inches in his steel toe safety boots. He didn’t look at all like John Wayne though. Maybe more like a silver-haired Abe Lincoln without the beard. Somewhere in his 50s. Long legs always in boot-fit crisp jeans. Fingers that could wrap around the biggest drill in the tool shed. A protruding Adam’s apple on his neck. Ears that he could wiggle, one at a time, something that always gave Celeste the silent giggles.

Her boss was back on the line.

“Celeste?”

“Here Hank.”

“Well, wouldn’t cha’ guess. My plane had maintenance problems in Montreal. Sittin’ for two hours at the damn lounge bar up there with everybody talkin’ French. Right now, ah’m standin’ around waitin’ fer my luggage.”

“O.K.” she replied.

“But listen up, I just talked with a guy at the company office here in town. There are a lot of weather warnings on the TV stations here. A really big cold front - they’re callin’ it an “Alberta Clipper” - and it’s movin’ fast down the Front Range. The temperature’s dropped 25 degrees here in an hour. Kin ya believe it? Wind has really picked up and the airport is getting wind shears or microbursts or somethin’. Nothing’s taking off or landing.....Aw, hold on again

Damn, muttered Celeste to herself. I should have checked the weather this morning on the Net. That’s part of my job when I’m acting for the Super.

She was a woman who did not tolerate her own mistakes, even small oversights. And an incoming blizzard in the Rockies could be a major threat to their mining operations.

Celeste kept making her way down between the great granite boulders, carefully watching her footing until she reached the old trail at the edge of a tundra meadow. Keeping the cell phone to her ear, she turned and looked to the north. The beautiful crystalline cirrus clouds had moved almost overhead and the horizon to the northwest was now an ominous black. Still, there was just a wisp of wind, it was unusually calm in fact this high up the peak.

“Celeste?”

“Yes Hank?”

“Well, I just talked again with the Denver office. I kin try rentin’ a car here and drivin’ down there. But the weatherman is predicting a foot of snow and blizzard conditions over all the passes. Winter storm warnin’s all over his friggen TV map. And high wind warnin’s big time. I reckon I’ll just find a motel up here and hunker down until morning.”

“So be careful Little Lady.” Hank’s tone went down an octave into a steady stream of instructions. “You’ve bin in some high winds up there but it might git up past the 100mph range. That could get a bit dicey.”

Celeste thought to herself, *“a bit dicey”* in Hank’s terminology could mean it might get a bit dangerous.

The boss man continued his instructions. “First of all, tell Gundahl to double-check the diesel mules for the emergency power generators. You might git a power outage, if so, the “UPS” should come on automatically, but jist to be sure, have him run them for a couple of minutes. And make certain they’ve got enough diesel fuel right there by the generators. Ah don’t want anyone haven ta’ drag fuel cans around out in a friggin’ blizzard at night. Have him pass on the storm warning to security.”

“And Celeste, git Hans to have his transport crew to move both forklifts into the big shed, but put the new strip borer drills in the back first or there mightn’t be enough room. Git all the 1/4 tons in there, the Jeeps, and your SUV. Grab a bunch of portable heaters from the tool crib and spread them out around the vehicles. Ah jist don’t want the guys to hafta charge truck batteries all damn Monday. I’m figurin’ it will get to maybe 10 below easy, in the wind chill tonight,” he cautioned.

“O.K. you got all that?”

“Yes sir. Trailer tie-downs. Tell Gundahl to check the diesels and the UPS systems. Move borer drills, trucks, SUV’s, into the maintenance shed, put portable heaters. And.... oh, yeah, put the forklifts in there too.”

“What about the Euclids and Caterpillar units?” she asked.

“They kin stay put. Nothin’s gonna’ bother those big rigs,” he replied.

There was a slight pause while she sensed he was thinking of every possible contingency. That was Hank. He looked like and sounded like an easy-going cowboy but he was as meticulous about safety as the corporate accountant was about decimal places. Hank had survived one cave-in at a mine in South Africa years ago and he never wanted to see any more major accidents. Not on his watch.

“And Celeste, don’t let anyone, not Olympic Hans or any of his crew even think about putting on their damn skis or those crazy snowboards after the storm. Ah don’t care if it’s sunny and seventy tomorrow morning. I’ve seen too many avalanches in that area. Until ah git there, no sleddin’, no nothin’ off the site. And that includes you. Understood?”

“Understood.” She unconsciously nodded to the affirmative even though no one could possibly see her.

Another pause. Celeste could hear muffled voices, more announcements from an airport speaker in the background.

“O.K. Just got a ride to a motel.”

Celeste smiled to herself. It would be a woman, stranded like the other passengers from that flight. That was friendly, thrice-divorced, Hank too.

“Oh, and one last thing.”

“Yes?”

“You need to go through the SOP manual emergency checklist. Every line on the page about weather and storm. Make an entry on each in the daily log. Trailer cable checks and so on. They’ll be plenty of paperwork to file with the Company. And you be sure to call me if anything, anything at all, out of the ordinary pops up. O.K.?” he cautioned.

“Will do, Hank,” she responded, noting his Western twang seemed to disappear the more serious his tone became. “See you tomorrow.”

“You’ll do just fine Manager Wasserman. They’ll be a whole lot of shakin’ and rattlin’ but it shouldn’t be worse than the mountain thunderstorms you’ve been through. And no crashin’ and bangin’ lightnin.’ Chuckle!”

The phone clicked off. Celeste pictured Hank smiling at his last little joke to bolster her confidence. She didn’t mind wind and snow, but lighting crackling and sizzling around the boulders at 11,000 feet scared the shit out of her.

Celeste turned and looked north. Those beautiful, wispy, crystalline cirrus clouds she had enjoyed overhead a few minutes before, were in reality the lead scouts of the massive front, the harbinger of the Alberta Clipper cold front in the far distance. Already the wispy cirrus were replaced by a long line of white lenticular clouds that topped the university peaks, Mt. Princeton and Mt. Harvard, like white graduation caps some 80 miles to the northeast. She knew enough meteorology to know that a particular type of lens cloud was created by jet stream winds streaming down over the lee side of a mountain. *Mother Nature’s high-wind warning.*

Celeste picked up her pace on an old trail down to the mine site. Twenty minutes later she paused on her downward trek below timberline, catching her breath to open a bottle of water at a lush meadow nesting a small cluster of 19th century log cabins. The roofs and walls on the cabins had long fallen to the ground, but enough of the little gold mining settlement remained that it was another favorite “picnic” spot for Celeste.

Two weeks before, on another Sunday hike, she had even found an old cemetery behind the ghost town, hidden among an aspen grove and stunted lodge pole pines. An old iron

gate marked the entrance with an elegantly wrought sign above: “ EL CEMENTERIO SANTA MARIA.” Five or six simple metal crosses, a half dozen wooden ones and a few others conveniently made from flat slabs of Dakota sandstone still stood in the acre or so of burial plots. For the most part, she noted in her diary, the relentless weathering over the century had erased many of the inscriptions that had been lovingly carved into the soft sandstone.

But there was one headstone that she found that day that stood out from the others. A fine grained gray granite stone, meticulously engraved, that in those days must have been special ordered and hauled from a railroad city like Salida or maybe even as far as Denver.

In any case, it was an expensive stone carved with special love. It still clearly read:

Anna Vallejos
1893
Kyrie Eleison

Celeste judged from the single year on the stone that it had been an infant that died the same year. She had imagined and pictured what it must have been like to live just below timberline in those days as a woman, a wife, a mother, finally enduring what must have been a year that had been filled with tragedy and grief. *The “Sangre de Cristos - The “Blood of Christ” - mountains, had embraced poor little baby Anna into their cold granite grasp, she imagined to herself.*

When she told Hank of her find he teased her maternal picture, countering that it just as well could have been “some whore come up from the old mining towns of Mosca or Crestone to make a little money in a bad summer. Then she just died from a sexual disease or drugs.”

His effort to toss water on her visuals didn’t work. “*Kyrie Eleison*” – “*Lord Have Mercy*” – seemed too religious, too fine for a brothel gal. She kept her version.

But right now, Celeste was multitasking while she briefly rested. She punched the buttons on her cell phone to call down to the mine camp and give Gundahl, one of the mine foremen, a “heads up” on the impending storm. She waited but no answer. She left a brief voice mail.

“Gundahl, this is Celeste. We have a major storm approaching. High wind warning for tonight. I have some important instructions for you. Call me as soon as you can.”

She had the authority to give orders. Her official title in the company human resources records was “Chief Site Environmental Officer.” The “Chief” in the title put her into a job level that provided a starting salary that she knew was triple the annual music teacher’s

income of her mother. The “Site” portion merely meant she was a field staff person, continually on site and not at a desk at headquarters (just what she wanted at this point in her career). The “Environmental” title meant she was responsible for gathering, assembling and providing data and all required information to every federal, state and local official and any other government entities that scrutinized the operations every week. Hank was more than happy to defer those inquiring people to Celeste. (However all contact with any media whatsoever was strictly restricted to PR staff at the Denver office.) But it was the title “Officer” that classified her at the management level and gave her “2nd in command” authority in Hank’s absence at the moment.

Sure, Hank had 15 other “site foremen” to run operations and generally he would delegate multiple responsibilities accordingly among those workers. But this time it was to be a short trip, it was nearing the end of the operations at the site and he wanted her to have some “leadership” experience on her record before they shut down.

It was beginning to look though, as if she were going to be doing more than “minding the store” in the next 24 hours.

She was now responsible for the lives and safety of 167 men, 79 women, and 15 toddlers.

Yes, women and children. This was not a typical mining site. No roughneck hard rock miners from Montana, no coal miner refugees from West Virginia, no Hispanic laborers from the valley. This was a very unique, but very skilled crew.

Every single person, with the exception of Hank and Celeste, came from one small town, Czerny, high in the French Alps.

Celeste had to learn the history of the Czerny culture and community before she ever set foot on this site. She had a month-long management training course in Montreal and one entire week was devoted to lectures from an anthropologist, a sociologist, and company HR staff but mostly meeting and talking with the Czerny foreman and a Czerny woman who it turned out would be the site doctor.

Her father would have been enthralled with the history aspect. Even she was impressed and realized what a valuable human resource and assets these miners from the Alps really were to the French Corporation. Two years ago, some geneticists had matched the DNA from a group of Czerny individuals with DNA from the “Bronze Age Man” that was uncovered frozen in the Alps. Apparently a large settlement existed in Czerny back then because of the local mining of malachite, a copper ore necessary for the Bronze-age tools and weapons. After those ancient mines played out, the remaining villagers mined lead for the Romans and subsequently for the Franks, the Goths and every other conqueror that happened to march through their high mountain pass. The Czerny literally had 5000 years of mining experience.

The isolated village had an ancient name, something like Duth or Dof, Celeste recalled from the seminars, but during WWI the Austrian-Hungarian empire occupied the area briefly and the Hungarian troops gave it a Hungarian name on their maps. It became permanent when Germany sent survey patrols to map in detail the strategic pass in the early days of WWII.

But it was the *Wehrmacht*, the Nazi army, which brought the Czerny miners swiftly into the technology of 20th century heavy equipment. With the Italian army's imminent collapse, the Germans needed better roads to move men and equipment across several alternate routes into and out of the Italian front. The German engineers conscripted every able man in Czerny to help with the construction of roads wide enough and good enough to move Panzer tanks and trucks. Short-handed, the soldiers taught the Czerny how to operate and maintain bulldozers, trucks, build bridges, handle explosives.....all the skills that would be needed in modern construction and mining. Two years later, with the threat of being cut off by Allied troops, the German engineers hastily retreated, leaving behind almost all of the construction equipment in the village maintenance sheds. After the war, the French further improved the road, looking for potential ski areas. Although the mountains at Czerny proved too rugged for a resort area, the mining corporation spotted the skilled villagers as an ideal alternative to the highly unionized and unpredictable French miners at the time. That began 60 years of a symbiotic relationship with the Czerny. The Corporation provided comparatively high wages, health care, education, training, housing, and everything needed to sustain a community at a mining site. In turn, the Czerny provided a highly skilled, exceptionally reliable and productive work force that could be moved worldwide as a self-contained community.

However, this site in Colorado was the Corporation's first venture into the United States. For this operation, the Czerny crew and their families were brought over just to work during the late spring and summer for the past five years. Married men could include their wives if they chose to come. No single women. (That was learned somewhere in those 60 years of experience!) No children of school age. Especially no teenagers even if they were capable drivers. Everyone in those categories remained back in Czerny with parents or elder supervision.

Celeste's phone rang. It was Gundahl. She continued walking and lifted the phone to answer.

Gundahl Tolat's native tongue still had elements of one of the earliest traceable languages, Indo-European. The Corporation trainees were not encouraged to learn to speak Czerny since it required some important guttural accents foreign to French or English. In addition to the usual prepositions denoting gender as in French or German, the ancient Czerny language had ones that also expressed "good" and "evil" to a word. (The Corporation linguist joked that it was possible if you weren't very careful speaking

Czerny, you could easily mispronounce the Czerny words into something embarrassing or obscene).

But all of the foremen knew French and most spoke fairly good English. Some not so well. Gundahl was in the “a little better than some” category. And like Celeste, he was young, in his mid 20s, so Hank sort of assigned him to her as a translator and sort of aide-de-camp.

She hit the answer button and heard his voice.

“Miss Wassermann?”

“Yes, Gundahl. You got my message?” She didn’t wait for an answer. “There is a major storm approaching. Very high winds and even snow. Mr. Wray thinks it could be a blizzard and he is stuck at the airport in Denver. I need you to get the men prepared and everything buttoned down. I want everything ready for the storm.”

Celeste was going to continue with the instructions but the foreman replied: “Yes, yes. All foremen have storm checklist. Everyone is doing everything according to list. Myself, Hanz, check generators, tie downs, move stuff into the shed. Everything will be all right. We will finish soon. Hanz and other foremen do this many times in snow storms. I tell everything to chief of security.”

She gave herself a little sigh of relief. They were good. They were on it. It would be o.k.

“Thanks Gundahl. Good. I’ll be around to double-check everything in about a half hour.”

She was about to punch out but the voice on the other end continued: “Miss Wassermann. Big problem for me.” She stopped. She sensed a stress in the rise of the tone of his voice.

“Miss Wassermann. My wife, you know she is pregnant. Due next month.”

Celeste recalled that. She had briefly been introduced to his wife at a gathering and that was about it. She was a beautiful young woman but spoke no English so it was sort of a “nice-to-meet-you” brief meeting.

“Her water broke just few minutes ago. The doktor is with her. She think maybe baby come soon. Too early. Could be bad.”

She didn’t need to see the young husband to know he was anxious and bordering on frantic. A premature baby here with a storm coming. *Damn! Wrong time. Wrong place,* she told herself.

But she had met the company doctor, Katarina, several times in Hank's office. The Doc reported directly to Hank and although she was a Czerny, she was very well educated with an M.D. from a medical school in Montreal. She spoke fluent English along with four other languages. Celeste liked her. The doctor could hold her own in the meetings and swear like a cowpoke with Hank or say no to any of the Czerny foremen. Celeste also knew there were capable midwives and three nurses among the older Czerny wives to assist with the baby in the clinic trailer. The Corporation anticipated these things.

Still, she felt she should try and assure Gundahl that things would be o.k.

"Gundahl, let me talk with the doctor. Maybe we can drive your wife to a hospital in Alamosa or Salida."

"Dr. Katarina back in clinic with wife. She say, said, no, too long drive to hospital. Baby need to be here."

"All right Gundahl. Go back to the clinic. I'll be there in about ten minutes."

She didn't put the phone back in its holster and instead stood up on a small boulder and dialed up her boss.

He answered promptly. She could hear car noise and figured he was still on the road.

"Hank, it's Celeste. Everyone is starting to move equipment and button up the site. All the foremen have the storm checklists from the Operations Manual and we should be ready in an hour or so. I'll do a check walk around the whole site at that point." (She didn't mention that she was away from the site at the moment.)

"Good. We're crawling around here in a goddamn snow storm. Plows are out but a couple of city fools have spun out across the highway." He laughed. "Might have to walk to the hotel at this pace."

"One other thing Hank," she continued. "Gundahl told me that his wife...uh, their baby might be on the way right now. Premature I think. I told him maybe we could get her to a city hospital but it sounds as if it will pretty quick."

"Yeah, Katarina called me just a few minutes ago. Sad. It's their first and they've been really excited. They have a big family here and I guess the old man is a mayor or something back in Czerny. It doesn't sound good but don't worry, Katarina and the nurses have everything they need. Let them take care of it."

That was perfectly fine with Celeste. With no siblings, no younger brothers or sisters, babies were not her expertise and she had absolutely no desire to be part of an emergency delivery. That wasn't a very pretty visual in her mind.

Still, she thought she should talk with the doctor. But no answer came from her phone so Celeste continued down to the mine site gate.

At this point, up here, from her current position above the mine camp, she could clearly see how the "mine" site was more of a quarry or strip operation than the traditional mine shafts up at the old Spanish mines.

Instead of a tunnel, a lateral excavation was being carved around the remains of an ancient volcanic "dome" that had marked the last vestige of lava eruption in this old caldera. The miners were removing the high-grade ore, which was segregated in veins of the outer layer of dark red and black oxidized iron and manganese magma, exposing a fresh, much lighter tan-colored rock beneath. It looked as if some giant was peeling an apple from the top down.

Except the "peeling" here was done with some very large, very expensive equipment scattered around the inside of the old caldera along with 60 trailers and sheds that, at the moment, looked like fragile boxes waiting to be blown over. And right now all of it, the housing, the equipment and most important, the people, were Celeste's responsibility.

Celeste arrived at the steel fence topped by barbed wire, waved her electronic key and walked into the compound. There was a concentration of diesel smoke at the far end and she could see that the last of the big rigs were being parked in a cluster around the big maintenance shed.

She unlocked the door and stepped into her office/trailer home for a pit stop. Her trailer and Hank's were distinguished by satellite dishes and radio antennas. In addition, Hank's trailer also sported a pole with emergency sirens. So far, the sirens had simply been used to automatically announce start and quit times.

The custom mobile homes were very comfortable, luxurious even, considering the contrast with the old cabins up on the mountain or some of the small, old homestead homes down in the San Luis valley. Satellite TV, a small kitchen, refrigerator/freezer, lounge, a queen bed, plenty of closet space for a recent graduate with no prom gowns and no roommates. It was lot better than her old college apartment. The Czerny trailers were as livable, though a bit crowded for families and although there was a TV in the community center/mess hall, the Czerny adults had little use for shows they couldn't comprehend. A few of the single young men did watch occasionally to practice English but it was the toddlers who loved the daytime cartoons.

Celeste's trailer also housed a separate room with a small lab. She was after all, a geochemist and a portion of her job description was to analyze the ore samples coming from the excavation daily. She had a small, hand-held x-ray unit to detect the precious metal on the site but only for qualitative purposes to define the boundaries of the high-grade ore in the dome rock. The real analyses were done on samples she selected daily and sent to the Denver lab by a FedEx courier.

But all of this, all of the quarter of a billion dollars of leased equipment, charter flights for the Czerny workers each summer, not to mention 16 years of negotiations, environmental impact studies, federal and state regulatory reports, severance taxes, building two schools on each side of the mountain range as a down payment on economic benefit...all of this had to be justified by an enormous profit potential for the Corporation.

And the Canadian geologists had found just that potential back in the early fifties on this mountain - a rare platinum mineral, Sperrylite. That was an ore found in commercial quantities only in Sudbury Canada and Russia. From the bore samples it appeared this could be even larger and there were trace amounts of rhodium and palladium to add to the value of the ore. The Corporation bought all of the old mining claims, patent rights and the entire caldera of the mountain 50 years ago, for what was a miniscule price, even at the time.

The platinum in the Sperrylite's mineral composition, platinum arsenide, (PtAs_2) made the Corporation's costly venture into the United States very enticing. Then, with the introduction of platinum catalytic convertors into all auto production, it seemed an easy decision for the directors. But the arsenic in the mineral compound gave the state and federal environmental officials months, then years of scrutiny. Colorado had a long history of environmental disasters from unregulated mining, processing pollution, cyanide leaching and tailing dumps. It took 16 years of behind-the-scenes Canadian-American NAFTA negotiations and compromises before the first bulldozer scraped its way up an old rail switchback on the east side and started site preparations six years ago.

No chemical processing was allowed at the mine site. A minimal crush was done down to fist-size rocks in a filtered building with environmental monitoring "24-7." The high-grade ore was loaded, covered and trucked down the east side of the mountain to a rail site on the Front Range and sent to Canada for processing. The clincher in the mining deal was that at the end of operations this summer, when all of the high-grade ore was depleted, the Czerny workers would plant charges in the remaining core and collapse the rock burden down into the surrounding excavation. "As neat as taking down a skyscraper or a football stadium," Hank said. The rock would be leveled, boulders and top soil moved back over the empty trailer and parking lots until the site, absent the 154 meter high dome, would blend into the rest of the rock-strewn, avalanched caldera. A small reclamation team would come next summer to plant native grasses and trees and check

groundwater monitors, etc. A portion of the switchback road would remain as a firebreak for the Forest Service. That was it. As planned, the only reminders of mining on this mountain would be the 19th century tailings at the old mines by the ghost town.

Only the Corporation officers knew its bottom profit line to date. Everything was privately held. No public stock. No financial disclosures. Nonetheless, Hank told her that he had been told the site had covered all startup expenses at the end of its first summer of shipping ore, five years ago. And the price of platinum was escalating. He even hinted there might be a bonus for Celeste at Christmas, maybe enough to buy a car, he joked. She told him she didn't need a car, she needed to pay off student loans.

If I don't fuck it up tonight, she soberly whispered to her bathroom mirror.

Celeste glanced at the digital anemometer and weather station over her desk. The numbers flickered up to a gust of 29 mph. She grabbed a ski jacket and went outside.

The first thing she observed were the security guards, with their orange jackets, sidearms and white hard hats, setting up cable "guide wires" to steel posts along the walkways between buildings. No structure was more than 100 feet away from another but in a white-out blizzard, the cable could be your lifeline to shelter. She went from one working group to another, being reassured by each foreman that things were being battened down according to the checklist.

With a smile, Celeste saw that the clothes lines over by the family housing were bare. Even though the site had a complete laundry facility, the Czerny women always had clothes on those lines during the day, regardless of the dust that might be blowing around. The sight always brought memories of bleached white bed sheets and pillowcases waving at her on the clothes lines when they went to Uncle Joseph's house in Queens. Here, it seemed to put a familial, homely, touch to a stark panorama of volcanic rock and it occasionally stirred Judith to emerge briefly from Celeste to mourn her parents' deaths.

She watched a large group of Czerny adults walk into the community center followed by the chief of security who closed the door behind him. *Good place to hunker down the storm watching TV, I guess*, she approvingly told herself.

She and Hank rarely walked through the family section of the site unless invited for something. They considered it private. Celeste wasn't going to intrude at this time since a security foreman had told her everything and everyone was safely inside or at their posts.

Celeste began the walk back to her trailer. Just as she got to the door, she turned and glanced up the mountain.

It was a strange, almost spooky sight. The dark clouds had reached the peak and were sliding down like a black avalanche over Her Rock on its rapid descent while other dark arms reached around the side of the mountain to envelope them all in a cold, wet embrace.

A snowflake hit her cheek. Another smashed into her nose. The darkness blended with a falling sheet of shimmering snow coming straight at her.

For a wild second Celeste thought of taunting the oncoming locomotive and was about to shout:

“Yeah. Come on! Hit me with your best shot! I can”

It did.

She hadn't bothered to zipper the jacket front and a ferocious gust hit her unbuttoned jacket like a hammer, inflating the jacket momentarily and paragliding her two feet into the air. Celeste grabbed the door handle and hung on.

If the door had to be opened by swinging to the outside, the gusts would have ripped it off its hinges. But some experienced, mountain-trained, engineer had designed heavy, sliding doors for this duty. Celeste slid the bearing-tracked door back just enough for her to slide into her shelter with a sincere sigh of relief.

She hung up the parka and then remembered to close the metal shutters on all the windows. One windswept pebble the size of BB could easily shatter a window and then there would be hell inside her office with paper flying everywhere. A lot of details to think of. *This is why pilots and mine sites have checklists*, she said to herself.

Still, while the trailer shook violently, she felt secure. The trailers and the Czerny had survived five summers up here. Surely a couple of those previous storms would have been as bad as this one. Maybe? Right now she wished she hadn't seen “The Perfect Storm” movie. That thought though, did spur her to get online and check all weather forecasts.

It was just as Hank had told her. The “Alberta Clipper” was roaring down from the Arctic, bringing frigid, winter air down into the continental U.S. Worse, it was colliding right here in Colorado with a smaller warm low pressure system that was loaded with moisture up from the Gulf of Mexico. The “High Wind Watches” had changed to “High Wind Warnings” and “Blizzard Warnings” all up and down the Rocky Mountains. This really was the making of a perfect winter blizzard, and it came as an unwelcome surprise, very early in the fall. Traffic was at a standstill in the Front Range cities. The only

consolation seemed to be that it was moving rapidly south and east. Tomorrow's forecast for the area was cold, but sunny and dry.

She dialed up Hank. If the snow and ice stuck and covered the satellite dish she might have trouble communicating with her boss later. Lots of static, but she could hear it dial and ring. The high winds kept the light snow from accumulating for the moment. No answer though.

Come on Hank, she said to the silent phone. Get your butt off the lady and answer the phone.

The trailer shook violently. She looked at the anemometer. The digital reading for "max" was 81 mph. No response yet from Hank. She would try again in a few minutes. In the meantime she did what she had always done the past six years, she researched on the Net.

Fujita Scale for Tornado Damage

<u>F#</u>	<u>Damage Indicator</u>	<u>3 Second Gust (mph)</u>
0	Shrubbery, trees ripped	65-85
1	Weak trailers flipped	73-112
2	Trailers disintegrated	113-115

Her weather instruments indicated the winds were swirling, but coming mainly from the north. She decided damage from rotating winds in a tornado might be different than those from a hurricane. Before she switched to hurricane scales, she couldn't help but notice the last category of tornadoes:

Fujita Scale 5... "the finger of God"... strongly built homes are completely blown away. 261-318 mph.

Aptly named, she thought as another gust slammed the north end of her trailer. Fastball, 91mph. She was beginning to fear that last reading wasn't the storm's "best shot."

Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Scale

<u>Category</u>	<u>Damage</u>	<u>Wind force (mph)</u>
I	Trees, unanchored trailers	74-95
II	Major damage to mobile homes	96-110
III	Unsecured mobile homes destroyed	111-130
IV	Complete destruction of mobile	131-155

The wind couldn't get up to those last numbers here in the middle of the country, could it? she anxiously asked herself. *Whoa!* ***“Complete destruction of mobile homes whether secured or not.”***

Almost as if to answer her question, her phone rang.

“Celeste. Thanks for calling. You caught me in the bathroom. What’s the status up there?” he asked and she could sense a tone of concern in the question.

“Everything, everyone is secured. I did a walk-through of the whole site. All the equipment has been moved. Everything on the storm checklist has been done. Security strung up guidelines between the trailers and they confirmed everyone is in their trailers or the community center,” she reported.

“Not much real snow on the ground yet. Mostly high winds. The anemometer gage has hit 91 mph and everything is rocking but everything must be holding. I haven’t had any calls and power is steady.”

“Damnation! 91, eh?”

“Yeah, well it just hit 97” she responded glancing again at the weather station. “Hank, how high have the winds hit when you’ve been up here these past summers?” she continued, looking for some assurance.

“Hmmm. Up to the lower 80s as I recall. Nothing quite as high as what you’ve got now. That’s Category II stuff on a coastal hurricane.”

Oh great. I’m in charge during a goddamn record storm for this site, she muttered silently to herself as Hank continued on the phone.

“With that kind of wind velocity you might get some fair-sized gravel picked up from the Crusher and blown through the site. I don’t want you or anyone going outside and getting hit by a slingshot rock. You stay in your office. That’s the weather emergency center and you’re the emergency operations officer right now,” he cautioned.

“You know Albrecht, the Chief of Security?”

“Yeah sure,” she answered.

Celeste's first impression when she first met the tall, muscular, burly guard at Hank's staff meeting was that, with his gray, trimmed beard and crew cut and from his mature, august bearing and sensible suggestions, was that Albrecht could have been a tribal chief back in the Bronze Age. He just had that appearance of nobility and strength to keep things in order in his kingdom - and a mine site.

"I think I saw him go in the community center after he gave me a report," she added. "Do you want me to call him and tell him something?"

"Uh, no, on second thought, never mind. He'll call you if any of his night shifts report anything. The best thing is for you to stay put for tonight and watch the weather station. Work on the storm log. It's a fast moving storm and should clear out by morning. Let me look out the window here a minute." A brief pause and he spoke again.

"O.K. It has stopped snowing here and I can see the moon through some high clouds. It's already breaking up here. So if it's moving at 20-25 miles per hour I figure the storm should clear you in maybe four or five hours at that rate," he surmised.

"Celeste, I know it's going to be hard to try and get some sleep with that gale slapping on the trailer. But it's built like a brick.....well, you know the specs. Just hang in there and give me a report first thing in morning. I'll be on the road before daybreak," he concluded with a more calming voice.

She did know the specifications on the trailers. While the homes and other buildings looked like any standard temporary trailers and siding structures you might find at a construction site or trailer camp, they weren't. These trailers were built to specifications for mountain conditions. The builds were structurally reinforced and thickly insulated and tied down at six points by cables anchored to concrete imbedded in bedrock.

Celeste read the charts on the computer screen in front of her and muttered to herself: *But even a brick shithouse could be blown to Kansas with the right velocity numbers.*

"Oh, one last thing," he added, "any word on Gundahl's baby?"

"No. I've tried calling the Doc but she hasn't answered."

"That's all right. If she's doing her baby thing you don't want to bother her anyway. I just wanted to know if it was a boy or girl and how it was doin'. I'll pick up something besides cigars for the parents on my way out of Denver," he said.

"Anyway, good job and good night Wasserman."

The static was getting much worse and Hank's voice was breaking up but Celeste thought she could hear a woman's voice and a toilet flushing in the background so she just signed off.

"Goodnight Sir."

Celeste spent the next few hours busying herself with the computer, logs and notes in her diary but she was constantly watching the weather gauges and listening to the wind outside. The max reading still sat at 97 and she was hoping the worst was over but more and more of the gusts were creeping up to that figure. She became fascinated by the correlation of wind velocity on the gauge with noise. In the 70 mph range, there had been mainly the thump of the initial gust on the north wall followed by wind noise and whistling around the door and shutters. At 80, a vibration and distinct, high-pitched moan started from the turbulence around the satellite dish on her roof. But at 90, everything, even the emergency siren, apparently turned on by security to warn of the storm, was drowned out by the roar of jet stream air and hurtling snow. She glanced at the clock: midnight. "*Maybe just a couple of hours more?*" It was more of a hopeful question than a trust in the forecast and Hank's window calculations.

Suddenly, the door slid open, frigid air started bursting in but a figure in a hooded parka blocked most of the gust with his body as the man held his gloved hands on both sides of the door.

It was Gundahl. He beckoned and gestured wildly to Celeste:

"MS. WASSERMAN. COME QUICK. COME WITH ME. PLEASE." He stopped to catch his breath and sobbed uncontrollably. Celeste could see frozen tears on his wind-scarred red face.

"COME INSIDE. WHAT'S WRONG? TELL ME WHAT HAPPENED!!" Celeste shouted over the wind as she tried to tug him inside.

"NO, NO. YOU BOSS. YOU MUST COME. THE BABY - VERY BAD. VERY BAD. DEVIL'S BABY. He was shaking visibly, not only from the cold but something traumatic.

For a few seconds Celeste couldn't comprehend Gundahl's poor English. She tried to calm him down and get him to explain.

"Gundahl, what's wrong with the baby?" she asked in as calm a voice as she could muster over the wind.

But Gundahl was inconsolable and grabbed Celeste's hand and implored again.

“DEVIL’S BABY,” he sobbed again. “MISS WASSERMAN, THEY ...THEY WILL MAKE BABY DIE.”

“DEVIL’S BABY? YOUR BABY? WHAT DO YOU MEAN, THEY WILL MAKE THE BABY DIE??” She had to shout to hear herself over the wind.

But Gundahl just continued the litany, sobbing with his gloved hands over his face. “OUR BABY. NO LEGS. FACE NOT RIGHT. IS DEVIL’S BABY. BABY MUST GO AWAY,” he cried.

OH MY GOD. THE NEWBORN IS DISFIGURED AND THE CZERNYS THINK IT IS THE DEVIL’S BABY AND THEY WILL KILL IT. The chilling thought screamed and raced through her brain. *INFANTCIDE. OH DEAR LORD.*

Celeste grabbed her parka and slipped it on. Another 90+ gust reminded her of what was waiting for her outside. She grabbed her safety goggles, slipped the parka hood over her construction hard hat and followed Gundahl out the door, grabbing the guide wire at the steps as the wind tried to knock them down and across the caldera’s slope. Celeste had been through 70mph “Chinooks” on campus and white-out blizzards on the ski slopes but this seemed exponentially worse.

The snow was coming across horizontally and she had to continually clear her goggles while holding securely to the guide wire. The snow was actually only a few inches deep on the gravel path but they both slipped and struggled, step by step against the wind for 15 minutes to the community center. She was a fit young woman in an Arctic-rated goose-down parka, but she was frozen and out of breath when Gundahl partially slid open the center’s big door.

What she saw inside was a scene like she had never seen before in her life.

All the fluorescent lights in the large dining hall except for those over the exits had been turned off, so that Celeste had to remove her goggles and adjust her eyes to the dim light. Tables and chairs had been shoved to the sides of the hall and a life-size wooden cross was erected instead in the center. Tall candles at the sides of the cross flickered, casting moving shadows on the body of an enameled, crucified Christ, arms hanging grimly from the beam. The scarlet paint depicting blood contrasted starkly against the white of the plaster skin, and in the flickering candle light seemed to almost ooze out from the nail-punctured palms and the crown of thorns. A gold chalice was placed on a white cloth-covered step beneath the cross. Even Judith would recognize that as...an altar.

For what? Perhaps Gundahl’s worst fear?

But it was the Czerny that focused Celeste's attention. There seemed to be only a few men in the hall and two of those came and put their arms around Gundahl and led him away into the dim background. The rest of the group, perhaps 50 or so, were all women crowded together at the altar. Older women with long black dresses that draped down to their ankles, black knit shawls over their shoulders and the black lace scarves on their heads, the "babushkas," that Celeste remembered Grandmamma had made for her mother to wear at funerals. Each Czerny woman held a small lit candle and with what to her looked like beaded necklaces strung through their fingers.

The women kneeled down in front of the altar and now Celeste could see what appeared to be a bearded priest standing at the altar in red and gold vestments although the embroidered cross covering the back of the cloak was a cross strange to her. Instead of a simple horizontal beam across the vertical one like the cross of Christians, there were two horizontal beams, one above the other, with a third smaller arm slanted near the base. Two other attendants, in similar red and gold robes, were at the priest's side.

The priest began to chant. It didn't sound quite like the Gregorian chants in her Father's CD collection and it wasn't in Latin, certainly not English. The women responded in a litany of female voices, chanting softly in beautiful harmony each time the priest paused. This liturgy continued for a few minutes while Celeste stared in awe at the ceremony wondering what it meant and more importantly, *what it might portend*. She took off her hard hat and laid it on the floor with the goggles.

A guard offered her a chair. Celeste nodded a "thank you" but instead of sitting, she stood up on the chair to better see the altar and maybe to shout orders if necessary at some point.

Then she saw IT. THE BABY. Or what could barely be described as a human baby. Even in the candlelight she could see that it was deformed. Badly deformed.

It was lying totally naked on a white silk pillow in a small wooden cradle that looked more like a baby coffin in front of the altar. Gundahl was right. Instead of two legs, it had two fleshy stumps ending at the knee joints. Its little arms protruded stiffly outward with fingers and thumbs melded into two claws. And the face.....there was a semblance of what would have been a lovely tiny face with a cute nose and open mouth. But one eye seemed to be covered with a flap of skin, a drooping, permanent eyelid. The other eye was open but not moving. The ear that she could see from her angle was just an orifice with a hint of ear lobes. The head was elongated and the baby's the skin was blue.

Celeste couldn't help but turn away from the baby in shock and gasped to herself: *It's, it's grotesque. I can see why some religious zealots might think this is not a human newborn but instead some kind of a creature created by the devil. But it's not. It's just an unfortunate, pitifully deformed human being. And this is not the Bronze Age.*

She looked over at Gundahl but he was kneeling, head down, fervently praying with his two friends. *Dear God, why did this have to happen to him? To his poor wife?* Which reminded her, *Where is Gundahl's wife? Where is the mother? Is she all right after what had to be an agonizing childbirth? And where the hell is the doctor? Why isn't this newborn in an incubator or something at the clinic?*

Celeste was about to get off the chair and try to reach the doctor again on the phone when she saw that the women had formed a line behind the attendants and the priest. The priest made a sign of the cross and the entire group began a slow procession around the altar to an eerie sound, a sound, so alien to her ears that it seemed to ricochet and echo back from the walls and ceiling above even the roar of the gale outside.

CLACK! CLACK! CLACK! CLACK! CLACK!

She could see that the two attendants had wooden implements in each hand. The handles were affixed to a flat piece of wood with a wood clapper swiveled in the center. As the attendant flung his arms and wrists back and forth the clapper struck the wood platform with a sharp crack. The whole scene, the strange procession weaving around the deformed infant in front of a Crucifixion scene with the chants, prayers and the incessant "Clack, clack, clack" of the wooden bells was chilling, unnerving and grating. All heightened by the continual dim wailing in the background of the emergency sirens.

Still, Celeste did nothing as yet. The Corporate rules were explicit. No interference whatsoever from company officials with Czerny personal lives or their cultural practices. And so far there was no overt threat to the baby's life other than seemingly being abandoned by the medical staff.

She stood there for perhaps half an hour, almost oblivious to the storm outside until the procession stopped and the group gathered again in front of the altar. Celeste got down and moved her observation chair as close as she could to the edge of the elders. The wind seemed to have calmed a bit and she could clearly hear the prayers of the priest and the singing responses of the women though she couldn't understand a word.

The priest reached for something in an attendant's cloaked hand. She watched as he made the sign of the cross once again and brought out what looked like a whisk brush, dipped it into a crystal bowl of water and then solemnly sprinkled the altar and the praying women. *A sacred blessing*, she guessed as the spray of water reached her. The priest clearly saw her exposed above the Czerny women and specifically gave Celeste a second "blessing."

Could this be an exorcism or was it a sacrifice? Every conceivable thought swirled through her shocked brain.

Whatever it was, the wind seemed to have completely died and now there was only silence in the hall. Then the priest turned and sprinkled the baby.

Suddenly, as the drops of water hit the newborn, she heard it - the baby's cry - only it wasn't crying like a normal baby. What came out was a ...she couldn't describe it at first and the sound sent a cold chill through Celeste's deepest maternal instincts. No, the cry that came from its malformed lips was more animal, something like a cat's meow, only louder and shriller. *The unearthly cry of the Devil's baby.* Even Celeste could sense everyone almost imperceptibly backing away from the Devil's voice mewling from the tiny lips.

For the rest of her life, she would never, ever, forget that unnatural, eerie cry.

But for now, she shook off her own doubts that the baby was even alive. *It's still breathing and so it deserves every chance at living, even, well, badly deformed. They could not, would not kill this human being.*

Once again, the priest reached for an implement from the attendant. It looked long, sharp and had a handle. *A knife?* She held her breath. *No, the light's deceiving. It's just another cross. Gold or silver gilt, about the same size as a small pruning knife,* she concluded. The priest carefully placed the gilded cross on the baby's navel, then poured a small amount of oil from a cruet into a small vial. He made the sign of the cross over the oil. She could see his lips praying as he dipped his finger in the oil. Turning, he put a drop of the blessed oil on the stumps, then its fingers and finally the baby's forehead. Its eye closed, it stopped crying. It seemed to Celeste that the baby had calmly fallen asleep. *Maybe it worked. Maybe the devil was gone, exorcised.*

But the storm wasn't going away. She was aware that the gusts were pounding away again, stronger and louder. Even this large structure was shaking and if she was going to carry this baby to the clinic, she was going to have to stop this ceremony now.

Celeste stepped down from the chair, picked up her hard hat, hoping that it would act as a symbol of her corporate authority. *Stupid maybe,* but she was determined to do something to at least get the baby away from these people.

At that moment, another wind sledge hammer rammed the building and the remaining lights went out. For a split second there was only candlelight casting moving shadows, but sensors immediately kicked in the battery-operated dual spotlights in each corner of the room.

She was about to step back up on the chair and shout something to interrupt the praying when a powerful hand dropped on her shoulder, rooting her into the plywood floor.

Albrecht!

He turned her around, not loosening his grip on her shoulder and stood in front of her like a menacing giant covered by a thick, heavy black fur coat and hat that blocked her view of the altar. A wind scarf covered his face and nose, leaving only his wind-blasted red eyes staring malevolently at her.

He pulled the scarf down from his lips and with his baritone voice, shouting at her in his broken English over the noise:

“YOU BOSS. YOU MUST LEAVE. NOW. I TAKE YOU TO YOUR OFFICE.” And with that command he turned her around, shoving her forward to the door.

Startled, Celeste began protesting, “I NEED TO STAY HERE. WE NEED TO TAKE THE BABY TO THE CLINIC. THE BABY IS SICK. IT IS NOT A DEVIL BABY.”

The chief’s response was a terse negative, “NO. YOU NOT STAY WITH BABY. MUST GO BACK.”

“IT IS NOT THE DEVIL’S BABY. THEY MUST NOT HARM IT!” she shouted but the chief of security, with a grip that almost lifted her up from the floor, kept forcibly moving her to the door.

Oh dear God. Of course he won’t listen, he’s a Czerny. He’s part of this, this Devil exorcism. He wants me out of here because he doesn’t want me to see - to see the horrible ending, she shouted silently to herself. Celeste was athletic, fit from spin bikes and hikes but she felt he was 50 times stronger than her and there was no viable alternative except to move with him as he slid open the door.

She was about to protest again but once they stepped into the hurricane force in the blackness, nothing mattered except survival.

Albrecht slipped her parka hood over her hair, and shouted as he slid the door closed behind him. “HOLD GUIDE WIRE TIGHT BOSS. I HOLD YOU TOO.”

It seemed that the horizontal snow had lightened so she could faintly make out the emergency light over her trailer door in the distance. That was their target, their goal. But the wind was definitely stronger than when she came over. She was guessing it had to be over a 100mph. She managed to grab the guide cable with her gloved left hand. Right now, she was glad that the chief had his iron grip on the back of her parka to keep her from being blown over and slammed onto the frozen ground.

They struggled together until they reached her office door. She slid the door open, expecting Albrecht to shove her inside and hold her at gunpoint while the ceremony went to its dire end.

Instead Albrecht simply shouted after her as she entered. “BOSS, STAY INSIDE. PLEASE. I COME BACK WHEN EVERYTHING IS O.K.” With that mandate, he slid the door closed.

Celeste stood for a moment in the glare of the emergency spotlights over the inside of the door, gathering her panicked thoughts about being a prisoner in the trailer. She began frantically dialing Hank when she noticed a piece of paper from the top of the copier floating in a little invisible vortex up toward the ceiling.

She looked up and realized there was a gaping hole where the cable inputs from the satellite communications dish had been. She could see snow flying past the gash. A gust must have ripped the dish from its bolts, yanking all the connections. Even the cable leading into the terminal box on the wall was gone. She glanced back at the anemometer. Maximum gust reading---133 mph.

Category IV hurricane on a mountain! No wonder the power had failed!

The phone was dead. The computer and its lifeline Net were cut off. The security guards had two-way radios but she didn't.

Damn! I can't call Hank. Can't find the doctor. I can't call or email anyone, she realized. I can't count on the Czerny for help. I'm it, I'm the sole outside authority here.

But first she had to plug the hole. Celeste realized the terrific wind shear across the roof was doing a “Bernoulli thing” and sucking warm air out of her trailer. She thought of trying good old duct tape but then remembered the quick repair to the hole in Dad's old cabin at Chautauqua.

She grabbed a towel from the shower, stood on a chair and forced the terry cloth into the hole. The rest of the towel unfolded and dangled down but her makeshift caulking held. *One small problem solved.* Then, just as she came down from the chair, the main electrical power came back on. *Two problems gone.* She looked at her watch...1 am.

As far as Celeste was concerned, if the storm finally moved on (as it was supposed to by now), there would be just one major emergency left...the deformed baby. She paced the trailer, still in her parka, as her emotions clashed inside her body.

Pull yourself together Judith Celeste Wasserman, she ordered herself. The baby is alive. That's for certain. No matter what the Corporation regs say about no interference, this is

different. Killing a baby, even a deformed baby, maybe a dying baby, I don't know - it's still a crime. A heinous crime. I have to convince them that it's not a devilish creature, an Antichrist. Exorcism...they shouldn't have started that without the doctor's o.k. Where the hell was the doctor anyway? Maybe tied up in the clinic by Albrecht? (Celeste was beginning to think that might be the case.) Or was she part of the hideous plan? She was a Czerny too. (That was Judith's suspicion.) Was the mom alive? (asked Celeste.) Yes! (responded Judith). Otherwise Gundahl would have said something wouldn't he? Shit! I should have asked him about his wife first but he was almost incoherent. But I heard him clearly, I heard him definitely say "They make baby die!" Will you swear to that in front of a jury in a criminal court if need be? (asked Judith). What if he was just overly distraught? Out of his mind with grief? What if that was the case? No, (rebutted Celeste) she clearly heard those words. If it hasn't happened, if the baby hasn't been killed, then I need to go back there to the community center, convince them, someone, anyone, that it isn't an Antichrist child out of Hollywood movies. (That's stupid, said Judith to Celeste). They have never seen Rosemary's baby. The Czerny's belief is very real to them, it's ingrained over hundreds, maybe even thousands of years and your silly management arm-waving logic isn't going to change their religious beliefs. (So sayeth Judith).

It doesn't matter. I think the right thing, the only thing, to do right now, if it isn't too late, is to go back and show them, - no - MAKE them understand that the infant needs immediate medical care back at the clinic.

Celeste was getting desperate.

If I go back into that center and face group of religious zealots, I damn well better be prepared to face the consequences. Right or wrong I will probably lose my job. Worse, I could get hurt. She could feel the bruise on her arm where Albrecht had gripped it as they struggled to the office. Very seriously hurt.

She pulled her office keys from her parka, unlocked and opened the drawer. She pulled out a small .32 caliber automatic pistol. Oh, she knew how to fire it. Hank had issued it to her in her first week at the site and they had gone over to the make-shift firing range to practice. She had total confidence in her skill with the weapon.

But Hank had warned her: *"If you ever aim this gun at anybody you had better be prepared to kill them."*

That was a sobering thought. And vice versa. If she went back there, into the community center, and waved a pistol around in the midst of old women praying, she knew Albrecht or any of the other guards in there would gun her down in an instant. That would be the ultimate useless sacrifice. Still, she checked the ammo clip, the safety, and slipped the gun into her parka pocket. If it came to deadly force, it would be better hidden there.

Celeste took a deep breath and sat quietly for about fifteen or twenty minutes and watched the wind velocity drop. Judith said a little biblical prayer her Grandmamma had taught her. It could be her last one. *This situation with the baby seemed so unreal, yet it was dangerously real.* She felt the pistol snug in its deep pocket and got up from her desk chair. The wind was dropping rapidly; the front was past the mountain. The wind hovered at a relatively mild 20 to 30 mph.

It was time to go.

At the door, she hesitated, paused and went back and typed in the laptop computer log: **“1:29 am. Went to Czerny community center to check on unauthorized ceremony.”** If she didn’t make it back there would be a notation that she had been on her watch.

Just as she clicked off her computer battery, the trailer door swung open.

Another figure in black stepped quickly into the office, slamming the door behind against its lock. Instinctively, Celeste jammed her hand into her pocket, clutching the hidden handle and trigger of the pistol. Another guard come to get her?

The figure flipped back its parka hood, took off the orange hard hat and peeled off the ski goggles revealing a woman’s black hair streaked with silver - Katarina!

“Jesus Christ! I thought I was going to get blown the hell off this goddamn mountain trying to get between the clinic, the center and Hank’s trailer,” exhaled the breathless physician.

Celeste was relieved to see her but needed a thousand answers and she let loose with her questions:

“Doctor, where have you been? I’ve been trying to reach you? The Baby...Gundahl’s baby...I went to the center...the...the devil’s mass...the mother wasn’t there...you weren’t there.”

The doctor put her hands on Celeste’s shoulder to reassure her. “It’s all right. It’s over. The wind has swept the baby’s soul to heaven” she declared.

“The wind ... The wind has swept the baby’s soul to heaven? What the hell does that mean? Heaven? The baby must be dead. What an odd thing for a physician to say. But then, she’s a Czerny too”, Celeste thought suspiciously as Katarina peeled off her parka revealing a black Czerny shawl draped around her neck and over the scrub jacket she still wore underneath. The scrub sleeves were blood-stained.

Celeste kept her right hand in her parka pocket and asked. “Heaven? You mean the infant is dead don’t you?”

Katarina plopped her exhausted body into the guest chair next to the desk. Celeste still stood at her computer and waited for the response that came quickly.

“Its heart mercifully stopped. I understand you went to the service, you saw how deformed the poor little thing came into this world?” she asked. Celeste nodded but waited for more information.

“Worst case I have ever had in 23 years of practice. I don’t know why it wasn’t a stillborn fetus.”

“It was premature. Shouldn’t you have put it in an incubator or something?” The question from Celeste came with a tinge of official inquiry but it didn’t faze the doctor.

“It really wouldn’t have helped. You saw it. The blue skin. Its tiny heart was not developed. Transposition of the main arteries. She pointed to her chest. Normally, you have a pulmonary artery coming out of the right ventricle carrying “impure” blood into from veins into the lungs for oxygenation. The Aorta comes out of the left ventricle and sends the purified blood to the rest of the body. This preemie had the two arteries transposed so it was sending low oxygen blood to the body, hence the blue appearance. Normally it wouldn’t have lived a few minutes after delivery. There must have been a hole in the atrium, the wall, allowing some mixing, some dilution to the oxygen depleted blood, that let it live those few hours. But the heart beat was wildly arrhythmic”...she sighed.

“Yes Celeste, I wanted to put it in the incubator.” Katarina continued, “Maybe it would have somehow miraculously lived a few more hours, a day to get it to Denver for surgery. But no, Gundahl’s father, an uneducated, superstitious man, a horse’s ass really, oh, he convinced, forced, Gundahl to overrule me, and take the baby towell, you know the rest. And I’ll put that in my medical report and shove it up Corporate’s Swiss ass if need be.”

Katarina was clearly angry and like all the Czerny men that Celeste worked with, she constantly used her hands as she spoke, gesturing both anger and helplessness.

“Gundahl’s father is a superstitious old fool but very powerful.” Katarina held up three fingers and rubbed them together indicating something slippery, slimy. “At home he is like,” she gestured for a word, “like a clan...mafia...leader, you know? But Hank doesn’t know that. He likes him. The clan gets things done,” she said throwing her hands up in futility.

That little bit of internal political knowledge made Celeste uncomfortable but she had to press the issue. She had to know.

“Gundahl. He came running here. I know he was distraught of course. But he said,” Celeste looked straight at Katarina, “he said they would make the baby die.”

“Infanticide? Huh. Maybe when the Romans were in Czerny. Maybe even a couple hundred years ago. Something that badly deformed. You know the history,” she sighed, waving a hand.

“But no, Miss Wasserman. There certainly was nothing like that. I came back to the center from Hank’s trailer when the power went out. Just missed you I guess. I checked the baby. It was still in atrial fibrillation when the praying was over. We couldn’t go back to the clinic until the storm calmed down of course. I had the stethoscope on it when the heart stopped. I will put heart failure on the death certificate and that is exactly how it happened,” she said emphatically.

“As for Gundahl..... I have no doubts poor Gundahl thought they were taking the baby to some ghastly sacrifice at the time. He was delirious. First baby and it’s horribly deformed. How worse can it get?”

“As you can imagine, Gundahl went into shock, real trauma, when he first caught a glimpse of the baby. I didn’t want it to happen. Then the grandmother went hysterical, and his father, eh, I told about his asshole father. They were all crying and screaming: “Devil’s baby, devil’s baby.” God! That was awful. I’m just glad Gundahl’s wife was anesthetized.

“So they had it... what....exorcised from the devil?” asked Celeste, thinking back on the ceremony in the center.

“Sort of. Baptism first, then last rites actually. The whole circle of life and death.” We’re Catholic as you learned at the class in Montreal. But it’s a very old Byzantine rite of the Catholic Church. It must have seemed strange to you,” explained the doctor as she reached into her parka and pulled out a liquor bottle while still talking. “I would have been at the whole liturgy and I believe in God, but I’m not the rosary bead type if you know what I mean,” she added, moving her fingers as if she were praying the rosary. “I went over to Hank’s trailer instead to try and get in touch with Children’s Hospital in Denver. I left my phone somewhere. Clinic probably. Sorry you couldn’t reach me. But you handled everything just fine apparently.”

“Glasses?” Katarina asked as she placed the bottle on the corner of the desk. “I need a drink. Worst night I’ve had in years. It probably wasn’t a pleasant night for you either,

what with having to handle a hell of a blizzard. You seem to be holding up well as boss while Hank's gone though."

Held up well? You can't imagine what the past few hours have been for me," Celeste cried to herself. She pulled out two wine glasses from the cabinet above the desk and handed them to the doc, then sat down at her desk chair.

"Thanks. I'm not so sure. Hank probably would have handled things better," Celeste offered.

"Hank? Hank's a guy's guy. Hell, no. He would have cowered in his trailer if he heard there was a deformed baby emergency and directed me to 'handle it,' Katrina gestured toward herself. "No, you came and saw for yourself."

"Yes, I can tell him it was alive when I was there. It cried. Rather, I can't call it a normal cry. It was so eerie. More like - I hate to say this - it was animal-like.... it really sounded like a cat's meow."

Katrina pulled the cork on the bottle.

"Oh yes. Exactly. **Cri du Chat.**"

"What?"

"Cree doo shat" repeated the doctor in fluent French translation. "**The Cry of the Cat.** It's a rare genetic disorder." The meow is a definitive characteristic of the syndrome." She held a hand to her throat. "The meow cry is due to abnormalities of the larynx," Katarina slipped into DocSpeak, "laryngeal hyperplasia. The Cri du Chat Syndrome is caused by a partial deletion of chromosome 5p and generally results in mental retardation throughout life among other problems. I've seen five others in Czerny. All died before they reached twenty. This was way worse than the typical case. Damn. Worst, hardest delivery in my life."

The doctor poured a green liquor filling two-thirds of the chardonnay glasses and held up the bottle's label for Celeste to read.

"Green Chartreuse liquor from France. Made by the Carthusian monks somewhere back in the 17th century from 132 herbs, flowers and plants to ward off the bubonic plague," explained Katarina. "The secret formula is supposedly known only to two monks."

Celeste took a good gulp. It tasted like cough medicine to her but she already felt the warm glow. "Stronger than wine, huh?"

“110 proof. I think that’s what, 55% alcohol?” replied the doctor. “I suppose if you drink the whole bottle you won’t care if you have the plague,” she chuckled.

Katarina suddenly switched the conversation.

“Wasserman. Isn’t that a Jewish name?”

Celeste stiffened slightly. “Yes” she answered, wondering what that might have to do with all this.

“And you’re from New York. Then you probably know about Tay-Sachs syndrome?”

Celeste was startled for just a second but realized quickly where the doc was going. “Yes. I know about the disease. My mother told me about it on about her 55th lecture on safe sex,” she said, trying to lighten up as she sat down at her desk chair. “It’s a genetic disorder too. Prevalent among Ashkenazim Jews. There’s no treatment. It’s terminal with children. There were some unfortunate nephews and nieces in my family. Something about some kind of fat accumulation in the brain isn’t it?”

What Celeste wasn’t saying, but what Judith knew, was that both her parents tested positive for the carrier gene after she was born. After that, they didn’t want to chance the 25% risk of having a Tay-Sachs baby. As a result there would be no siblings for Celeste. No adopted children. No younger brother to beat up, no sister to play with dolls and hand-me-down clothes. Even Grandmamma told her If, - no, - WHEN she married a nice Jewish boy, they must get tested.

Celeste went to a clinic when she was in college. Yes, she was a carrier. She might face the same dilemma, the same difficult decision, some day.

“That’s correct,” answered the doctor. “Lipids called gangliosides build up in the tissues and nerve cells in the brain. It is terminal. The children usually die by age 4. And it’s well-documented that with the huge immigration of Ashkenazi Jews to New York at the turn of the 20th century, they tended to marry within their religion. Later generations moved out of the city carrying the TS genes with them.” Katarina shifted herself in the chair, pulling her stethoscope out of one packet that was jabbing her in the side and switching it to another pocket and continued:

“I think the same thing will happen with the Czerny and the Cri du Chat Syndrome now that the young men and women are moving off to find work in Gay Paree and so on. The cause of this rare chromosomal deletion isn’t known, but we think that the majority of cases are due to spontaneous loss of a piece of chromosome 5 during development of an egg or sperm. However, a minority of cases result from one parent carrying a rearrangement of chromosome 5 called a translocation. I’m working with a geneticist at

the University of Denver to do some research on the old church records, family bibles, and the usual genealogy stuff. And then we'll do some DNA studies on selected Czerny families.”

“But there are tests for genetic diseases aren't there? I know there is one for Tay-Sachs. Is there one you could have done for Gundahl and his wife before they became pregnant?” asked Celeste, taking a smaller sip this time of the powerful Chartreuse.

“Oh yes, of course. And I knew when I first examined his pregnant wife when I got here there was a problem. I could have taken her to Children's in Denver, perhaps even done an amniocentesis for a prenatal diagnosis from the amniotic fluid. But no,” she waved her hand again in futility. “It wasn't about the Catholic anti-abortion issues at that point. No, if the mother's parents were here, they are educated, they would have been sensible at least about the test but it was...” “Let me guess,” interjected Celeste. “The mafia grandfather and Gundahl wouldn't allow it.”

The doctor nodded, then pulled her scarf off her shoulders and over her head and showed it to Celeste who could see now that it wasn't the typical Czerny babushka at all. Instead it was a closed loop woven of some exquisite yarn, maybe cashmere, she thought as she fingered an edge. Interwoven among the thread were random beads, shimmering in the office lamp like stars in a nebula.

“All Czerny women start knitting a scarf or a shawl when they are married. They add a bead at the death of a loved one or a relative. These two onyx beads right here,” she fingered the largest black gems in the scarf, “these are in memory of my parents”. But these wood ebony ones in a row here. They are for the three Cri du Chat children I delivered. Now there will be a fourth.”

Then she rotated the scarf to what Celeste gathered was a stunning, umpteen carat, sparkling cut diamond. “This was my engagement and wedding ring”. She paused. “A climbing accident. My piton held. His didn't. So I'm the Czerny widow here.”

Celeste could see her eyes blink more rapidly. *Jeez, that must be a traumatic memory. Watching your beloved fall away to his death*, she thought and was about to offer condolences when there was a loud knock on the door.

“That was 11 years ago,” Katarina jumped up, still talking and walked to the door. “I'll get the door. I think I know who it is.”

She slid open the door and Albrecht stepped inside. Celeste stood up and put her hand in the parka again, but Katarina ran into his arms, bursting into tears. “Albrecht, Albrecht, it will be alright” and then began sobbing, crying and talking in Czerny. Celeste could see that the chief of security also had tears in his eyes. After a few tender moments together,

Katarina pulled back and held the chief's hand for several long minutes while she discussed something with him but Celeste caught the French words "Cri du Chat" several times so she guessed it was another explanation.

Katarina reached into her pockets, couldn't find something, and looked around the trailer. Celeste picked up a box of tissues from the desk and handed it to her.

"Thank you. Albrecht is the mother's uncle," she explained, turning to talk directly to Celeste. "He would have been the Godfather." "But he understands. He's smart and wise. The men, all the Czerny will listen to him."

"He also wants me to thank you for coming to the services. The family appreciates that. It was a very nice gesture on your part Ms. Wasserman," she added.

Thank me? They think I came to pay my respects? Celeste didn't know what to say but saw that Albrecht had wiped his face on his sleeves, composed himself in front of his boss and became chief of security again.

"Boss. I checked. Everybody o.k. Tell Hank, equipment, buildings o.k." Pointing to the hole in the roof he noted "Except your antenna rip off. Fly into generator shed." He slammed his giant fist into his palm to emphasize the damage that Celeste could easily visualize. *Twenty or thirty pounds of aluminum smashing into the shed at a 130 mph, yeah, that could make a dent.*

"The one at Hank's trailer is on the ground as well," interrupted the physician.

"Electrician temporary fix. But you, Boss, must be at headquarters in emergency. Is company security rule. Maybe I hold – push - boss too hard. I never be in wind like that. So sorry Miss Wasserman," he said apologetically.

He's right. That is the rule. This is the weather emergency center. Hank told me that. And I thought Albrecht was forcing me away from a ritual murder when he was just enforcing the emergency rule when the power failed. She took off her parka, felt the guilt weighing down the right pocket as she sheepishly hung it up on the coat rack. And I could have been pointing a gun at this man.

"Thank you Albrecht. No, you did fine. I wouldn't have made it back here without your help. I will make a note of that in the record."

"Other generator o.k. Electrician fix tonight," he told her. Then he pointed to the program chart on her cork board. It was the official schedule for the summer operations.

“Tomorrow we supposed to start putting explosives in rock. Hank not here. You boss. O.K. with that?”

Celeste was pleased with the question. She looked at the chart and made a decision. “The weather is supposed to be clear and sunny tomorrow and it’s supposed to warm, well above freezing. Check to see that there is no ice before anyone climbs anything. Safety first. Understand?”

Albrecht nodded in the affirmative. “Good. Men are ready to go home soon. Thank you.”

Then he spoke in Czerny to the doctor who subsequently turned and translated.

“The chief would like you to give Gundahl lots of work over the next few days. He thinks he needs to get his mind off the grief and away from his asshole father,” smirked the doctor.

“You’ll have to teach me the Czerny word for asshole,” Celeste said with a chuckle. But Albrecht must have heard, must have known that bit of slang in English, and pointed to the ceiling.

“Somar.”

“Somar” repeated Katarina. “Donkey. You have a donkey here?” as both looked up at what the chief was pointing at.

Celeste realized it was part of the stuffed towel dangling down to reveal an embroidered blue donkey kicking its heels on the alumni souvenir.

“Oh that. Tell him it’s the mascot at my university. It’s a miner’s mule, a pack burro actually.”

“Yes” said the chief with the first smile Celeste had ever seen on his face. “My father work with pack mules...in the War. Stubborn. Like mine wife.”

That really lightened up everyone. Celeste thought for a minute about the request for Gundahl and then picked up a thick, three-inch binder and handed it to Albrecht.

“Albrecht. You tell Gundahl I need a complete inventory of all capital equipment on the site done before we pack up the site. Everything on the list.” *If there was a clan, a mafia of some kind here, no matter how small, there could be some other things going on as well. Some of the smallest pieces of equipment, diamond drills, were worth a lot of money and some could easily be hidden and stolen.*

“Good idea boss,” said the chief as he grabbed the thick book. “I have my best guard help Gundahl too.” He slid open the trailer door and exited.

That’s an even better idea, thought Celeste. The chief knows. He is thinking the same as me. The guard would keep an eye on the accuracy of the inventory. She knew she could learn a lot by getting outside and talking with chief Albrecht, some of the other Czerny, and especially this doctor.

Katarina sat down and poured them both another glass of chartreuse. It was indeed warding off all the dire effects of plagues and devil babies.

“Katarina, your scarf, it isn’t like the other Czerny women’s scarves and shawls. It’s very beautiful.”

“Oh it’s quite unique,” replied the doctor with pride. “It’s a Mobius scarf. My husband was a mathematician. You’re an engineer. You must know what a Mobius is.”

Celeste had years of being quizzed. “Yeah. I remember we made one in high school math class from a strip of paper. Half twist and then you join the ends together or something. And we computer modeled the equations in college. It only has one side,” she said as her finger traced around the beautiful scarf and came back to the same point. “Cool. Very cool.”

“You’re not married are you?” asked Katarina.

“No. Not even dating right now. New career. Way too busy for men,” replied the Chief Site Environmental Officer.

“Ah. Not all the beads on my Mobius represent dead people. My little reminders of pleasant things have to be there to keep my sanity,” she noted, fingering more beads around the scarf.

“This ruby bead is for a lover in Montreal. Corporate VP. Has a villa in Bermuda,” she confessed and continued walking through her love life. “The emerald, he’s in Geneva. And here, the blue topaz - ah, a Spaniard in Barcelona. Very romantic man. The best in bed. Takes his time if you know what I mean.” The conversation was sliding into 110 proof girl talk and they were enjoying it. “French, here, two bits of quartz. All myth about Frenchmen. Egos. They think it’s all about them.”

“And what about American men? Where are they on your Mobius list Katarina?” chuckled Celeste.

“The best. I married him,” replied Katarina draining her glass. “I don’t think I’ll ever find another like him.”

“Do you ski?” she asked Celeste as she reached for her parka.

“Snowboard” corrected Celeste.

“Of course. You are the young generation.” Katarina chuckled as she flung up a hand in acknowledgement. “Listen, I have a condo at Grenoble in France. Not too far from Czerny. You must come and visit me. My friends have sons and daughters your age. The Christmas parties at the Olympic hotels and restaurants are wonderful, go on all night.”

Celeste was sure that Katarina probably had a party animal streak in her. “Yes, I would very much like to come and visit you. Let’s plan it out before you leave.”

“Great. We’ll think up some reason for the Corporation to pay for your trip,” said the doc with a smile. “And there are, shall we say, ‘clothing optional’ hot springs near my place. Delightful, heavenly, I mean REALLY heavenly massages there. You could show off that cute tiny tattoo of yours,” she said, laughing. Celeste looked a bit surprised at that little comment, but the physician pointed a finger at her saying “I did your company physical....remember? Don’t worry. It’s just a body characteristic noted in your private medical record. *Yes, that’s right, along with my dental record in case they ever have to identify my body after an accident.* That was the part Celeste remembered.

That thought brought her back to the dead infant.

“Katarina, will you need some help from me, some forms, approvals or something to ship the body back to France? There isn’t much that Hank or I could probably do to console the family but at least I can be of some administrative help.”

“France? Czerny? Oh no. Never happen. The grandfather. The shame, dishonor to his clan.” The doc made what Celeste recognized as an obscene European gesture, flexing her arm up and holding it at the elbow with the other. “Somar.”

“No, I think the priest and I can handle everything for the funeral,” she continued as she thrust her arms into her parka. “I’ll go down the county courthouse, file a death certificate. If they want me to bring the body, and they may, Father Cyrill and I will do that. I doubt a small town coroner or undertaker will have a clue about Cri du chat. Doesn’t matter. I hope the family opts for cremation but if not, I’m certain we’ll find a Catholic cemetery down in the San Luis valley.”

“Oh speaking of the San Luis Valley, which reminds me,” she interrupted herself, pointing to the calendar on Celeste’s wall. “On Friday I’m supposed to have lunch with my colleague, the geneticist I was telling you about. I don’t want to push the Semitic

thing, understand, but she recently did a fascinating paper tracing a number of Hispanic Catholic families through DNA analysis to, get this, -Spanish Jewish origins. A single mutation that could be traced through from the San Luis valley families to their grandparents and great grandparents in New Mexico and then Mexico and back to the time when the Inquisition forced many Jews to convert. Some eventually fled to the New World. Oh the media had a great time with that story. 'The Secret Jews of San Luis Valley'. A Catholic priest down in Albuquerque traced his ancestry to Jewish origins. The Inquisition apparently kept very good records.

You should come with me and meet my friend at DU on Friday," cajoled the Doctor.

"I'd love to, it would be very interesting actually. Maybe she could update me on the latest on Tay-Sachs, but Hank will have me wrapping things up here," she offered as an excuse.

"Oh don't worry about the Super" insisted Katarina. "I'll tell Hank he owes you big time for holding down the fort in a blizzard while he was humping some 'sweet thang' in a Jacuzzi in Denver. And I'm certain Albrecht will give a good security report on your leadership when Hank asks."

"Get some sleep. I'm your doctor. You need some rest and you won't need a sleeping pill after the chartreuse." Katarina chortled as she got up from the chair, stretched her arms and zipped up her parka. "I better get back to the clinic, check on the mother again."

Celeste stood up to say goodbye and thank the doctor while she thought to herself:
Digging back in the records of the Inquisition in the Vatican archives. Unraveling the mystery of the secret Jews. Oh, her father would have loved to be involved in a project like that. He certainly could read Latin if not DNA. The Secret Jews up here in Colorado. That would have been right up his historical mystery alley.

Her mind was slowing down to a drowsy alcoholic pace, but then it occurred to her:
The cemetery. The headstone. Anna. Common Spanish name. Common English name. Ann. St. Anne the Christian. Hannah in Hebrew. Hannah, the Jewish Mother of Mary. Mother of Jesus - could little Anna, the poor miner's infant, could she have been one of them, one of the secret Jews? And the prayer was Kyrie Eleison, Lord have mercy, - not Christie Eleison, - Christ have mercy. Did that mean something? A hidden Jewish prayer? Stop. Now I'm thinking like my father. One thing though...

"Wait!" Celeste called as the physician had her hand on the door handle. "You said you would look for a Catholic cemetery? There's one here. Right here on the mountain." Celeste pointed in the direction of the ghost town. "There's an old, abandoned cemetery named 'Santa Maria'. The town was an old Spanish gold mine settlement I think. There are Spanish names on the headstones and one has a prayer in Latin."

Katarina stopped and looked at Celeste while she pondered the idea. “St. Mary’s cemetery. Nearby?” “Yeah,” replied Celeste. “About a 15-minute hike up an old road.”

The doctor paused and then spoke quietly as she opened the door into the cold dark night. “Yes, that would be perfect. I’ll tell Father Cyril. Thank you, Celeste. Yes, perfect indeed.”

Celeste felt as if every drop of adrenaline, every microliter of energy had drained out of her tired body. She pulled off her boots, shuffled a few steps to her bed and flopped face down on it with her clothes still on. She could barely pull a blanket over her back and tuck a pillow into a comfortable spot.

Little Anna will have a companion on the mountain soon. It’s been an unreal night. Did it all really happen the way the doctor said or did they...?? But she couldn’t think anymore, and her exhausted brain shut down.

All I know is that I.... I did hear the baby cry.....

Copyright F.J. Fraikor 2009

Frederick J. Fraikor, PhD
Director, CAMI and Research Prof. (retired)
Volunteer, Mines Geology Museum
Colorado School of Mines
Golden, CO, 80401
ffraikor@mines.edu
Phone 303-273-3606
Cell phone : 303-349- 9620

Home address:
837 Meadow Run
Golden, CO, 80403
Home Phone: 303-277-1246