



CONDO CITY

dauid zane

*“People have never lived in Cities like this, they’ve never been jammed into boxes in the sky like this before. This is the future Ben, the white-picket fence with a yard is gone - gone! This is where families are going to be raised... and we’re going to build them.
We’re going to build these Condo Cities everywhere.”*

*Herman T. Chang
One of the wealthiest men on the planet that
nobody knows anything about.*

*St. Moritz - September 15, 2008
The same day Lehman Brothers files for Chapter 11
Bankruptcy Protection.*

***Two Years Later ***

Remember Benjamin, God never gives with both hands.

Fixed on her design... on her incredibly-alluring design... delectable... and very delicious for sure... just like *that* I get so frail for her bright-white-t-and-black-jeans-combo.

Skin tight the both of them.

And those eyes.

Turning around to aim them right at me.

Those killer, killer, eyes.

Trapped inside those heavy-lidded blues in what feels like mere seconds.

Usually I'm type-a-ocd focused on business and business only.

I know that look.

Except Leila can do special things.

Jesus now??

And special things have been following me around lately.

Guess so!!

Like a brick to the head this Siren's silent scream of "*I want you right this very second*" collides hard; always does whether I like it or not! The second Leila locks-onto my dilated pupils - *carnal desires exploding the main fuselage fast... by the second fast* - she knows exactly what I'm thinking. Absolutely she most certainly does - because the only thing filling my head this very instant is the fact that this entire plane can smell primal ecstasy leeching our pores.

And it's coming out in buckets!

Wisely we both stand... and quickly depart my very nosey, yet very pre-occupied staff. No joke, we've got to get out of here *now*, I feel urgently below the waist with every intended step.

Leading her... and making damn sure - *click* - to bolt the door the second we're in.

Turning to lock lips... *those soft cushiony lips*... pawing her as if a starter's pistol just went off...

that silky-smooth skin... just need to blow off a little steam is all... *tongue down her throat*... a

little steam before having to start the most important day of my life. Tearing off her top...

gorging on her neck... on her amazing chest with scrumptious abandon while backing her to

horizontal. Her skin smells... my god her skin smells just like a Sunday drive deep into cottage

country... *both of us moaning*... could care less about the damn blouse... *flinging it*.

I'll buy her another ten when we land!

I ride Chang's *PLEX jet*, what Herman and Teddy now refer to it, at least once a week. Query any MBA student on the planet on the notion of having such a luxurious means of transport at their beck and call, and then... well... simply stand back and wait for the blinding glee. One doesn't

need to be American to be tethered to such materialism - although it sure as hell helps! For there is not a more cherished by-product of *Stars and Stripes* dogma in this, or any other lifetime let me tell you; a nation of affluence-seekers that definitely understands the fine art of unleashing human creativity to create profit - then spread it around.

The fury that fuels it... day after day.

The utter relentlessness of it... 3-6-5.

Some eras it's legit, others not so much - but it's always chasing *BIG*. Think Jobs, Gates, Ellison, Buffett, or even media-shy microchip-king Grove, and then stop... just stop. The World needs our can-do-moxie - end of discussion.

Now that we're finally on the massive tempurpedic, my touchy-feely-hands waste little time beginning their own excited tour down each leg. Pulling hard on the first thigh-high boot.

BANG. Moving to the other, tossing it. *BANG*. Blindly as well.

Neither one of us flinches.

Yanking at her skin-tight pants as blood now courses my veins... my overheated hard-charging veins... leaves one frilly black thong resting in my hand in pieces.

The Joy of being Naked with Leila; she can have ten of those too!

Stopped in my tracks... truly and completely... her nakedness fills my eyes and then some. Can only stop and stand and just stare... and, *while remaining happily glued*, suddenly I feel my skin get the urge to shed every article of clothing like I'm a bucking Bronco.

No, it's definitely not only my skin; jumping in ready to rock her world.

Sliding into that familiar smoothness... her erect nipples rub my bare chest as I do. Instinctively I pull back... *freeze*... then grin happily because us men are so incurably visual. More than satisfied with what I see... *infinitely more*... I cup her perfect breasts like I own them.

Then slowly... very slowly... start downwards to a magnificent ass blessed by God... *squeezing*... any God. "You're my King! You're my King!", she repeats into the plane's only private abode that's become unmistakably rife with combustibility.

Emboldened, I begin to initiate quivers of arousal when those same appreciated hands stroke her feminine glory. "You're my King Ben!", she screams as if we're the only ones on this steel bird of luxury.

Savouring every second caressing her *zones*, like a raging bull released from its' cage... forget the damn Bronco... there isn't another woman alive who sets me off like this.

Leila's moans grow.

No man with a beating heart and functioning libido could hold-off this level of perfection.

Grow into an unstoppable tune of very determined moans.

An 11 on any man's scale... I head down to insert my mouth between her supple thighs as if preparing for a perfectly-ripe peach in July. "It's your turn babe", I state confidently in

preparation to a gorging. The room has gotten warm. Her eyes close easily I see.

No, the room has gotten *very* warm. A hand starts to weave the top of my head with consent.

“I’m all yours Ben”, hits the air in the most inviting tone from those first few licks.

Since the *big change...* slash that... I mean *the big raise...* I’m now ruthlessly gluttonous... in and out of the bedroom. It’s like a new chemical’s been injected into my nervous system...

squirming like she can’t hold-off one second longer... and it’s definitely not for kids. “I need you inside me *NOW! PLEASE, NOW!*”, Leila cries.

Seeing her body sear, she reaches down, way down, and puts my rock in her tight grip. Knowing exactly what she wants, she opens, and places me inside.

Sliding into her soaked cage, all of a sudden her moans go different. Her breathing pauses... then quickens rapidly.

Kegel-like thrusts next as we slip into a rhythmic dance... her tongue slides to touch mine in the melee. Iron and dripping with sweat, she then clamps onto my lip. Her ferocity nearly draws blood. All that feminine strength... *moaning...* all that university-educated wit... *louder...* melts into one... *and louder...* irrepressible passion to receive me. Transporting my sweet-peach to a place of intoxicating excitement... *pumping hard...* the turbulence in here is way-worse than anything out there... *sweating...* a good orgasm is such a stress-buster... *dripping with sweat...* I wouldn’t know my name if I was asked??

“*MY GOD MY GOD!*”, Leila barks before levering-up to rest me below. Showing incredible desire and flexibility, as if her life depended on it... my satin-skinned nymphet saddles up for another famous ride; damn our naked tangos are always so physically demanding!

Work.

Travel.

Incredible sex.

Then work some more.

God Bless Ameri... geez everyone knows the rest of that one.

Celebrating rivers of money, and too many flashy new toys to count, like the Gods of Capitalism vociferously repeat that I must... *brushing my thumbs over her rock-hard nipples...* I’ve aptly blocked out this Faustian bargain of quid pro quo with Chang. Life today is as good as can be lived for being young rich & always horny! From out of nowhere Leila leans in and, staring deeply into my eyes, suctions both palms onto either side of my head. A starving animal looking only to devour, her lips quickly do the same. Amazed at the time she spends on my mouth, on the magic she finds so fascinating there, “*mmm*”, this Geisha knows exactly what to do to ignite Ben Prince’s wick of dark delights. Our faces drenched... *panting uncontrollably...* every man craves a woman who can lose control like this... *quickly moving back on top...* that much I know... *triceps bulging immediately.*

"MORE BEN MORE", released from its' pen my inner beast only wants to feed, *"FUCK ME HARDER BEN... HARDER."*

Flesh meeting flesh.

The outside world doesn't exist.

"OH YA LIKE THAT... JUST LIKE THAT!"

Money doesn't exist.

"MY GOD."

Pleasure and pain must be filling this plane.

"IT'S SO CLOSE", Leila announces at 30,000 feet, *"IT'S SO DAMN CLOSE."*

Our eyes are lasers.

"We're almost there", I fire back while pounding.

The sheer joy that intoxicates us every time we're naked... every time she *means* it.

"HARDER BEN HARDER", she *means* it all right.

Feeling that glorious mountaintop approach, *"OH GOD"*, this Gulfstream's rarefied air is doing what it does best, *"OH GOD OH GOD OH GOD"*, providing unparalleled bliss to our... *"WHOO"*, to our loud... *"WHOO"*, to our divinely loud exultations in full-on stereo.

And I mean *FULL-ON THX DOLBY*.

The heavens must have awakened... because Leila's multiple releases are definitely not the silent type. Absolutely not.

Falling back into a dead-man's pose after squeezing out every last bit... every final drop.

Except for pounding hearts and plenty of panting... it's total stillness for the two of us.

After reaching the pinnacle of sexual extravagance, we can only clasp pinkies.

"Sex is at the core of being human", Professor Lipton said to a packed room of giggling first year psychology students. Freud would be proud.

Thirty years on this planet... and this is my most majestic sex ever. Or so I thought.

The crew of Rick Bernier, Seth Riggs, and Martine Mohns have become like family.

"Listen up PLEX", the intercom reverberates with the sound of Captain Bernier's voice.

My eyes open reluctantly.

Miss Martine feeds me so well up here that I've already gained 10 pounds.

"Wake up PLEX."

Very reluctantly... where am I?

Rick and Seth go on about the uninhabited islands of the South Pacific they want to expose me to. *"Heaven on Earth"*, they keep emphasizing.

Cool guys.

“We’ll be starting our descent in forty minutes”, is Rick’s grating interruption to my short, but very blissful slumber.

Groggy.

Trying to sit up.

Putting my head in my hands once I do.

I take more than a few minutes on the end of the bed for the psychedelic colors to clear??

I’m absolutely not aware of anything just yet??

Slowly... very slowly... very measured and slowly... I start to muster the balance to stand.

When my balance is to be trusted, which does take some time I must admit; I head, very zombie-like, towards the three-piece en-suite and the resuscitating powers of a hot shower.

Right left right - each step a reminder - *left right left* - that today is set to be one extremely big day in the life of Ben Prince.

Taking one last look back... one final delicious stare back at her cuddled-up so innocently; I can’t not smile. Extending a revered Eastern Custom going back centuries, delectable Leila was blessed to me by Herman after bearing witness to her virginal beauty on my first, and most unforgettable visit to the Mandarin.

Eating.

Laughing.

Dancing.

Talking until the sun came up... her razor sharp wit more than I’d ever expected from such humble beginnings.

Grinning while reaching to close the door.

Did I ever enjoy those first few nights out on the town - *click* - thank god for Leila’s substance, because only beautiful never keeps me interested for long. Turning on the water... and making damn sure it’s hot before I step in. Leila’s a tireless Asian flower whose infectious beams and kind words can lure anybody... *this feels so good...* anybody. Herman’s been very generous with me and then some, placing millions into rock-solid mortgages throughout a roaring New York, quadrupling our revenues; my fortuitous union with Herman these past 24 months has, for the first time in my business life, enabled me to press down hard on the *greed accelerator*.

Synonymous with savvy, stealth, cutting-edge - PLEX is now an exploding real estate brand, with me as its’ top Sage. Fuckin’ crazy if you asked me... but I’d only admit as much to my lifelong muse Papa Joe.

Today’s profile, in fact, is so damn haughty... that clients can’t stop rushing to my door, while agents, both young and old, can’t stop tripping over themselves in their clamour to join.

Seeking PLEX’s advice only, those same clients refuse to sign any *Purchase and Sale Agreement* without our say-so... even if it means losing a deal!

Real trip this new world - mind-blowing actually, since I'm still the same kid from the lower east side with the early morning paper-route, and family of raging dysfunction whose relatives are teachers, civil servants, and homemakers; hardly fitting elucidators on the merits of unfettered capitalism. Together with Brian I became consumed with the goal of soaring above these maddening limitations... these genetic barriers. Lighting that spark of raging ambition - deep down I know it was my big brother Brian who made me who I am today. Although with new influences like Herman Chang and Teddy Artest now firmly in my corner... he's definitely not the only one. Hell no.

Legitimate enabler of those lucid dreams of grandeur; without exaggeration Herman T. Chang's proving to be an integral piece of those raging goals. Remove his largesse from my arsenal, and I'd probably still be hawking expensive condos to this city's endless collection of *nip and tucked Madame Bovary archetypes* - complete with distracted husband in tow.

\$200,000 may be nothing to sneeze at, except when 100 or so exhausting hours per week, and an increasing lack of reciprocating respect is added in. Compare that to the \$700,000 that's already filled my pockets this first year alone, as this partnership swings open doors to mortgage lending and building development on a striking scale - to say nothing about the direct pipeline to a renewable client list of the most mysteriously wealthy that I seem to be meeting every night. Never would I ever... never in a million years would I ever have imagined seeing so much *burning-a-hole-in-pocket-type-of-money*... and this is prime New York for god's sake! Mandarin, Russian, Arabic and Farsi seemingly at every turn; there isn't a week that goes by where priceless connections aren't initiated for one merrily-obliging *Yours Truly*. Can taste all that english-as-a-second-language-privilege in my spit... and is certainly why PLEX's corridors now burst with those same accents Herman politely *recommends* I hire.

"Pleased to meet you."

Been amazed at how easy it's been to morph.

"Of course we can do that", a fast response with painted-on smile.

Saying *yes* to everything; guess the smell of *real money* will do that.

And like sugar; and I do mean *everything*.

You just can't stop because you crave it so damn much.

"Let's put in an offer at 14 million."

"Ben, I need you to show me this one."

"Ben, I need you to find me something this week."

Now Chang's not blood of course, unless some audacious relative fleeing a disintegrating Poland or Russia made a dreadfully wrong turn somewhere along the way.

"Ben, I want you to meet some very close business Associates."

Yet with the Prince brand front and centre in this new arrangement, and as Papa Joe used to

say... *"One can never get back a name that's been lost."* I see my role with open eyes, that's for sure. "Gentlemen, I will not stop until I get you what you want."
I know exactly what I've become.

"Listen John I don't give a rat's-ass what your boss says."

Purchasing underperforming brokerage firms in Boston, Miami, Chicago, Philadelphia and Atlanta... then immediately branding them PLEX as I set out to crank up the marketing; outgrowing its' limitations so fast, astonished by it in fact, New York's become a smaller and smaller piece of the overall strategy.

"I need 400 hours of media time today!"

Testing late-night ads in these new markets amongst every focus-group imaginable has ignited massive promise, leading me to conclude that with the right bait our target audience will respond to our luring enticements in droves.

"If you can't do that for me, then I'll find someone who can!"

Making real money's nothing but a rush... *ka-ching ka-ching...* like having wild ecstasy sex three times before sunrise with a high-up bank exec who looks great in heels, really great, but hasn't seen the light of day outside her corner office in a very long time.

"You hear me John... now call me back when you get it done!", letting out a testosterone-filled roar after putting down the phone.

NEVER BE TURNED DOWN - CALL US 24 HOURS A DAY!

A simple enough tag line meant for fishing in bleary-eyed slugs at 3a.m. with chocolate sauce dripping down their chest; I can't express how stoked I am for this medium to get our expansion plans into overdrive! Turn on any business report... *BUY BUY BUY* is all I'm hearing. Hundreds of millions my numbers say, *dialing up another media buyer.*

"Ya Eli, I need 400 hours."

A rush like I've never felt.

"Are you finished Eli?... good because we're not even close on the price I need to pay."

God Bless Capitalism - Red White & Blue Style.

Amidst all the chaos, Andy's been assigned the new General Manager's position in Beantown, while Alex monitors the salsa down in South Beach. Positive he's doing considerably more work after-dark with Florida's scantily-clad inhabitants; Lord knows I would. Both are there until the local guys get sufficiently trained, until then all paperwork flows through Shannon's desk here at PLEX central in Manhattan. Her keen neurotic eye left to focus on authoring the appropriate

protocols for efficiency. "Chill out Ben, technology will see to all the curbs", she reminds a frenetic me daily.

As PLEX's original members are being asked to share, train, expand their workloads big time... for a massive bump in pay of course - only an aggressive form of profit-sharing keeps this greedy bunch motivated.

And me on edge trying to corral it all.

There isn't a day, not one thank god, where I don't acknowledge *The Almighty* for having this deep roster of indigenous PLEX talent to manoeuvre this crazy labyrinth; best case scenario - I figure the new managers are on-stream within a couple of months. And when a step back from the cacophony is taken, which is getting rarer and rarer, I see a PLEX that's becoming a den of rousing eagerness for the green... for the status purchases... for those in-your-face Rapper purchases... with me as its' head cheerleader! *Crazy*. Teddy wrote me that first cheque for \$50 million to get it all started... from an account in Toronto. *Real Crazy*.

First things first now that I'm finally out of the shower and standing upright. Choosing a powder blue top under some very dignified navy Armani pinstripes... carefully I prepare the finishing touches to a perfect Windsor in the full-length.

"Come on babe... we're landing soon", slapping her taut ass hard enough to remind her there's a world waiting for us once we land.

Groaning while half-covered and motionless, her sleepy-eyes attempting to unlock under a wild jet-black mane... blessed with an insatiable libido, a flexible body, and one very open-mind. *Staring down with a smile*.

I understand her dithering well, was there only twenty minutes ago. "Come on, we're landing soon", another playful slap. Leila's return to the world is barely a crawl. Wedged into a delectable package that plays classical piano, sculpts, reads philosophy, and speaks six languages... Leila's an old-soul clinging to the vaporizing tradition of providing unconditional support to everyone around her.

"Come on beautiful." "Grrr."

Drawn-in during our exciting genesis by her radiant beauty, this rare bird can party like a man, and make sweet sweat-filled biblical love like a woman.

"We're landing soon."

She groans again... but does begin the journey back to the living.

Try finding such mesmerizing talent at any martini bar in shallow Manhattan... or on E-fuckin'-Harmony!

"That's it, you're almost there... just a few more steps."

Whether they choose to admit it publically or not, “only a few more”, she’s every man’s Holy Grail, “just two more.” A Grail of unquenchable delights... “You did it”, kissing her. Then immediately closing - *click* - the bathroom door behind her to be sure she’s getting ready. I’m a lucky guy.

Exiting into the main cabin a new man, one that’s definitely more ready for whatever those unpredictable Santa-Anna’s might blow back. During the first part of this flight, before my pangs for Asian sustenance rudely took over, my team was being compulsively prepped by their leader - *taking a seat amongst them* - now I’m just hearing everyone sound like they have a handle on their specific jobs after I seal the deal on a real estate and mortgage broker network that, thanks to their junkie of a CEO, remain hugely underachieving enterprises.

“Trust me on this one... it just needs better management is all.”

For the life of me how did Teddy ever find such a hidden gem?

A dawn departure from chilly LaGuardia enables us to arrive at John Wayne International before noon, fed, rested, and in my case... down a few quarts of antagonism.

Fifth largest economy on the planet, California’s nothing short of a beast of opportunity... can smell the money here... and with millions more predicted to settle over the next twenty years, the trajectory for home ownership - *A.K.A. DEBT* - is only going to go up and up. That’s why being able to purchase this infrastructure somewhat intact, then, almost-overnight, setting out to expand its’ retail reach; well this is nothing short of one massive coup for the Ben Prince brand let me tell you.

Sitting quietly amongst my Posse.

Once all monies eventually do change hands.

Expressionless as I listen.

This’ll become one long trip of orchestrated celebrations to be sure.

First things first though - *a thought pops in my head* - we’ll need to act fast expanding our in-house roster of Appraisers and Home Inspectors, hermetically sealing us for the projected acceleration to follow.

Why Appraisers and Inspectors?

Because not one god-damn domino can move forward in this business without an Appraiser’s mother-fuckin’ signature!

Crazy I know.

Giving a \$75,000-a-year night-school grad permission for the rest of us to do our jobs??

More like un-fucking-believable!

Unfortunately it’s true... infuriates me just thinking about it - it’s why having everything in-

house is the only way to go. All the big brokerages are heading in that direction.

The race is on and it's worth a bundle!

Mortgage volumes doubling every few quarters.

Prices in some neighbourhoods seeing an eye-popping 25% annual jump.

Today's seminal event carries superb timing because the hard assets of real estate have never been hotter. OK'ing every check no matter the zeroes; Herman hasn't blinked once.

"Sienna can you please tell Kevin or Simon to call me back ASAP on the plane's number."

Expose me to any level of human incompetence... and it's harder to reign in the smallest levels of frustration.

"All I'm asking for is a measly \$20 million be wired into our Orange County account by noon!

Jesus fucking Christ it won't do me any good after 5!", screaming rhetorically at the heavens.

With giant rewards dangling like Christmas lights; it's hardly a surprise I'm more volatile.

Turning to my assistant, "Still not in yet?"

"Nope", a sheepish Amanda responds from behind her laptop.

"You'd think any high-priced Attorney would understand what *by noon* means! And why does the money always have to come from mother-fuckin' Toronto anyways?!", churlishly filling up the fuselage for those contemptuous partners of mine, "fuck fuck fuck the Rotenberg's know full-well I'm going to have those greasy hands in front of me in a few hours looking for a bank draft!"

Swooped up in the clutches of capitalism as early as I can remember, that booming message repeated over and over that I, Benjamin Franklin Prince, privileged offspring of this great nation, deserve as much. "You are the greatness of America... as America goes so goes the rest of the world." Fervent tenets for every kid attending the finest academies this country has to offer; get a taste of making a few bucks and it all comes to the fore let me tell you. And I mean without even realizing it.

"The World depends on American ingenuity", a recurring theme meant to repel any type of balanced satiety or moral introspection; heaven forbid the volume's ever turned down on that one... would wreak havoc on those bombastic tones of *American Exceptionalism*.

"Always remember you're the best!"

Meant to convince me and my peers that it's our god-given birthright to demand it all - from middle school to Columbia's acclaimed MBA program - "The World Needs Your Ambition."

And Capitalism needs the churn... but no one understands any of that when you're in it.

No Sir.

Any hopes of succumbing to some altruistic balance soon becomes as pitch-black dark as a night's drive thru the star-less prairie fields of *Chevy-Truck USA*.

After all money is how us Americans keep score.

“That Lebanese punk better not be difficult”, loosening my lips a little too much, “mother-fucker’s getting ten times what his business is worth... snorting his business up his nose... I swear I’m going to fire anybody sharing a blood type with that greedy bastard!”, blithering inconsolably. “Just go and make your little movies would ya!!”

Lacking a decent night’s sleep in over 36 hours has my emotions teetering... the combination of endless paperwork and trance-dancing with Leila until dawn on our favourite little pink pills has me firmly in its clutches. *Butterflies* they call this batch. Crazy all these names. Awash in pills Manhattan is, and so amazingly pure these ones, keeps us intermittently surging for a good two, maybe three days. And with my iron horn, especially at this altitude, neither one of us can get enough. I can’t stop grimacing... “Fucking Asshole”, even though I know all this venting has me looking like some third-world Tyrant.

“Come on Ben, you’re smarter than this”, Leila’s ravishing jet-black hair, now slicked-back and tied in a tail, has her looking marvellously edible in her un-tucked fitted white shirt, sprayed-on jeans, and ebony boots. “Remember the best way to catch a butterfly is not to try so hard.” Lending another quote for my benefit from the ancient texts of pragmatic Taoism; if the woman didn’t want the best for me, I’d rip her head off too!

“Here you go”, Martine brings me a glass of freshly-squeezed orange juice. Everybody preparing for our soon-to-be-landing... *ring ring*... the plane’s phone finally goes off.

Thankfully more relaxed to engage this lazy good-for-nothing, after all he is Herman & Teddy’s money man in Toronto... and now mine too - something I should probably be reminding myself. Kevin’s timing is spot-on.

“Good morning Kevin, how’s it going?”

My tone reeks of sycophantic politeness at this point.

“Good Ben... very good.”

Lacking any benefit to being confrontational, “Listen Kevin, I just wanted to remind you to wire the \$20 million into the O.C. account as soon as possible.”

Far too passionless for my liking; it’s as if nothing’s ever immediate with this guy.

“I’m going to need it the minute I land.”

Since day one these Rotenberg’s have been on thin ice with me - Preppies wouldn’t last one minute in my handshake universe which doesn’t give a rat’s ass how many diplomas you have hanging on your wall! “You better not short-change me one god-damn nickel getting this expansion up and running”, I can’t stop thinking the entire time I’m espousing bullshit pleasantries.

Confused as to why my golden-goose chooses to park his money up in Canada anyways??

What the hell’s wrong with New York... not big enough vaults??

“Enough Ben”, I sternly remind, “move on or that million-dollar-nest-egg you’ve been dreaming about since grade school is going to slip through your sticky fingers.”

After Kevin’s repeated assurances the money will be there within the hour; I’m left to gaze out at the hypnotic puffs Seth and Rick are flying us through. Reclining close to horizontal, providing some well-deserved rest to my overly-anxious body, eyes, and definite mouth... “Standard firsts, high-ratios, front-loaded ARM’s, re-fi’s... plus those super-easy to process credit lines”, my mind scrolls in and out of consciousness. “Our Consultants are telling us there’s hundreds of millions to be mined here in the Southwest. And thanks to Gramm-Leach-Bliley’s obliteration of that bloody prehistoric Glass-Steagall Act, there’s plenty of other players from every corner of the globe chomping at-the-bit to lend to the almighty American Consumer”, lectures Teddy. “Providing the market with over a million units annually dwarfs the 600,000 unit average from 1990-1995 mate, bloody builder’s are selling them as fast as they can put ‘em up. Add in a Fed funds rate buckling at around 2.5%, creating a 50 year trough in rates, my word it’s impossible not to feel the invisible nudge that’s manipulating anyone with a pulse to buy... shit to leverage everything just to obtain a piece of history’s proven red white and blue asset!”, continuing to dream. “Blowing-up home-equity markets from \$100 billion to over \$600 billion in just seven short years has made America the bloody wild west Mate! Who in their right mind is going to challenge the poetry of the almighty Greenspan? That revered maestro in the \$200 suit who plucked the world economy from that flaming tailspin ignited by Bin Laden’s nauseating brain. Who Ben?”

Armed with Herman’s considerable cache of currency as greed wafts over every American city; everyone has ear to ear smiles as we charge into 2005.

“Our sales are rising 12% this quarter Ben.”

“Jesus Ben prices are up 6% this quarter.”

Visualizing my first task upon touchdown... I’ll need to get that idiot and his brother out of the way so the markets of San Francisco, Phoenix, and Vegas can be next on the PLEX hit list.

Bump Bump Bump... rubber meeting earth... *Bump Bump Bump...* quickly jolts me back to the present.

Groggy as I open my eyes... the plane bounces a few times, softly of course thanks to those wizards in the cockpit.

Immediately the plane’s engines reverse-thrust.

Everyone starts clapping.

“Welcome to Los Angeles PLEX”, Rick announces, settling us down before taxiing to our proposed gate.

Shutting laptops... packing them in their neoprene protectors... everybody stands and prepares their portable Heys for an overnight party meant specifically for converting 1,000 budding disciples into our own brand of Keynesian Capitalism.

Preferring to stay seated... I keep looking out the window at my future.

Private jets, and familiar one's at that, are hardly under the same onerous thumb of Homeland Security the way commercial flights are... and since Seth and Rick are familiar with many of the country's security personnel, sometimes we're able to hit the runway and be in a waiting limo in less than 20 minutes flat.

SWOOSH... Martine unlocks the cabin door.

Releasing a rush of desert air that hits us all... poles apart from the early autumn nip of a New York left behind.

The rolling stairs await us.

A twinge of nervousness shoots through my body as I stand to grab my stuff.

In one orderly procession we all hit the disembarking apparatus to terra firma.

Fanning out like Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* in their stylish black & white montage... IVY League degrees notwithstanding of course... this group's swagger is bearing north-west into La-La Land's beating heart to do some real damage! Breathing in agreeably warm air... there won't be a pulp-fiction-like pile of bodies when we're done here though, just a business doubling as a PLEX printing press.

"Did you call the Convention Center to confirm the schedule?"

"On top of it", Amanda replies with the confidence I need to hear while removing her jacket.

"And Christina's ready to go?", aiming my words at a sun-kissed Tanya in her oversized Gucci's.

"She's going to make her grand entrance at around 11... after dinner and speeches", Miss Andruzzi coolly confirms without breaking stride. Typical as she saunters with such mastery on those stilettos, her swaying hips, sleeveless blouse, barely-skirt, and lethal cleavage enhancing the fearsome package. Tanya's proven herself and then some, her ancestral links to Christina Aguilera more than serendipitous, providing PLEX a *break* at just \$50,000 for the night.

"Perfect", I respond with confidence, an utmost confidence I've had to perfect these last 24 exhausting months.

Wish I could say the same about pretty-boy Brady's fee.

Forget the damn costs Ben, this is going to be the most talked-about party of the year, I remind harshly, which in the end will be priceless for assimilating PLEX into the community. After all that's what the \$20 million in my back pocket is for... walking with my team like rock-stars... *right foot, left foot*... through the airport. Each coalescing step an intense *fuck-them-all* into this very un-Manhattan-like weather. Nico Nafisi and Miles Lobredo, decked-out in their custom-

fitted ensembles, round out my convoy's impressive collage; if looks could conquer we'd be Alexander's fuckin' Greek Juggernaut!

Halfway to the waiting stretch my handheld begins to vibrate, reaching to unclip it in order to see who has the title of being the asshole with the bad timing.

WATCH YOUR BACK THEY'RE SNIFFING AROUND YOUR WORLD!!

Like everything else that comes across my desk while in the presence of others, I make damn sure to hold back any revealing expression for the sake of my soldiers.

Glancing again at the tiny screen; and from a blocked number no less??

Have died twice in my life, once when Brian left me, the other when Mom followed.

Clenching the inner turmoil.

So disguising fear is hardly foreign.

Forcing a carefree grin.

As we all enter the limo, my stomach continues twisting and turning.

Who the fuck is *THEY*?

And do they know who my Benefactor is?

And that I'm on a first-name basis with Governors, Senators, Mayors... and too many International Billionaires to count?

"Remember Benjamin, God never gives with both hands."

Regrettably, the gift of Papa Joe's wisdom seems to have betrayed me while obsessively - and rapidly I must add for the record - I have ascended the most rapacious bull-run of nihilistic greed the world has seen since the Roaring Twenties!

Judge me not though - here me out first. I promise... no better yet I'll bet every last penny of my now overflowing treasure-chest of tax-free millions that anybody would be behaving the exact same way.

Closing the door behind me.

I never realized how much could happen in just twenty-four months.

Pulling away.

This is the story of that betrayal.