



# THE GAMBLER

david zane

# **The Gambler**

*“A real Gambler just wants a chance, just one chance to make it big.  
It’s in their blood and there is nothing more to say about that.”*

“Ok everyone it looks like nothing but clear skies up ahead.”

Not one second after Captain Bernier’s optimistic tone flees those little tiny speakers I realize it’s merely a flash – and if my eyes could make any sound right after that mere flash they would be whistling something catchy to get them aimed right back at me. But instead they’re just left fixed and silent, but happy for any of it while appreciating her bright white-t and black-denim eyeful. *Skin tight the both of them.*

And those eyes.

*Turning around quickly and aiming.*

Those killer killer eyes.

*Trapped inside those big baby blues.*

Usually I’m type-a focused on business and business only on these trips.

*I know that look well.*

Except Leila can do special things.

*Jesus now??*

And special things have been following me around lately.

*I guess so!!*

This brunette’s laser stare of “I want you right this very second” collides hard – it always does whether I like it or not! The second Leila locks onto my dilated pupils she knows exactly what I’m thinking. I’m frozen... I can’t move even one muscle. The only thing filling my head is the fact that this entire plane can smell primal ecstasy leeching out of our pores, and it’s coming out in buckets! Which is why we both need to move fast! So I lift myself up first... determined most definitely... and depart my very nosey yet very pre-occupied staff... boy can I ever feel that *no joke just keep moving or else* surging throughout my body. As I lead her away... *thank the lord...* I make damn sure - *click* - to bolt the door the second we’re in. Then I turn and attack... always at those soft cushiony lips... and always with a raging fire to paw her as if a starter’s pistol just went off. That silky-smooth skin - “*Ah*” - has my heart pounding. I just need to blow off a little steam is all... *enjoying my tongue and her mouth...* a little steam before having to start the most important day of my life. Her top also needs to go... *tearing it off...* then gorging on her neck while guiding her to the bed. Her skin smells like a deep dive into something amazing... *flinging it...* I could care less about that damn blouse. I’ll buy her another ten when we land!

*Welcome to hour number two of my super-important New York to Los Angeles business trip.*

I ride the *Plex Jet*, what Herman and Teddy now refer to it, at least once a week - it is an all-out dream and then some! Query any MBA student anywhere 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! A nation of Affluence-Seekers that understands the fine art of unleashing human creativity to create profit... and 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 this type of can-do moxie. End of discussion!

Now that we've finally made it to the massive tempurpedic, my touchy-feely-hands waste little time with their own excited tour down each leg... pulling hard on the first thigh-high boot. *BANG*. Moving to the other. *BANG*. Tossing it blindly as well.

Neither one of us flinches.

Yanking at her skin-tight pants... leaves one frilly black thong resting in my hand in pieces; the joy of getting naked with Leila. She can have ten of those too!

Stopped in my tracks because her milky white glow is filling-up my universe... I can only stand and stare at her perfect body... as my blood starts to boil!

Without warning I now own the urge to shed every article of clothing like I'm a bucking Bronco... Leila's eyes stare back while I do just that like I am the most bucking Bronco Madman... like it's our first time... like it's our kinkiest time... like it needs to be some kind of world record! Jumping in ready to rock her world... there is always some deep-breathing when our bodies lock; how can there not be? There is also, thank the lord, some erect nipples rubbing-up against my bare chest. How I love that smoothness, "ahhh", that incredible silky smoothness, "ohhh", that incredible silky satiny smoothness.

After a juicy kiss that says I'm happy to be here without any holding-back, I instinctively freeze, and 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 behind blessed by God... *squeezing*... any God.

"You're my King! You're my King!", Leila repeats into the plane's only private abode that's now 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!", screaming 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... there isn't another woman alive who sets me off like this!

*Leila's moans start to grow.*

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

*Leila's moans start to really grow into some very determined sounds of unstoppable lust.*

A ten 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", focusing on a gorging.

The room has gotten warm. Her eyes close easily I can see. The room has gotten very warm.

A hand starts to weave the top of my head with consent. "I'm all yours", 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.

All of a sudden her moans go different.

Her breathing pauses... and then quickens rapidly.

This lasts for a good while... as it usually does.

It's our preparation... our ritual.

Kegel-clenching is next on the list... with some very real thrusting... which puts us into our dance. Iron and dripping with sweat, she 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... *dripping with sweat*... a good release is such a stress-buster... I wouldn't know my name if I was asked?? "MY GOD MY GOD!", Leila yells before levering-up to be on top. 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 loudly repeat I must... *brushing my thumbs over her rock-hard nipples*. I've aptly blocked out this Faustian bargain of quid pro quo with Herman; 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, suction 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 long wick of dark delights. Our faces completely drenched... *panting uncontrollably*... every man absolutely craves a woman who can lose control like this... *quickly moving back on top*... that much I know... *triceps tightening*. "MORE BEN MORE." Released from its' pen my inner beast only wants to feed. "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-up this plane!

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

Our eyes fixed like lasers. "We're almost there", firing back while I pound. The sheer joy that intoxicates us every time we're naked... every time we're unleashed together. "HARDER BEN HARDER." 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... to our very loud... to our divinely loud screams in full stereo... and I mean full-on THX Dolby! "OH GOD OH GOD OH GOD." The heavens must have awakened, because Leila's multiple releases are definitely not the silent type. Absolutely not!

Once the shaking stops Leila falls back. Except for pounding hearts and plenty of panting it is 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.

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“Wake up Plex”, the intercom reverberates with the sound of Captain Bernier’s voice. The crew of Rick Bernier, Seth Riggs, and Martine Mohns have become like family. “Now listen up Plex.” Trying to open his eyes to his Captain’s stern request. Miss Martine feeds him so well up here that he has already gained ten pounds. “Where am I?” And Rick and Seth go on about the uninhabited islands of the South Pacific they want to expose their Boss to. “Heaven on Earth”, they keep emphasizing. Cool guys.

“We’ll be starting our descent in forty minutes”, is Rick’s grating interruption to Mr. Plex’s short, but very blissful slumber. Groggy, and trying to sit up. This depleted CEO needs to put his head in his hands once he does. And he also needs to take more than a few minutes on the end of the bed so the psychedelic colors can clear. “Jesus what the hell just happened?”

Slowly... really slowly... and extremely carefully, Ben ambitiously starts to muster the balance to stand. “Nobody would ever believe how much that woman takes out of me!”, attempting to try. When his balance is to be trusted, which does take some time... Ben heads, very zombie-like, towards the three-piece ensuite 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 Mr. Benjamin Franklin Prince. Taking one last look back, one final delicious stare back at her cuddled-up frame... he just can’t not smile. Extending a revered eastern custom going back centuries, delicious Leila was blessed by Herman after bearing witness to her virginal beauty on his first, and most unforgettable visit to The Mandarin. Eating, laughing, dancing, talking until the sun came up... her razor-sharp wit more than he’d ever expected from such humble beginnings.

*Grinning while reaching to close the door.*

Did Ben ever enjoy those first few nights out on the town.

*Click.*

Leila’s deep substance was such a wonderful surprise, because only beautiful never keeps him interested for long. *Turning on the water... and making damn sure it’s hot before stepping in.* Leila’s a tireless flower whose infectious beams and kind words can lure anybody. *This feels so good.* Anybody.

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Placing millions into rock-solid mortgages throughout a roaring New York that has quadrupled Plex’s revenues; Herman’s been very generous and then some these past twenty-four months. Synonymous with savvy, stealth, cutting-edge - Plex is now an exploding Real Estate Brand with Mr. Ben Prince as its’ top Sage; damn crazy if you asked him, but he’d only admit as much to his lifelong muse Papa Joe. Today’s Profile is so friggin’ haughty in fact... that Clients can’t stop rushing to his 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 Ben’s say-so... even if it means losing a deal!

Real trip this new world - mind-blowing actually, since Ben is 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. Yet together with Brian, Ben became obsessed with the goal of soaring above these maddening limitations... these genetic walls. Lighting that spark of raging ambition; deep down Ben knows it was his big brother Brian who made him who he is today. Although with new influences like Mr. Herman Chang and Mr. Teddy Artest now firmly in his corner... he's definitely not the only one.

Hell no, that just wouldn't be fair.

Legitimate Enabler of those lucid dreams of grandeur; without exaggeration Mr. Herman T. Chang is proving to be an integral piece of those raging goals. In fact, remove his largesse from Ben's arsenal and he'd probably still be hawking expensive Condos to this City's endless collection of nip and tuck Madame Bovary Archetypes - complete with distracted husband in tow. \$200,000 may be nothing to sneeze at, except when a hundred or so exhausting hours per week and an increasing lack of respect is added in. Compare that to the \$700,000 that's already filled Ben's pockets this first year alone, as this Partnership swings-open new 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 Plex's charming CEO seems to be meeting each and every night. Never would he ever... never in a million years would this fitted-suit CEO 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. Ben can taste all that english-as-a-second-language-privilege in his spit... and is certainly why Plex's corridors now burst with those same accents Herman politely *recommends* he hires.

"Pleased to meet you."

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

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

Saying yes to everything; guess the smell of real money will do that. And like sugar; and he does mean everything. You just can't stop because you crave it so damn much.

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

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

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

Now Herman'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 center in this new arrangement, and as Papa Joe used to say... *"One can never get back a name that's been lost."*

Ben sees his new role with open eyes, that's for sure.

"Gentlemen, I will not stop until I get you what you want."

He knows exactly what he's become... and he's gambling for more.



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“Listen John I don’t give a rat’s-ass what your boss says!”

Purchasing underperforming brokerage firms in Miami, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago and Atlanta... then immediately branding them Plex while cranking 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 four hundred hours of media time!”

Testing late-night ads in these new markets amongst every focus-group imaginable has ignited massive promise, leading this exceedingly-photogenic CEO to conclude that with the right bait Plex’s target audience will have no choice but to respond to these 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*... it’s 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 an extremely long time.

“You hear me John, call me back when you get it done!”

*Letting out a testosterone-filled roar after putting the phone down.*

**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; the seated man with the forceful tone is stoked for this medium to get all these expansion plans into overdrive! Turn on any business report... *BUY BUY BUY* is all he’s hearing.

*Dialing up another media buyer.*

Hundreds of millions the numbers say.

“Ya Eli, I need 400 hours.”

A rush like he’s never felt.

“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 Consumers*... “Lord knows I would”, Ben thinks after each phone call. Both of them are there until the local guys get sufficiently trained; until then all the paperwork must flow through Shannon’s desk here at Plex central in Manhattan. Her very keen and very neurotic eye left to focus on authoring the appropriate protocols for efficiency.

“Chill out Ben, technology will see to all the curbs”, she reminds one frenetic CEO daily.

As Plex’s original members are being asked to share, train, and 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 their leader on edge trying to corral it all. There isn’t a day, not one thank god, where Mr. Plex doesn’t acknowledge The Great Almighty for having this deep roster of original talent to manoeuvre this crazy labyrinth; best case scenario - he figures the new Managers will be on-stream within a couple of months. And when Ben can take a step back from this amazing pace, which is getting harder and harder, he sees a Plex that’s become a den of rabid eagerness for the green... for those status purchases... for those in-your-face Rapper purchases, with him as its’ head Cheerleader! *Crazy*. Teddy wrote that first cheque for fifty million to get it all started... from an account in Toronto. *Real Crazy*.

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First things first now that he's finally out of the shower and standing upright, moving towards his small but well-stocked closet... one very invigorated CEO chooses a powder blue top under some dignified navy Armani pinstripes.

Before the jacket goes on... this excited leader starts to carefully 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 once they land. Groaning while half-covered and motionless... her sleepy-eyes attempting to unlock under a wild jet-black mane. Staring down at her with a big smile... Ben Prince understands her dithering, he was there only twenty minutes ago. "Come on we're landing soon", with another playful slap.

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." Leila's return to the world, "Grrr", is barely a crawl. Drawn-in during their 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."

Groaning again... but finally beginning her journey back to the living.

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

"That's it you're up."

Whether they choose to admit it publicly or not.

"You're almost there."

She's every man's Holy Grail.

"Just a few more steps."

A Grail of unquenchable delights.

"You did it", reaching in for a kiss.

Ben then immediately steps back after they're done... and closes - *click* - the bathroom door behind her to be sure she's getting ready. He knows he is one lucky guy.

Exiting into the main cabin a new man, one that's definitely more than ready for whatever those unpredictable Santa-Anna's might blow back. During the first part of this flight, before his pangs for primal sustenance rudely took over, this Plex Team was being compulsively prepped by their Leader.

*Taking a seat amongst them.*

Now their Leader is just sitting and listening humbly... listening to everyone sound like they have a handle on their specific jobs... after he goes in and seals the deal on a Real Estate and Mortgage Broker Network that, thanks to their Junkie of a CEO, remains a hugely underachieving Enterprise. "Trust me on this one, it just needs better management is all." How did Teddy ever find such a hidden gem, is what Ben can't stop silently asking?

A dawn departure from chilly LaGuardia has enabled his Plex Team to arrive at John Wayne International before noon, fed, rested, and in their leader's case... down a few quarts of antagonism. Fifth largest economy on the Planet, California's nothing short of a beast of opportunity for making lots of money fast. You can smell it here, it may be mixed-in with the dry desert air, but it's here... the money is 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. 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.

*Sitting quietly amongst his Posse.*

And once all the money does eventually change hands.

*Expressionless while listening.*

This'll become one extremely wild trip of hedonistic rewards to be sure.

*A thought pops in his head.*

He'll need to first act fast expanding their in-house roster of Appraisers and Home Inspectors, hermetically sealing them for the projected acceleration to follow.

Now why Appraisers and Inspectors?

Because not one god-damn domino can move forward in this business without an Appraiser's signature! Crazy, this CEO deeply understands - giving a \$75,000-a-year night school Grad permission for the rest of the industry to do their jobs; more like un-friggin' believable!

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 have seen an eye-popping 25% annual jump. Today's strategy for expansion 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 even once.

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

Any level of human incompetence and it's impossible to reign in the smallest levels of frustration. "All I'm asking for is a measly twenty million be wired into our Orange County account by noon! Jesus Christ it won't do me any good after five!", rhetorically at the heavens.

With giant rewards dangling like Christmas lights, it's hardly a surprise that the face of the Prince brand is so volatile. "Still not in yet?" aimed at his Assistant.

"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?!", filling up the fuselage for those contemptuous Partners. "The Rotenberg's know full-well I'm going to have those greasy hands in front of me in a few hours looking only for a bank draft!"

Swooped up in the clutches of Capitalism as early as he 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 demands 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 deter any balanced satiety or moral introspection. Heaven forbid the volume is ever turned down on that one... it would wreak havoc on those bombastic tones of *American Exceptionalism*. "Always remember you're the best!" Meant to convince Ben and his Peers that it's their 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 that when you're knee-deep in it.

No Sir!

Any hope of succumbing to some altruistic balance soon becomes as pitch-black dark as a Manhattan blackout in stifling summer.

After all money is how us Americans keep score.

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“That Lebanese Punk better not be difficult”, loosening his 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! Just go and make your little movies would ya!!” Lacking a decent night’s sleep in over thirty-six hours has someone’s emotions teetering, the combination of endless paperwork and trance-dancing with Leila until dawn on their favourite little pink pills has him beyond ornery. *Butterflies* they call this batch, crazy all these names. Awash in pills Manhattan is, and so amazingly pure these ones that they keep these two intermittently surging for a good two, maybe three days; and with his iron appetite at this altitude, neither one of them can seem to get enough. A fixed grimace that won’t stop... “Fucking Idiot”, even though he knows that all this venting has him 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 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 his benefit from the ancient texts of pragmatic Taoism; if the woman didn’t want his best he’d rip her head off too!

“Here you go”, Martine brings a glass of freshly-squeezed orange juice to her Boss.

Everybody preparing for some airplane shut-eye; 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.

“Good morning Kevin, how’s it going?”, providing a tone of backslapping politeness that lacks any benefit to being confrontational.

“Good Ben, very good.” Kevin’s timing is spot-on.

“Listen Kevin, I just wanted to remind you to wire the twenty 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 Rotenbergs have been on thin ice with my goals - these 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”, sternly reminding, “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 that the money will be there within the hour; I am left to gaze out at the hypnotic puffs Seth and Rick are flying us all 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", scrolling 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", Teddy lectures. "Providing the market with over a million units annually dwarfs the 600,000 unit average from 1990 to 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 fifty 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 Maestro in the two-hundred-dollar suit who plucked us all 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 charging into 2005.

"Our sales are rising 12% this quarter Ben."

"Jesus Ben prices are up 6% this quarter."

Visualizing the first task upon touchdown... Ben will 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 Ben back to the present.*

Groggy while opening his 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 the plane down before taxiing to the 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 a thousand budding Disciples into Plex's brand of Keynesian Capitalism.

Preferring to stay seated... and keep looking out the window at his future. Private jets, and familiar ones 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 they're able to hit the runway and have the Plex Team in a waiting limo in less than twenty minutes flat.

Martine unlocks the cabin door, releasing a rush of desert air that hits everyone... that is poles apart from the early autumn nip of a New York left behind.

The rolling stairs await.

A twinge of nervousness shoots through Ben's body as he stands to grab his stuff.

In one orderly procession Plex hits 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 the agreeably warm air... there won't be a pulp-fiction-like pile of bodies when they'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 Ben needs to hear while removing her jacket.

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

"She's going to make her grand entrance at around eleven... 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", her Boss responds with confidence, an utmost confidence he's had to perfect these last twenty-four exhausting months. Wish he 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, reminding harshly, which in the end will be priceless for assimilating Plex into the community; after all that's what the twenty million in his back pocket is for.

Walking with his team like Rock-Stars... *right foot, left foot...* each synchronized step an intense strut into this very un-Manhattan like weather... *left foot, right foot*. Nico Nafisi and Miles Lobredo, decked-out in their custom-fitted ensembles, round out Plex's impressive convoy. If looks could conquer they'd be Alexander's 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 fool 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 simply make 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??

I have died twice in my life, once when my older brother Brian left me, the other when my Mom followed.

*Clenching the inner turmoil.*

So disguising fear is hardly foreign.

*Forcing a carefree grin into the invigorating zephyr.*

As Plex enters the limo my stomach keeps twisting and turning.

Who the hell 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 his grandson while he obsessively - and rapidly one should add for the record - he ascends the most rapacious bull-run of nihilistic greed the World has seen since the Roaring Twenties!

Judge him not though - hear everything out first.

Mr. Ben Prince the CEO promises, cross his heart... no better yet he will bet every last penny of his now overflowing treasure chest of tax-free millions that anybody would be behaving in the exact same way.

*Taking one last look into the invigorating zephyr.*

Nobody could ever imagine how much can happen in only twenty-four months.

*Then closing the limo door behind him.*

This is the story of one heck of a Gambler.