

Mike's Fiction©



Pigs Get Fed©

Phillip Hawley III had one of those weekends when every store clerk he encountered felt obligated to prove his incompetence. At Home Depot no-one could be bothered to help find light bulbs to fit his Tiffany table lamp, a check-out girl at Albertson's, who looked like a poster child for HIV screening, rang up his truffles four times, and the guy at the wine store didn't know Sonoma from Tacoma. Now, on Monday morning, his Farsi speaking taxi driver couldn't comprehend directions and he was an hour late for a nine o'clock appointment. Fortunately, as he strode into the third floor conference room of the SEC's Central Region headquarters in Denver, he remembered the axiom that the best defense is a good offense.

"Good, you're early," he said to the man seated at the table. "It's Daniel Shayne, isn't it?"

Looking confused, Danny checked his watch. "Uh—yes sir. Most people call me Danny. And you must be Mr. Hawley, the lawyer,." He stuck out his hand.

Hawley took in Shayne's cheap slacks and limp sports coat before he shook Danny's hand and sat down. It struck him that Shayne was a perfect compliment to the room's scuffed, barren gray walls and scarred oak veneer table. Hawley was tired of the Salvation Army décor employed in government offices. He wanted out of Denver too. The town was an endless strip mall, devoid of culture. Chicago's sophistication was more to his liking.

Hawley cleared his throat. "Let's get down to business, Mr. Shayne. How long were you employed by Well-Pro Corporation?"

"Five years."

"And Well-Pro is a public company headquartered in Houston?"

Shayne nodded. "They're in the oil services business with about \$3.5 billion in revenue."

“Are you still employed by them?”

Danny blinked. “This past year I was promoted to Assistant Controller. Then I was fired.” Shifting in his chair, he added, “Look, I’ve already answered these questions in Houston. I don’t see the purpose—”

“I’m a staff attorney with the Enforcement Division of the Securities and Exchange Commission, Mr. Shayne. The *purpose* of my inquiries is to determine whether you’re telling the truth about what went on at Well-Pro, or if you’re a disgruntled ex-employee looking for retribution.” He slammed a fist on the table. “For all I know, maybe you just want to see your picture on the cover of *Forbes!*.”

Danny, angered by the theatrics, said, “Disgruntled? More like upset. Damn upset. Because I can’t provide for my family, because I haven’t been able to land a job that pays over \$9 an hour. But what I told your investigator is the God’s honest truth.” His face reddened and his voice grew louder. “Those people are cooking the books. I told Drummond about it, but he stonewalled me. The next thing I know, I’m out of there.”

Hawley smiled at the man’s spunk. He scribbled a note to get Shayne new clothes if things progressed to a hearing. “Drummond—he’s Well-Pro’s Chief Financial Officer?”

“That’s correct.”

“Tell me then, how were they cooking the books, as you put it?”

“One of my duties was to analyze operating margins. After the second quarter last year, I couldn’t figure out why the gross margin percent—that’s profit after cost of sales—”

“I have a CPA as well as a law degree, Mr. Shayne. I know what a gross margin is.”

Danny nodded. “I couldn’t figure out why it was up when sales were down. So I started to look for reasons. And I found a journal entry. A big one.”

Hawley disguised his growing interest with a deadpan voice. “And?”

“It reclassified \$15 million of expenses out of Cost of Sales into Administrative Expenses, so it improved the gross margin.” Danny leaned toward Hawley. “By almost two percent of sales.”

Hawley knew that was a big deal, because investors focused on operating margins while they all but dismissed administrative expenses as just overhead. “Do you know if any of the security analysts questioned the margin?”

“Yes. In the conference call after the second quarter, John Varney from Morgan Stanley asked why the gross margin percentage held up so well, given soft sales.”

“And who answered?”

“Drummond. He said Well-Pro is always looking for cost efficiencies, that they found ways to save labor.”

“Did the CEO—what’s his name?—corroborate the savings?”

“Pearson Bradley. He was there, but didn’t comment.”

Hawley flipped pages in the case file. He had brought it home over the weekend, but barely opened it. “Let’s see. You were terminated right around Christmas. So what about the third quarter?”

“The file should indicate I found a nearly identical journal entry in September.”

“I’d rather hear it directly from you, Mr. Shayne. Did you ask anyone about these journal entries?”

“I asked the Controller, Marge Lassiter. She didn’t know anything, told me to track it down.”

“And?”

“Dead end. No documentation, not even who posted the entries.”

Hawley cocked his head.

“So then I e-mailed Drummond, described the journal entries.” Danny tugged at his collar. “I told him they might be improper.”

“Did he respond?”

“Three days later. He called me and said he was aware of the entries, and they were OK. He said they were reclassifications of labor costs that should have been charged to overhead in the first place.”

Hawley paused and prepared himself to ask the \$64,000 question.

Agnes Winston sat with her elbows on the desktop and her chin cupped in her hands. She was a bit melancholy, because tomorrow she’d turn fifty-seven. After twenty-seven years with the SEC, she had achieved the position of Central Region Director. Her career had peaked, and she didn’t intend to stick around for the downhill slide of an aging bureaucrat.

Straightening, she checked her watch and wondered how the Well-Pro interview was going. Soon, Philip Hawley would knock on her door and summarize his session with the whistle-blower. The skinny on Hawley indicated that he was smart, ambitious. He looked the

part too, tall and slim. She had heard, however that he had two serious flaws: he was lazy and impetuous.

She wondered what she should do if he acted in character and recommended jumping straight to a Formal Order to Well-Pro? It would be reckless to agree, but then again, it might create an opportunity. She tossed the possibilities around in her mind, then decided she would play it by ear.

Hawley's cheeks flushed and he spoke too loudly as he asked Danny the question. "Did Drummond threaten you in any way, or offer a bribe?"

Danny jerked back in his chair, like he'd been slapped. "No—no, it wasn't like that. But he did get brusque when I asked what kind of labor costs were involved. He told me those were details that didn't concern me."

Hawley sense this would turn out to be his first big case heightened. He could barely manage to stay seated. "What about the Controller, Lassiter? Was she concerned?"

"Yeah, but—you know—she reports to Drummond. She seemed satisfied to let me follow up." Danny shook his head. "My mistake, huh?"

Hawley looked at Danny for several moments while his mind processed various scenarios. Then he picked up his things and stood. "One last thing, Mr. Shayne."

Danny raised his eyebrows.

"Is it possible Drummond is right—that those journal entries were perfectly proper?"

Danny's face soured as he stood too. "Anything's possible, Mr. Hawley. But why wasn't there any documentation? Why were they the last entries made at the end of the quarter? Why didn't the Controller know about them? And why did Drummond stonewall me?"

Hawley's eyes stayed fixed on Danny's as he nodded. Then he opened the door, and turned back to face Danny. "And I'd add, Mr. Shayne—why were you abruptly fired after challenging the CFO?"

The question lingered in the stale air as Hawley stepped out and closed the door.

Outside the Regional Director's office Hawley buffed the top of a Bruno Magli loafer on the back of his trousers. He'd never met privately with Agnes Winston, only attended large meetings where she spoke. And that reminded him why he disliked the SEC. Not only were the furnishings tawdry, but the people were impersonal, the work beneath his abilities, and his

aggressiveness discouraged. Still, he knew the Well-Pro case might be huge. If he could get an indictment, his father would take notice, maybe give him a chance at running the family business back in Chicago.

The thought of working with his father again triggered a tic in Hawley's left eye. He knew he had something to prove to the old bastard, and he needed to do it soon, because dear old daddy was pushing eighty.

Pushing back his thoughts as he opened the door, Hawley glanced around, and almost did a double-take. The décor was exquisite! Maroon Berber carpeting complimented art-deco maple furniture. The vintage movie posters on the walls were clearly not government issue either. As the director stood, he could see that the surroundings were in stark contrast with her personal appearance. Short, unkempt black hair accentuated a hooked nose. And her dark, calf-length skirt and frilly, high-buttoned blouse came straight out of *Mary Poppins*.

Winston proffered her hand, and said, "Pleased to meet you Mr. Hawley."

Nodding, he sat down after Winston did. Her raised eyebrows gave him his cue to begin. So, he filled her in on the Shayne interview.

After listening intently, Winston tented her fingers and said, "And what do you think?"

"I think he's for real. I recommend we issue a Formal Order."

She smiled. "So, right to the subpoenas, huh? Wouldn't it be more prudent to start with a phone call to their CFO?"

Hawley thought fast as he crossed his legs. "No. Drummond, the CFO, has already fed Shayne a pile of crap. I'd just get more of the same." Winston didn't respond, and Hawley sensed she was considering something.

At last she said, "If you say so," then flipped through a file. "You've got quite the background, haven't you, Philip?"

He narrowed his eyes. "What do you mean?"

"Yale, Kellogg Business, Harvard Law. You were an international banker for awhile in London. Before that, you went to work with your father at Hawley Enterprises. At only thirty-two, your resume could be entitled *Great Expectations*."

"I don't see what—"

"Why did you leave your father's business, Philip?" Her eyes bored into Hawley's. "If I were you, I'd have tried to position myself as successor to a two billion dollar a year foodservice company."

“I—I thought I should make it on my own.”

“You thought? Or your father thought you might not be executive material?”

Hawley stiffened. *What was she after?* “Whatever the reason, it hardly pertains—”

“Sorry,” Winston interrupted. “It’s just that given your credentials, I’m stumped as to how you’ve managed to accomplish exactly nothing the entire nine months you’ve been with the SEC.”

“I beg your pardon?”

“Your performance, Philip. It stinks. And so does your attitude.” She glared at Hawley—then her eyes suddenly softened. “Look, I hate to spring performance evaluations on people. But in your case, it’s necessary. You need to understand that if I had another attorney free, *anyone*, that person would get the Well-Pro case.” She crossed her legs. “You worry me, Philip, because to date you’ve failed to show you can handle the substantial responsibility of an SEC enforcement action.”

Hawley frowned in puzzlement.

“Didn’t Jenkins talk to you about your work on Citicorp? How you wanted to go off half-cocked?”

Hawley eyes drifted to his lap.

“Well?”

He nodded. “The evidence seemed compelling. How was I to know that—”

“And Hartley?” she interrupted. “On the NYSE investigation? He said you gold-bricked the whole time.”

“I—I wasn’t feeling well.”

“I don’t think this is a big surprise to you, Philip.” Agnes stopped and waited for Hawley to look up. “You know that when one of our cases goes public the market interprets it as sure-fire evidence of malfeasance. The stock price of the target company plummets.” She wagged a finger at him. “Remember, Hawley, it’s the little people—not the institutions—that get hurt if we don’t get it right.” Winston un-tensed. “You’re the lead, by default. But make no mistake.” She pointed a finger, like a dagger, at Hawley’s chest. “It’s your one and only chance. One screw up, Hawley, one little misstep, and you can add another line to your resumé. Are we clear?”

Hawley had colored. One of his buried memories of his father wormed its way into his mind: his seventh birthday, when his old man yanked down his pants and spanked him in front of all his guests. Just because he had forgotten to walk the dog before the party.

How unfair it all is.

He worked hard to swallow his anger, then said, “Yes—perfectly clear. I won’t disappoint you.”

“I hope not, Hawley, for both our sakes. I’ll issue the Formal Order. The rest is up to you.”

Hawley stood to leave, but his legs wobbled as it dawned on him how big a mistake the Formal Order would be. He had climbed out on a limb, and the director sawed it off by acting on his recommendation. Each synapse in his brain fired on full automatic as it searched for something to salvage. He managed a few steps toward the door, then slowed and raised his head. Abruptly, he sucked in his stomach and strode out the door, the very picture of self-confidence. He forgot to say goodbye to Winston, because his mind was busy fine-tuning a plan to turn the sour fruit of the Well-Pro case into sweet lemonade.

“Mr. Rollins, your 9 o’clock call from Well-Pro.”

“Thank you, darlin’,” the attorney said, and shifted his burly six-foot frame to pick up the phone. “Gentlemen. How is everything in Houston this fine Wednesday?”

“Morning, Jonah. This is Mark Drummond. I have Pearson, our CEO, with me. I’m afraid things could be better.”

“Pearson? You mean Pearson Bradley—the same Pearson Bradley who gets fish laughin’ so hard when he tries to tie a fly, that they flop right into the boat?”

Jonah was pleased to hear laughter. He liked to break the ice early.

“Hey, Jonah—Mr. Jonah P. Rollins,” Bradley said. “I might not be able to tie a fly, but at least my belly’s small enough to reach over to tie my shoes.”

After more laughter, Jonah said, “Why do you think fat old men with sagging jowls don’t wear tie shoes?”

Drummond’s worried voice cut the banter short. “Jonah...did you get the overnight package with copies of what we received from the SEC?”

“I did. They don’t shed much light on the matter, just a date when they request the pleasure of you two gentlemen’s company—and about a quarter ton of files.”

Drummond said, “Why didn’t they pick up a phone and tell us what they suspected? We would have had a chance to explain before they made such a B.F.D. about it.”

“The good Lord and the SEC work in mysterious ways, Mark. But you’re right; it’s strange they didn’t probe informally first. Could be this Hawley fella is fixin’ to notch his gun. Fortunately, gentlemen, the law firm of Jacoby & Watson, Ltd. has sources at the SEC, even at the Central Region, which has jurisdiction in this case.”

“Tell us what you found out,” asked Pearson.

Jonah opened a file. “Two things. First, they think they have a bona-fide whistleblower, though I couldn’t get a name. And second, they believe y’all haven’t been earning your operating margins the old fashioned way. They think you’ve been pumpin’ ‘em up by reclassifying labor costs into overhead.” Jonah stopped. He wanted to hear their reaction.

Pearson spoke first. “You fire anybody lately, Mark?”

Drummond took a few moments to respond. “Actually, I did. The Assistant Controller, Danny Shayne, last November. After he got promoted he turned into a classic case of the Peter Principle. But I’d never take him for the type to—no, wait a second. He came to see me, right before Halloween. He had some journal entries he thought looked fishy. I looked into it, and they were fine. Is it possible—?”

“Sounds like a pretty fair connection to me,” said Jonah. “If I were you, I’d do more research on those entries, pronto. Make sure they’re backed up like I-10 on a Friday night. Also, check the documentation of Shayne’s performance—the more you can discredit him, the better. And who are your auditors, Ernst & Young?”

“Yes.”

“Make sure they look them over too. And don’t forget to plug in the Chairman of your Audit Committee, lickety split.”

“Yes sir—will do.”

“Pearson?”

“Yes, Jonah?”

“You give any thought to a press release?”

“We did. Mark, why don’t you explain.”

“We don’t think we have a choice, Jonah. If we don’t disclose we’re being investigated by the SEC, then we possess inside information and all of us, including the Board, can’t trade in our stock and the company can’t issue bonds. And even if we could stomach that, what would it look like if there was a leak?”

“You boys are doin’ exactly the right thing. Be sure to fax me a draft.”

“Of course,” said Drummond.

“And Mark, are you comfortable there ain’t any skeletons that might rattle themselves out of the closet?”

“I am, Jonah. With all the corporate scandals and the Sarbanes-Oxley Act, we’re audited down to a gnat’s ass. I feel better than ever about the books.”

“Fine. Then I guess I’ll be seein’ you gentlemen at the hearing in Denver. And don’t worry. If your books are as good as you say, all you’ll get is a hiccup in Well-Pro’s stock—though it might be a substantial one. When we clear this up, it’ll bounce back like a three-iron off an oak tree.”

“Speaking of trees,” said Bradley. “Have you been able to get back to that place in Montana you took me to? What’s it called?”

“Lincoln. It’s by the Blackfoot River”, Jonah said. “A little piece a’ fly fishin’ paradise. But I haven’t been there for a spell, Pearson. Dallas has held me captive—and when it deems appropriate to release me, I’ve found I’m also fond of southern France.”

“Well, Jonah, then it’s a good thing you’ve earned your reputation as the wiliest lawyer in Texas. You need those obscenely high fees to pay for your hobbies.”

“You know I appreciate your business, Pearson.”

With that, they hung up, and Jonah sat back and licked his lips. If his partner in Denver was right, this case would be lucrative enough to accelerate their retirement.

“More wine?”

Hawley shook his head. Jonah Rollins had called the day after the Well-Pro hearing. While it was unethical to see the crusty old Texan while the case was technically still open, the big man captivated him—despite the fact that Rollins had flattened him at the hearing like a steamroller on soft asphalt. Besides, it was a dinner invitation to the Brown Palace Hotel, an ornate old Denver building. Its restaurant featured antiques and precious objects dating back to the 1700s. Rollins had secured a private dining room.

While the waiter filled the big lawyer’s glass, Hawley turned to look out the door at the main room. He could see some of the twenty-two revolutionary war battle flags that ringed the great expanse. When his eyes drifted back to Rollins, he almost smiled at the contrast: *Beauty and the Beast*. The beast sat across the dinner table like a bloated Sam Houston dressed in a brown tweed suit and vest.

“Desert then?” said Jonah. “I hear they whip a mean chocolate mousse.”

“I really shouldn’t ...”

Jonah held up two fingers to the waiter, then looked at Hawley. “I s’pose you’re getting’ curious why I asked you here.”

Hawley dabbed at his lips with a linen napkin. “Should I have something to worry about? At the hearing you made a point of telling me your middle initial stood for Predator.”

“Oh hell, that was just a little joke. You know, an ice breaker.” Jonah grinned and sat back in his chair. He took something out of his coat pocket and started to squeeze it in his right hand. It looked like a rubber ball.

Hawley asked, “Is that for arthritis?”

Jonah looked in his hand. “This?” He placed the object on the table.

Hawley felt his color drain. *My God! It’s a shrunken head!*

“Arthritis? Naw, I don’t have that—at least, not yet. It’s just a little somethin’ I picked up in Peru a few years back. Squeezin’ it is a nervous habit.” Jonah smiled. “No, Philip, what could you possibly have to worry about? Certainly not the fact your whistle blower was spoutin’ hot air, and your career might be over.”

Hawley twisted his napkin while he strained to keep his composure level. “I won’t be waiting around to find out.”

“You’re going to quit the SEC? What’ll you do?”

Hawley measured his reply. “I don’t know, probably just take stock for awhile.”

“I see.” Jonah sipped wine. “I invited you to dinner out of pure curiosity, Philip. I mean, the dang Well-Pro hearing must have been the shortest in SEC history.” He threw up his hands and grinned. “Good Lord, I’ve never seen so much documentation. They even had the social security numbers and job descriptions of each and every employee whose salary was reclassified to overhead.” His eyes danced. “And that was that. You hardly asked a question. I swear, you didn’t even bother goin’ through the *motions*, boy.”

Hawley bristled. “Mr. Rollins, I hope you’re not accusing me of staging the Well-Pro case.”

“No, though at first I did think it was incompetence. Kind’a like if the Air Force bombed a city without checking if the enemy occupied it.”

Hawley decided to feign outrage and stood abruptly. “I don’t have to sit here and listen to your—diatribe, Mr. Rollins. And I think the Regional Director might like to hear about your unprofessional remarks. In the future, maybe you’ll find your firm’s reputation with the SEC a little tarnished.”

“Now don’t go stickin’ up your tail feathers.” Rollins motioned for Philip to sit down. “It just exposes yer asshole.”

Hawley couldn’t stop a grin from claiming his face. He sat down. “Your vocabulary is quite rustic for a man of your stature.”

Jonah pushed his chair back from the table and unbuttoned his vest. “You can add that when you talk to the Regional Director. Agnes, isn’t it?”

Hawley nodded, then began to chew on a fingernail. *Why won’t Rollins get to the point? He knows something.*

“No, Philip, I don’t think you’re incompetent. Maybe a little bent is all.” Jonah paused and made a show of switching on his Palm Pilot.

Hawley’s underarms felt slick.

As Jonah tapped the screen with the stylus, he said, “When you talk to Agnes, Philip, maybe you should think of it as an opportunity to cleanse your soul.”

Hawley stifled a gasp. *He couldn’t possibly know, could he?*

“You’ll feel much better when you tell her about those short sales you made of Well-Pro stock between the time of the SEC’s Formal Order and the company’s press release.” Jonah squinted at the Palm’s tiny screen. “I believe the dates of the transactions were February seventeenth through the twenty-first. With the stock taking a thirty dollar hit, I figure you made six million.”

Hawley had hardened into a block of ice. If he moved a muscle, he’d shatter.

“I wouldn’t have suspected nuthin’ if you hadn’t conducted the hearing in such a lackadaisical manner. I mean, anyone simply incompetent would have made a fool of himself strugglin’ to salvage something. But you just watched the whole thing slide into the toilet, with nary a whimper. That’s when I knew you had another agenda, boy.”

Hawley moved his lips a fraction, but no sound came out.

“Then again, if you hadn’t violated the Pig Theory, I wouldn’t have found your tracks.”

“I—I don’t—”

Jonah waved a hand. “The Pig Theory. You know: Pigs Get Fed and Hogs Get Slaughtered. You were a real hog, Philip. With your experience, I figured you would evade detection by doing the transactions offshore under different names and on foreign exchanges, but damned if I could find anything—until I stumbled on an IRS Form 1001 filed by a

Bahamian trust claiming it was a non-resident alien.” Jonah shook his head and snorted. “Tsk, ts, son. Tryin’ to deprive Uncle Sam of his income taxes?”

Hawley’s eyes darted to the waiter who brought their desserts. The respite gave him time to try and think.

When the waiter left, Jonah picked up an oversize spoon and gouged out a hunk of mousse. “Mmmm. Don’t that look dee...licious?” He looked at Hawley. “What’s the matter, boy? Lose your appetite?”

“You—you want something. You must, or you wouldn’t bother with this charade. You’d just have me thrown in jail.” Hawley bit his lip.

Jonah pointed with his spoon. “You’re smart as I thought. I do want somethin’, but first I want to know why you did it. Was it greed?”

Hawley shook his head. He picked up his wine glass, but it was empty. “I—I screwed up. I locked myself into a Formal Order, then realized, too late, it would backfire and embarrass the SEC. I knew I’d be toast. That’s when I thought of shorting the stock. I knew Well-Pro would have to go public with the investigation and the stock would tank.” As he grabbed his water glass, he pictured himself, post prison, living in a cardboard box on Chicago’s Lower Wacker drive. He shuddered and tried to re-focus. “And—as you said—I know how to cover my tracks.” Hawley felt his face grow hot, and glared at Rollins. “What is it? It’s the money, isn’t it? You want it, don’t you?”

Jonah folded his napkin and placed it on the table. “No, you can keep the money, Philip. All of it. But there is one little thing you can do for me.”

At the very moment the sun wrestled free of a cloud and dappled the azure waters of the Mediterranean with its shimmering image, a tanned Jonah Rollins said, “I’d like to make a toast, darlin’.”

“At breakfast?”

He shrugged his big shoulders. “The setting seems appropriate, and orange juice ought to do.” He saw her nod and raised his glass. “Here’s to ten years of a wonderful partnership. May it continue till death do us part.”

“I’ll drink to that,” the woman said, smiling.

Jonah winked, then picked up the check the waiter had left on a small gilt tray. “This place seems kinda pricey.”

“Really? Perhaps it has something to do with the fact we’re at a four-star hotel on the French Riviera.”

Jonah feigned alarm. “Think we can afford to retire here?”

“Oh, I think we can squeak by if we watch our Euros. And camping summers in Montana should save a ton.”

“Campin’? A brand new six-thousand square-foot cabin overlookin’ the Blackfoot is your idea of campin’?”

“Just teasing, darling.” She checked her watch. “What are we doing today after we look at villas?”

“We got an appointment at four with that candy ass wedding planner.”

“Ah yes, the ‘death do us part’ thing.”

Jonah frowned. “Speaking of partin’, that’s what I thought Hawley and his old man did. But I found out he’s back working for his father. I hope that doesn’t mean he’s already gone through his six million—maybe gambling.”

She shook her head. “He’s no dummy. I’ll bet he has every penny, minus a Maserati or two. He’s the insecure type, terrified of failure and in need of constant reassurance. They disguise it with arrogance. His father is likely the person who’s approval he craves the most.”

Jonah stared at his bride to be and thanked the Good Lord she wasn’t his adversary. He took her hand. “Agnes, tell me the truth. Did you ever have even a twinge of guilt?”

Agnes parried with a wrinkled brow. “Certainly not. Maybe I egged him on a bit, gave him some rope to hang himself, but it was Hawley who panicked and shorted the stock, not me. And as far as investors go, you know there are no innocents. That’s just a speech I give.”

Jonah smiled. Agnes never failed to impress him. And she looked damn good in that lime sun-dress compared with those schoolmarm clothes she used to wear. “Your idea to let Hawley keep the money was brilliant, Agnes. You shoulda seen his face when I explained the condition that he had to execute a second transaction on my behalf – this one a call. He looked like a bull who just figured out someone climbed on his back.” He released Agnes’s hand. “I just hope he keeps his mouth shut.”

“Don’t worry. He will. Aside from his six million dollars, don’t forget that all the evidence would point straight at him.” Agnes smiled. “Well-Pro’s stock did rebound handsomely after the investigation closed. Fifty-nine dollars is an all-time high, isn’t it?”

“Yes indeed. And those calls Hawley bought all over God’s green earth at forty-five and a half before you closed the investigation netted us our own six million.” Jonah chuckled. “You could say we got the stock goin’ and cummin’.”

Agnes patted Jonah’s hand. “Have you ever added up our ten-year total, darling?”

“Jonah squinted at the sun, counting on his fingers. “Let’s see. There was Enron; that was, uh, three million. Then Tyco, another three or so, and Imclone—” His big belly shook with laughter. “Hell, Agnes. We got enough to keep us in suntan oil and fly rods for quite a spell.”

THE END