

## THE ICE HORSE

SHE SAT IN THE DARK behind the soundproofed glass walls of the library with a stopwatch in her hand. As each runner passed the window, her job was to clock his time and enter it in a computer. It had started as a joke, the late-night running around the circumference of the office, three laps a mile, but now it had become a ritual, a very serious ritual, and Cecelia's job was to handle the stopwatch and punch in the times. At the end of the workout she'd feed the disc with the times into the word processor and then stat six copies, one for each man.

As she sat on a table with her legs tucked up underneath her, the orange light of the computer screen cast the only light in the room and it highlighted her features. Cecelia Maria Sandoval was a law student who worked nights as a law clerk and whose dark features and long shining black hair gave her the face of an Aztec princess. She'd only had the job for a month. She was a first-year student in a night law school in Chicago and she worked for the firm for two nights a week, rushing over after her 6:00 contracts class. At first, they'd given her reams of computer printouts of telephone logs on an antitrust case to scan for spelling errors. Then they handed her the watch and taught her to use one of the library's computers, and suddenly she was the night timekeeper for their track team.

She seldom spoke to any of the runners, and they didn't speak to her. She was very precise and careful with the times. As the faces passed by the library, she sat silently in the dark and watched them with a mixture of awe and hatred that she'd reserved for them all her life.

She was assigned as a clerk to the oldest runner, Edward Parkhurst. He was the firm's chief antitrust litigator. He also coached the track team and ran with it. He was a lean-faced, thin-bodied man, about fifty, married with a home in Lake Forest and two daughters in Eastern schools. Edward Parkhurst had been captain of his Dartmouth track team, and on his office wall there was a photograph of him shyly holding a trophy after the meet with Yale in his senior year. There were also two new gold plaques from the last two years. His team had won the plaques for the firm in competition with the other major Chicago law firms.

She soon realized she was more like a night servant to Parkhurst than a legal assistant. She kept his Florentine leather boxes freshly loaded with paper clips, one for large clips, one for small. She supplied him with fresh boxes of tissues, watered his plants, sharpened his pencils, and did the extra personal correspondence filing his secretary left for her. She also carefully stacked the printouts of the runners' times on his bookcase so they would be available to him every morning.

After several weeks some of the members of the track team occasionally began to speak to her. Her relationship with Parkhurst

hadn't really changed, except instead of telephone logs he'd given her a few citations to check on interoffice memos. "Harmless stuff, Cecelia," he'd said to her. "You can't hurt us with these. Just follow the uniform system of citation you use at law school. You know, the blue booklet." His hand lingered on hers as he handed her the notes. It was the second time he did that to her. Two days ago, when he'd asked her to carry some books for him down to the library, as he handed her the pile of books his face came close to hers, so close her hair inadvertently touched his cheek. She didn't think about it again. The citations were easy, and before the nightly run she returned them to him. His eyes caught hers for a second, but there was no other signal from him.

The next day was a religious holiday, the Day of the Dead, *el Dia de los Muertes*, and there was a mass at the old church of Our Lady of Guadalupe in her neighborhood on Loomis Street. After the mass all the parishioners walked to the park in a procession in honor of the dead. She held a white, lighted candle in her hand and walked behind the priest swinging his censer of incense before her.

When she came to the office that night she still had the smell of incense in her hair and she had kept the stub of the candle in her purse. Instead of immediately switching on the computer in the library, she lit the candle stub and sat with it in the darkness. It was soothing to her, and she was alone. For a moment she closed her eyes and saw herself as a child on a horse in between her grandparents on their tiny ranch in the mountains of New Mexico. It was the only photograph she had of her grandparents—who were now dead—and she treasured it.

"Cecelia, do you like to work by candlelight?" The door had opened, and Edward Parkhurst stood there in his jogging suit.

"Oh, I'm sorry, sir."

He snapped the light on.

"Cecelia, do you look like your mother?"

"My mother?"

He reached out and touched her face with the back of his hand. His hand on her face reminded her of an ugly snake, coiled and ready to strike. Should she stand up?

"I don't understand you, Cecelia," he said to her. He turned away and walked out, snapping off the light and leaving her again in darkness.

A week later he brought a hammer, flashlight, and several rolls of orange luminous tape to her. Instead of the usual workout this night, the men were to run on the street, up Michigan Avenue, over the bridge to the Water Tower, and back to the Art Institute. She was to wait for them with the flashlight and stopwatch in front of the Art Institute lions and clock the runners as they returned. Before they all took the elevator

down to the street, he asked her to wrap each runner around the waist with a strand of orange luminous tape. He watched her strangely as she did it, almost as if the wrapping of the men was a ceremony. He said he would carry the hammer to ward off any cars that might aim at him. Cars had been coming too close.

The runners took off up Michigan Avenue but one of them, Jeremy Barthold, stayed with her on the steps. He had twisted an ankle and couldn't run. He invited her across the street for coffee. He was a rather nice man, she thought, and unlike the others, quite friendly. In the restaurant he ordered coffee for each of them.

"Tell me about Mr. Parkhurst," she asked Jeremy.

"What do you mean?"

"All this running. I don't understand it."

"He just likes to compete."

She thought about asking Jeremy some other questions, but she didn't.

"He likes to win. Last week he brought in a fifty-million-dollar jury verdict in an antitrust case. With treble damages, that's a hundred and fifty million. Do you know what the fees are on that?"

"No." She put the stopwatch down between them and glanced at it. The runners had been gone almost ten minutes.

"Try twenty million dollars." He smoothed his blond hair back over his forehead and put on a pair of dark glasses. "My eyes are sensitive to this kind of fluorescent light. They won't be back for at least another fifteen minutes."

She turned the stopwatch toward herself.

"Cecelia, how do you like your job?"

"It's hard with three jobs. I work as a waitress in the afternoon in a restaurant on LaSalle Street, and in the mornings at a legal clinic in the church in our neighborhood. I love that job. But here, Parkhurst hardly gives me anything legal to do, except work with the track team, and I shuffle a few papers."

"It will get better."

"I don't know."

"No, if you'll just be patient, he'll give you more responsibility. They need you, you know."

"They need me?" She laughed, and her white teeth flashed at him.

"Sure. They must have some minority people if they want to work for the city or the government. They need a census that shows at least one Latino, and you're it."

"I don't think so," she said. "They could fire me tomorrow."

He smiled and glanced at the watch and left some money. "Okay, let's go back and time them in."

She stood beside Jeremy on the steps of the Art Institute, watching the snow drift slowly across Michigan Avenue. The first runner came in, stretching his arms at an imaginary tape, and Jeremy caught him and held him. "Way to go Steve!" They were both laughing, and Stephen walked down the sidewalk panting, with his hands on his hips. Jeremy gave him a thumbs-up sign. The second runner came in now, gracefully extending his chest to the imaginary line and Cecelia clocked him and Jeremy slapped his hand in a high-five and the second runner disappeared down the sidewalk into the darkness.

Cecelia stood watching them. *Que diferencia.* These young, white men. They reminded her of white deer running in the darkness, very graceful, very elusive. She and her grandfather would sit for hours in the pine forest in the Sangre de Cristo mountains, absolutely silent, as mute as the ancient stones of the mountains, waiting for the white deer to come to the pool at night to drink in the moonlight. Her grandfather would stretch a piece of rope across a narrowing in the path, fastening it to the two young trees, saplings that would bend with the impact of a deer and catch its throat, not killing it, just stunning it. Then he and Cecelia would creep along the rocks to the animal, its heart beating wildly, legs thrashing, its eyes wild with terror, and her grandfather, with one clean silent drive of the knife, would plunge his knife into the animal's heart. They would carry it home to the grandparents' rancho, and there would be food for all of them. *Que diferencia.* The lights flashing on the faces of these strange young men. Now came Jonathan and just behind him, Parkhurst, and then very quickly Tom and Peter, all laughing and slapping each other on the backsides. Parkhurst was as happy as she'd ever seen him. He ignored her until finally he came over to her and handed her the hammer. "We're going out for a drink. Please take this back to the office and print out the times." He reached out and took some snowflakes from her hair. He looked at her for a moment and trotted away.

She returned to the office and entered the times into the computer. She fed the disc into the word processor and took the sheets to Parkhurst's office. There was no one in the corridor, only a few young associates in the library working on a brief that had to be at the printers by midnight. They'd been working all Saturday and Sunday on it. One man nodded at her through the window. Another was asleep with his head on his arms.

She put the sheets on the bookcase behind the desk. He had a collection of modern art and groups of photographs. She looked at the faces in the photographs. A young Edward Parkhurst, a law school graduate standing between two older people, a man and a woman she presumed were his parents. It was his version of the photograph of

herself on the horse between her grandparents, only instead of short people with dark, weather-worn faces, these people were tall and lean. His father was wearing a suit and holding a hat, the mother wore a long fur coat. They were standing at the foot of Abraham Lincoln's statue in Springfield, sternly facing the camera. There was a photo of a younger Parkhurst in a naval officer's uniform with ribbons on his chest. When could he have been in the navy? Then she realized it was the father's photograph. They were almost cloned, father and son. Written across the photograph was "For Edward Parkhurst from his father, August 3, 1943." That was almost 50 years ago. How old had the son been? Five? And there was a photograph of his own family before the fireplace in their living room, Parkhurst and his wife expressionless in the center, their children on either side, a large Irish setter seated on its paws in front of them. Each daughter had initials on her sweater, the wife wore a tweed jacket. They were such formal people. Did they all love each other? She wondered. She touched the photograph. Why was he touching her? A framed Order of the Coif, another from his admission to the Supreme Court. She saw a light switch and turned it on. There were several strange pieces of art. A painting of a fiery bird like a hawk caught in a tree, the hawk's wings on fire. A white plaster nude torso of a woman with the eyes made of glittering pieces of glass in mosaic. Beside her on his telephone table was a small sculpture of a red Chicago fireplug that looked like it had melted down. There was a seating area with a television, a VCR, and a stereo with headphones. She imagined Parkhurst in the chair with his eyes closed. She looked at his tapes—Beethoven, Mahler, Mozart, several operas.

She turned the lights off and was about to leave, but just before she left the office she had an impulse to open his desk drawer. She saw it was locked, but she'd seen where he kept the key, in a slim white porcelain Japanese vase. She shook the vase, and the key fell out on to the desk. She opened the drawer. There were several white envelopes, but they were unsealed. She looked in one. It was full of thousand-dollar bills. She counted to twenty. He kept twenty thousand in cash in his desk. She looked in another white envelope. There were five passbooks. She opened one. There was only one entry, of one hundred thousand dollars, in his name. She opened another passbook, same entry, one hundred thousand dollars. She looked through the other three, each had one hundred thousand dollars, all in his name alone. The man had five hundred thousand dollars in savings accounts in his desk and twenty thousand dollars in cash. Why? Why did he need all this money? She looked at the thousand-dollar bills again and put the envelopes back and closed and locked the drawer and put the key back in the vase. Then she quietly shut his door and left his office.

The young associates were still in the library. They looked up at her. One of them raised a finger as if to say hello.

As she rode the bus back to Loomis street she thought about what she had done. I don't understand them. I will never understand them. But I must become one of them. My people have no lawyers. We are alone. I must become one of them. I am tired, very confused and tired. He is touching me, and I am permitting it. She looked out at the black shadows of the buildings, and shook her head.

In the morning at the legal clinic in the basement of the church she met with a woman who was waiting for her in the entrance. The woman had a young child with her, a boy of about five. They walked through the church, to the side door that led to the basement. The woman was silent. Cecelia opened the door to her basement office. Her desk was a card table. There were folding chairs. The floor was bare. She had a few old law books, a set of three-year-old Illinois Revised Statutes, and some booklets from state agencies.

She asked the woman to be seated. The child sat in the woman's lap and stared at Cecelia with his dark eyes. The mother still did not speak.

"I am a student of the law, like a *notario*. If we can help you, I can perhaps find a lawyer."

The mother remained silent.

"You must speak to me, *señora*."

The woman's eyes filled with tears, and she put her hands around her son and bowed her head.

"Where is your husband, *señora*?"

She shook her head.

"Has the immigration taken him?"

She nodded yes.

"When did this happen? Last night?"

"Sí."

"Has anyone contacted you?"

She shook her head again.

"So you don't know where your husband is? Was he taken from work? If so, they will have him downtown. When did your husband come to this country?"

The woman looked away. She was trying to hide her tears from her son.

"When did your husband come to the States?"

She didn't answer.

"Was it this year?"

"Sí."

"From Mexico?"

"No."

“*Dónde?*”

“El Salvador.”

“Is he a *político?*”

“*Sí. Político.*”

“He will be in danger if he returns?”

“He cannot return.”

After the woman left, Cecelia called the restaurant and told them she wouldn't be in. Instead she went downtown to see Edward Parkhurst. They were surprised to see her at noon at the law firm. Parkhurst was at lunch and had a 2:00 appointment. His secretary told her he usually took a short nap after lunch, and at 1:50 she would knock on his door. He followed the same routine, except when he was on trial; lunch at the University Club and then a nap until two, when he either had an appointment or opened up his phone again.

Promptly at ten minutes to two, the secretary knocked on his door. She came to the library and smiled at Cecelia. “He'll see you for just a few minutes.”

He was sitting on a chair by the stereo with his earphones on. He motioned to the chair across from his. She could feel his gray eyes watching her as she sat down and crossed her legs.

“I'm surprised to see you here, Cecelia. Mary said you wanted to see me.”

“Mr. Parkhurst, I want to ask you to help me.”

“What kind of help?” He removed the earphones.

“I work at a legal clinic at our church. A woman came in this morning. Her husband was arrested last night by the immigration authorities. They have him downtown in the Federal detention center. He is an illegal, from El Salvador. He will be sent back immediately. They will put him on a plane, perhaps today. If he is sent back, she says they will kill him because he is opposed to them politically. He is a *político*. Under the law he should be entitled to remain here under amnesty. He should be granted political amnesty. But I cannot act for him. I am not a lawyer.”

“You want me to act as his lawyer?”

“*Sí.*” She unconsciously answered him in Spanish.

“But I am not an immigration lawyer.”

“Yes, but you are a lawyer of great experience.”

He put the earphones back on and stretched out his legs to another chair and closed his eyes. He was silent, and then he spoke to her with his eyes closed. “You are rather naive, Cecelia. In some respects still almost a child. If you want to be a lawyer, you have to toughen yourself. You have to understand the profession, this office. The way we do things

here." His eyes were still closed to the music. "First understand that we do not do pro bono work."

"Our church could perhaps pay a small fee."

He smiled. "No, we don't want money from your church. We simply do not do pro bono work. It is an absolute rule of the firm. Some of the young lawyers do it on their own, but that's their affair. Instead we contribute money. We contribute to all the great charities of Chicago. To the university legal clinics, to the Bar Association legal clinic. In that manner we discharge our responsibility to the community. We simply cannot afford to do pro bono work. What is your client's name?"

"Felipe García."

"The matter of Felipe García would be inextricably lost in our office. It does not belong here. It is simply a matter of efficiency. Cost. We cannot afford to serve the Felipe Garcías of the world. If you are to work with us, you must understand that."

She felt ashamed for having asked him. Her legs were weak, and a hot flush enveloped her body.

He took his earphones off and handed them to her.

"Tchaikovsky. *Swan Lake*. Listen to it, Cecelia." He reached out and carefully placed the earphones over her head. "He was a very complicated man, Tchaikovsky. Peter Ilyitch." He adjusted the earphones and touched her hair. The music began to wash over her. It calmed her for a moment as he stared at her. He took her hand.

She closed her eyes. He leaned toward her. She could sense his face moving toward her and now he kissed her, at first lightly, his lips just brushing hers, and then he parted her lips with his tongue and slowly moved his tongue into her mouth. He then moved away from her and held her face in her hands.

"You're a beautiful young woman, Cecelia. But you have much to learn. We could become friends. If we are to become friends, I will make an exception for your Mr. Felipe García and I will help him." He stood her up and took the earphones off and put his arms around her and held her and pressed himself into her. She recoiled as he kissed her neck and let her go. "You are a lovely child. Most complicated and mysterious. But if we are to be friends, I will help you. I am leaving for Detroit this afternoon, but I'll take care of the matter before I leave." He held her hands and then slowly let her go. He put on his vest with its silver chain and jacket and smoothed his hair and stood in his pinstripe gray suit in front of a mirror. "Leave his name with Mary," he said.

She went to the law school that evening, and as she sat in her torts class, her ears were ringing. She really couldn't hear the professor. Parkhurst's tongue inside her mouth was like a fat larva. Not the black snake she'd seen in a store window, but a fat, slimy larva that had



inserted itself inside the white pulp of a nut and was feeding on the pulp, slowly twisting into the soft meat of the inner shell. The professor was talking about foreseeability. She stopped taking notes. Was this the price she had to pay? No. She knew it was wrong. But she seemed frozen, incapable of striking back. She was taught to be gentle among men. His tongue felt like slime, like the swollen worm at the bottom of a mescal bottle. There was a legend that whoever ate the worm at the bottom of the bottle would become a real man. *Qué hombre bravo! Qué gringo bastardo!*

She didn't go to work at the law firm after school that night. Instead she went to the movies. She bought some popcorn and she lost herself in the film. Afterwards, on the bus, she at last felt relaxed. Her ears had stopped ringing, and she tried not to think about the situation. On the back of the seat facing her was some graffiti—Carlos, Jaime, *Las Aguilas*. The Eagles. She traced the diamond shape around the scrawl of *Las Aguilas* and closed her eyes. What would it be like, to soar high above a valley in the mountain winds, to be free and powerful? To be like the eagle. A night hunter. This city was full of night hunters. She would practice law somewhere else, perhaps in a small town in New Mexico, where the darkness was not filled with hunters, where they did not always come at you with their talons ready. All the strange young white men. So sure of themselves. So superior. So confident. The best minds of the country. She shook her long black hair back and stared out the window.

The following morning when she went to the legal aid office in the church, the woman was already waiting for her, seated with her son in the lobby.

Cecelia asked if her husband had been released.

The woman shook her head. Cecelia could see the woman's face was streaked with tears.

"*Señora*, he will be today. I am very confident."

The woman shook her head again.

"What is it, *señora*?"

"He is gone. They have taken him."

"No. There must be a mistake."

The little boy stared at Cecelia innocently and poked one finger up his nose.

The woman held out a wrinkled piece of paper. The child wandered into the church and began running down the aisle toward the altar. Cecelia took the woman's paper. It was a telegram in English: *The Department of Immigration informs you that Felipe García has been transported by air to his place of origin, El Salvador, effective hour 1930 this date.*

Cecelia held her arms out to the woman. The boy came skipping back down the aisle. He had a red wax flower that he had taken from the altar, and he held it as he watched his mother cry.

That evening when Cecelia returned to the office, there was a sense of excitement. Tomorrow was the Simeon McCutcheon Memorial Track Meet, and all the contestants had been given commemorative T-shirts printed on the reverse side with a black silkscreen of the deceased senior partner of the McCutcheon firm. He had founded the track meet twenty years ago.

When she saw Parkhurst, he was already wearing one of the T-shirts over his sweatshirt. He had a green and white stocking cap on and his sweats with green shorts over them, and his feet up on his desk.

"Hello, Cecelia. We'll be outside tonight. I want you to clock us in at the Art Institute. I've even brought a piece of tape so we can simulate finishes."

"Mr. Parkhurst, what have you done for Felipe García?"

"Oh my God, Cecelia, I forgot about García." He sat back and took his feet off his desk and looked at his watch. "It's too late to do anything tonight. I just had so much to wind down in Detroit, some very complex negotiations. I have a friend on the board of Travelers Aid. He has some immigration experience. I'll call him tomorrow."

She didn't answer him.

"I'll take care of it. I promise you."

She looked at him without speaking, but as he reached out for her hand, she turned her back on him and walked back to the library.

That night she stood alone in a light snowfall with a stopwatch behind the north lion of the Art Institute. It was bitterly cold, and the city seemed to be made out of ice. Her gloves were too thin, and she could barely see down Michigan Avenue because the wind kept blowing drifts of snow. The snow seemed to come at her like the white wings of eagles, drifting in patterns through the lights. She thought she could look up through the buildings and see the large white birds sailing. She had the stopwatch and the finish tape, a piece of clothesline Parkhurst had given her. She tied it to a young tree planted at the curb in front of the entrance. Then she took the rope and walked it back to the stairs and pulled it taut, testing it. If she held it tightly, tied to the young tree, and pulled it taut, aimed at the runner's throat at the exact moment of the impact of the runner, it would probably kill him. It would be so easy. She practiced with the rope and pulled it taut as steel, then dropped it to lay hidden in the soft snow on the walk.

The runners were coming now. She could see them mixing in the colors of the lights. They were a block away. Which one was Parkhurst? She squinted and looked for the green stocking cap. She had to be sure.

She didn't want to injure anyone, just Parkhurst. Right at the throat, his arms spread, those silly shorts. They were coming now. What a surprise it would be. I am waiting for you. She smiled. They were thirty yards away. Jeremy was in the lead, striding gracefully and easily, only a few yards separating the runners. The snow made them seem like figures running in a glass ball, all suspended in place. Jeremy reached his arms out. She counted and watched, holding the rope slack in the snow with both hands just below her waist. Now Stephen and then Peter, Tom, and now Parkhurst. She began to cry. He was coming so clearly now, so open and unprepared, the thin white neck, the arrogant face. Her hand tensed, and she pulled the rope taut as his body hit it, but she let go and dropped the rope in the snow. He passed through, foolishly exultant, only feeling the light touch against his throat.

The next night at a dinner at the Hilton in honor of the track meet, Cecelia was a guest. The team had won first prize and they were all very drunk. She sat between Parkhurst and Jeremy, across from a table laden with champagne and hors d'oeuvres and topped by a large horse sculpted in ice. As the men drank their champagne, Peter challenged each of them to climb the table to the top of the ice horse. He went first, and barely held on, then rolled off into the shrimp salad. Parkhurst then tried and fell off immediately, and so did Stephen and Tom. Only Jeremy remained with her at the table. They were all on the floor laughing and covered with food, and squirting champagne.

"I don't want to try," Jeremy called down to them.

Then Cecelia, in her ruffled silk dress, stood up. She got up on the table and climbed to the level of the ice horse. She looked down at each of them, and silently, gracefully, with almost no effort, ascended the ice horse and mounted it, wrapped her legs around it, and held her back very stiffly, and put one hand up. She sat there for a minute and then got down, and without saying anything, found her coat and left them forever.

