

BRING ME THE HEAD OF TOMMY MOTTOLA

I.

“And so the choirboy says to priest, ‘I found it, but now my finger smells.’”

“Jesus, Kofi. That is fucking gross. Where did you hear that?”

“Lithuanian Attaché.”

“It’s a wonder anything gets done over there.”

“Bureaucracy, Todd. Membership has its privileges.”

“Sign me up, mofo. Say, you still dating that little Kenyan number?”

“With the cleft palette?”

“That’s the one.”

“Off and on. Her husband came to town, so...”

“Too bad, she was fucking hot. The UN is stocked full of fine strange.”

“Why do you think I took the job, Todd?”

“World peace or some shit like that?”

“You’re hilarious, Barrel.”

“Hey, Kofi? That’s my other line. Can I call you back?”

“I have to sign some papers anyway.”

“Cool, man. I’ll talk to you later. Hey, try and work on that diplomatic immunity for me.”

“I’ll see what I can do, Todd. No fucking promises.”

“Thanks, dude.”

“Later.”

Click.

“Todd Barrel here.”

“Mr. Barrel, this is Sandra from Mr. Puchachos’ office.”

“Hey Sandra.”

“How are you today?”

“Whatever.”

“Mr. Barrel, Mr. Puchachos has a client he thinks you’d be interested in. An artist named LB Streetz.”

“Interested in? I’m not in the hip-hop game. That’s The Boutros’ biz.”

“He asked me to ask you to speak with Mr. Streetz. Would you like me to put him through?”

“The Boutros?”

“No, Mr. Streetz.”

“Fine.”

“Yo.”

“Yo, you.”

“Dis LB Streetz.”

“LB, this is Todd Barrel. Let’s get this straight, I’m talking to you as a personal favor to The Boutros.”

“Be cool, I’m just tryin’ to get mine.”

“Get to the point, Fresh Prince.”

“So I’s in this record contract, right. And I recorded my album—fresh beats, killa rhymes, you know, tha bombs.”

“OK.”

“And my label won’t put out the album. So I goes to The Boutros and I’m like, ‘yo, put out my album.’”

“Hold on, LB. Is The Boutros there with you?”

“He here.”

“Yeah, pass him over.”

“Boutros.”

“Todd, how’s everything?”

“What the fuck, man?”

“I just wanted you to get to know the guy a little. He’s incredibly talented. A hitmaker.”

“Yeah, I’m sure he’s gonna burn up the charts but I’m on vacation with Charlotte.”

“You’ve been on vacation for four months.”

“So?”

“So, I need a favor, Todd.”

“Let’s hear it.”

“This guy, LB Streetz, signed with Tommy Mottola’s new label and recorded an album. I’ve heard it. It’s amazing.”

“And?”

“And so Tommy wouldn’t put out the album for unknown reasons. It sat on the fucking shelf for six months. I arranged through my lawyers and his manager to buy the album from Mottola, releasing LB from his contract. The ink was dry on my end, but when I tried to contact the manager a few days ago, I found out that he was dead.”

“Dead?”

“Murdered. Thrown off of Trump Tower.”

“Are the police investigating it?”

“The police have deemed it suicide. Which is impossible. This guy was going to come into some serious coin once the deal was done. I’m telling you, the album is going to be the next big thing.”

“Shit, I’m sorry about that, but what does it have to do with me?”

“I’m worried that LB is in danger. I’ve got to get him out of the country to a safe place with someone I trust.”

“I thought LB was from the ‘streetz.’ Isn’t he all hard and shit?”

“He has some personality quirks.”

“Personality quirks?”

“Please, Todd. I’m begging you.”

“Fine, send him down. But you’re paying for all of his expenses.”

“Done. Where are you?”

“Copacabana Palace Hotel, Rio de Janeiro.”

II.

I am a man who takes my leisure seriously and when it's interrupted by a bunch of yapping nonsense, I become quite agitated. My poolside breakfast of caviar and pineapple no longer looked appetizing. The Clamata juice was less clammy. But my mood was somewhat restored by watching my number one piece of ass, Charlotte Exxon, hop out of the pool and saunter towards me. Her eyes could light candles and her ass could stop bullets. She filled all the basic requirements—tall, blond, beautiful and rich.

Charlotte and I had been globe-trotting in grand style for going on four months. Gstaad, Amalfi, Beirut, St. Barths, the list went on and on. Though I was broke, she most certainly was not, and her lifestyle afforded me luxuries to which I was accustomed. The only catch was that I had to deliver earth-shattering orgasms to the heiress in daily intervals. Such is my life. She smiled and threw her wet towel at me.

“Hey, babe.”

“Hey there, sugar tits.”

“What's wrong, Todd? You look funny.”

“The Boutros called.”

“Yeah, how is Mister Boutros?”

“Fine, I guess. A friend of his might be in some trouble so I agreed to let him come down and hide out with us for a few days.”

“Did he shoot somebody?”

“No, nothing like that. I think somebody wants to shoot him.”

“Whoa.”

“You mind if he comes down, Char?”

“Not at all. It'll be fun to have someone else around. Not that you're not company enough.”

“Ouch. Please don't bite me at the table, Charlotte.”

“Fine! Spoil sport. Who's his friend anyway?”

“Some underground hip-hop guy who's about to have a huge debut album.”

“Yeah? What's his name?”

“LB Streetz.”

“LB Streetz!”

“Know him?”

“Hell, yeah! LB Streetz...The Retarded Rapper.”

III.

The next day LB flew into Rio and met us at the Copa. He was short and scraggly but didn't look retarded at all. His regular features suggested chromosomal normality. I forced a smile and shook his hand.

“LB?”

“Yo.”

“I'm Todd Barrel. Welcome to South America.”

“Dis Mexico?”

“It’s like Mexico, just more south.”

“Do they have tacos here?”

“They have beer. Wanna grab a cold one?”

“What’s cold?”

“Beer. Would you like to drink beer?”

“That’s cool.”

LB Streetz wasn’t retarded—he was just stupid. Suffering fools is not the way of the Barrel and I had to hold myself back from drilling a fucking hole in my head. I wasn’t happy about this uninvited houseguest.

Charlotte came down and greeted LB graciously. That bitch is a total sweetheart. We walked a few blocks down to an open air bar looking out on Copacabana beach. The place was a notorious hooker hangout that served up ice-cold chope, Brazilian piss water that passed for beer. It reminded me of Coors Light, so I drank it religiously.

The combination of sunshine and beer put me in a very relaxed mood. LB kept himself busy playing Star Wars with the ketchup bottle and salt and pepper shakers. Charlotte tried to make some light conversation with the rap tard.

“So, LB. I’ve heard your mix tape, Frankie Muniz is Titty Bitch.”

“I gotta beef with Frankie.”

“Do you have a girlfriend?”

“Naw.”

“No girlfriend? I’m sure the ladies are knocking down your door.”

“I’m shy. Never had a girl.”

“Never had a girlfriend or never had a girl?”

“Never.”

My ears pricked up and I joined the conversation.

“LB, you’ve never slept with a woman?”

“Naw.”

“We’re gonna fix that right here and now.”

Charlotte wasn’t so keen on the idea.

“Todd, don’t do what I think you’re going to do.”

“They say do what you love and the money will follow.”

“You mean my money.”

“Charlotte, I need 600 real.”

“Todd, I’m not going to pay for LB’s hooker.”

“Charlotte, please. Just give me the money.”

I called over to the dirtiest hooker in the bar. Spandex and hope were the only things holding her ravaged body into place. I laid out the deal and negotiated the price. LB would soon be a man.

As per usual Charlotte forked over the cash, and the whore took LB by the hand up into the apartment above the bar. Satisfied with my work, I slumped back into my chair and chuckled. Two strange-looking men walked in wearing mink overcoats and matching fedoras. I thought that it was odd for them to be so heavily clothed in this heat but you never knew what was going on with the trannies around there.

A few minutes later, we heard a scream and the sound of automatic rifles being fired in rapid succession. I ran up to the apartment and found a crying hooker in the corner and LB, naked as a Jay bird, riddled with holes. Charlotte followed me up and caught sight of the body.

“Oh, Todd. That’s awful.”

“At least he didn’t die a virgin.”

IV.

I put Charlotte on the first plane to Barcelona and called The Boutros with the news.

“Boutros.”

“How’s LB? You taking care of him?”

“Boutros, he’s dead.”

“Dead!”

“Two gunmen shot him down while he was in bed with a hooker.”

“At least he didn’t die a virgin.”

“I know. I guess your goldmine dried up.”

“Actually, Todd, the Tupac Effect can increase sales.”

“Good for you, I guess.”

“But I still don’t have the album. Todd, I have a proposition for you.”

“I don’t know, Boutros. This shit has already fucked up my vacation.”

“There’s money in it for you.”

“I do love to work.”

“Go to New York. Snoop around. Find out what’s happening. And get me that album.”

“What’s my cut?”

“Ten percent of domestic sales and a blowie from Lil’ Kim.”

“Boutros, how good can the album be? LB was an idiot.”

“An idiot savant.”

“Fine. Send me your AMEX Purple Card. I’m fucking broke.”

The American Express Black Card, a.k.a. Centurion™, is offered by invitation only to elite customers who spend over \$150K annually and comes with a \$2,500 yearly service charge. There’s a 24/7 concierge who can arrange jet travel, exclusive restaurant reservations, midnight shopping and a smattering of other high-end perks. In other words, it’s for bourgeois chumps. The AMEX Purple Card, a.k.a. El Mas Chingon™, will get you a police motorcade through San Salvador, insider information on Gazprom, lodging at Buckingham Palace and all the free trim you can possibly bang in over 180 countries. The Boutros had a purple card and I was going to abuse the hell out of it.

I caught a ride to JFK on Brazil’s presidential 767 and then choppered over to the Four Seasons, where I took the 3,000 square foot penthouse suite. For \$30K a night, it would do. Timothy, the Purple Card butler, brought me into the foyer of the suite where 24 beautiful call girls in evening gowns waited attentively. Sashes with their respective countries emblazoned across the front were draped around their bosoms. It was the fucking Epcot of escorts. I walked down the line inspecting bone structure, muscle tone and fighting spirit.

They were all healthy and hot. A busty 6’2” Swede stood out. She was built like a brick shithouse and reminded me of a masseuse that I once showered with back in Stockholm. I slowly turned my back to her and then swung around with a karate chop. Her reflexes were most impressive. She blocked my punch and squeezed my wrist with the strength of a Norse goddess. It was wintertime in New York and this sexy human Volvo would run reliably in the snow.

“What’s your name?”

“Ulla Rodneysdotter.”

“What’s your background Ulla?”

“I am from Swee-den. I study for NYU.”

“Do you have a problem with condoms?”

“Ya.”

I turned to the butler.

“She’s perfect, Timothy.”

“Excellent choice, sir.”

“Everybody else, your services are no longer required. Pick up your complimentary gift bags on the way out.”

I had set up a dinner with Donald Trump to discuss the details of the recent death of LB’s manager at Trump Tower. My office called his office. His office called my office. My office blew his office. His office Dirty Sanchezed my office. Ad infinitum. Ulla and I took a bath together and got to know each other. She soaped me and I soaped the hell out of her. We both got real clean.

After our little love session, we got dressed—her in fur and me in a brown leather tuxedo. Some considered it gauche. And those people were assholes. I thought that we would take a nice evening stroll through Central Park and take in some crisp wintry air on our way over to Trump Tower. My beaver-pelt coat would keep me warm.

Many young lovers have been caught between the moon and New York City, but on this particular night, my hand got caught between the ass and Ulla’s panty. Central Park never felt so good.

“That’s a powerful musk you’re wearing.”

“Ya.”

“Hints of cinnamon. Dash of tarragon. Pinch of swordfish. It’s nice.”

“Ya.”

“Swedish pony sweat? Hmm, you don’t say.”

“Ya.”

“Here? In the park? You are one freaky Swede.”

Just as the skirt was coming up, out of the shadows ran two dingos, howling and snarling. Their electronic dog collars and plaid doggie coats indicated some degree of domestication. Both beasts jumped into the air. I pulled my Bowie knife and ducked as one of the hounds flew above me. I sliced deep into his Australian belly. Ulla stood her ground and caught the other dingo by its jowls, snapping its jaws like carrot sticks and throwing the carcass to the ground. What a hoss.

Then came five men dressed head to toe in white ski suits and African ceremonial masks. The unfortunate accessories to their fashion statements were high-powered submachine guns that began firing at us. We jumped through the bushes and landed on an embankment, tumbling down the hill. Ulla and I landed with a thud. The guns began firing once again and we took refuge in a Park Service storage hut.

Inside was a fuel-injected, 400 horsepower Yamaha Marmot Killer snowmobile. It was time to undo some of Olmstead’s fine work and tear the park to shreds. I cranked up the Killer, Ulla hopped on back and we tore out. I could hear a fleet of other snowmobiles closing in from behind.

“Ulla—”

“Ya?”

“Do you know how to shoot an Uzi?”

“Ya.”

“Swedish Military Safecracking Unit, huh? Well, this ain’t no stethoscope. Aim for the whites of their balls.”

The five snowmobiles came at us like buzz saws. I hit the gas and took us through the Joey Ramone Skate Rink. The ice skaters screamed and scattered as we hit the rink, churning ice into the air and nearly clipping every preschooler this side of Fifth Avenue.

We cruised past the carousel. Bullets shattered my rear view mirrors.

“Ulla! Shoot, you busty Swede! Shoot!”

Ulla got over her gun shyness and popped off a few rounds. Oh, what a feeling. She was gun smitten. One of the sleds burst into flames as we rounded the carousel and crashed headlong into it. Flaming horsies moved round and round. Satan’s amusement park lives.

I spun the snowmobile around and drove toward the zoo. Those dickheads were still hot on our tail, so I took it up a notch and jumped the sled over the gates. We came down with a crash and watched one of their snowmobiles land in the shark tank. Three Bull Sharks ripped the bodies to shreds and gnawed the seats off the submerged sled. There wasn’t any time to leisurely watch the carnage as the four remaining assassins came after us.

Ulla tossed one of the Uzis to me and I sprayed them for cover. We ran over and hopped into the tiger cages.

“Don’t worry, Ulla. I’ve spent time in India. I know the way of the tiger.”

I stroked the belly of one of the circling beasts and whispered an ancient Brahmin prayer into his ear. We mounted him bareback and rode him toward the gunmen with super fast cat speed. The tiger flew through the air, clawing the assassins and ripping three of them in half. Ulla, not being used to riding tigers, had fallen off near the monkey house. I went back to find the Norse woman.

Inside the monkey house, Ulla had been captured by the last assassin, who was holding a gun to her head. I checked my Uzi. No more ammo. The man spoke through his mask with a strange, South African accent.

“You put the gun down and I will not be killing the girl.”
“Barrels don’t negotiate, dick weed.”

When disadvantaged by a lack of artillery, a warrior must use fear as his weapon. I walked slowly in their direction and grabbed a little Capuchin baby monkey. Though he was cute, he’d have to go. I French kissed the monkey and then ripped his tail off. Capuchin shrieks filled the air. A puddle of urine collected around the man’s boots and he began shaking like a girly man. The assassin was so scared that he let Ulla loose and ran into the shadows. She and I embraced.

“Look, you’ve soiled your dress.”
“Ya.”
“That’s not pee?”

A quick look at my watch revealed that we were tardy for dinner with Trump. We headed out to Trump Tower and rolled up to the front desk. A monkey-suited bellhop greeted us.

“Can I help you, sir?”
“Todd Barrel. I have a dinner appointment with The Donald.”
“Sir?”
“Donald Trump. You know, ‘You’re Fired!’”
“Just a moment, sir.”

The little fuck disappeared behind a door for a few minutes and came back with a large-haired woman in a pantsuit. She spoke softly.

“Mr. Barrel?”
“Yes.”
“Mr. Trump is in Sioux Falls meeting with Lakota tribe elders and Cy Sperling.”
“What?”
“With whom did you make the appointment?”
“I’m not quite sure. My people Chilidogged his people, his people Cleveland Steamered my —”
“Mr. Trump’s schedule has been blocked out for weeks.”
“Thank you, ma’am. I’m sure it was a mistake.”

It was a fucking trap. Someone had set me up. Ulla and I made our way back to the Four Seasons— this time we took a cab.

We changed into matching lime green tracksuits and I called Timothy.

“Timothy —“

“At your service, Mr. Barrel.”

“Get me Jay-Z.”

“I’ll arrange a call.”

“No calls. No middlemen. No Middlemarch. No Little Women. I want him up here tonight.”

“Yes, sir.”

I told Ulla to call up some of her sorority sisters and put together a platter of Swedish fingering food. We would also need plenty of baby oil. When you host a man like Jay-Z, you don’t insult him with pigs in blanket and a couple of Phuket whores. No, the man has style. I also believed him to have some very valuable information that would hopefully clear up this cluster fuck I’d gotten myself into.

Jay arrived, smooth as silk.

“Jay.”

“What up, B.?”

“A bunch of New York horseshit, man.”

“It can be a dangerous city.”

“Thanks for coming by. Could I interest you in some salmon or sorority girl?”

A few hours later we all relaxed in a makeshift sauna on the roof top. Swedish sorority girls are an industrious subspecies of lady—give them some silk sheets, a busted coffee table, a few slabs of pilfered marble and you’ve got yourself a sweat lodge. I got down to business with Jay.

“Jay, you know why I asked you here.”

“LB Streetz’s album.”

“Bingo. Why is everyone associated with this album dying?”

“Todd, you walked into the middle of a war.”

“A rap war?”

“Battle to the death.”

“Who’s at war?”

“I can’t tell you that, Todd. It’s too dangerous.”

“Jay, I just hooked you up with three Communications undergrads. How about some quid pro quo? Some tits for tat?”

“Todd, all I can give you is a name.”

“What I need is the fucking album.”

“The album’s not in New York. But he’ll know where to find it.”

“And who is this man?”

“Mbutu Clarkson.”

“Where is he?”

“Sierra Leone.”

V.

Though I was exhausted and my loins dry like the Gobi, Ulla and I packed up and headed out to

Teterboro. We chartered a private jet with sleeper sofa and porn library. I got on the horn and tracked down The Boutros.

“Boutros?”

“Yeah, Todd. I’m here.”

“What’s that noise?”

“I’m in Miami at a dog fight. Little dogs. Killer Chihuahuas.”

“That’s precious.”

“How’s it going in New York?”

“I’m on a plane to Sierra Leone right now—to see Mbutu Clarkson.”

“Oh, shit. How much do you know?”

“It’s time for full disclosure, Boutros. What have you gotten me into?”

“OK. Hip-hop is not what you think it is. There are certain powers behind the game.”

“And it’s not two-bit drug kingpins and clothing moguls.”

“No, it’s not. Rogue nations. Rogue Islands. Rogue CEOs of rogue rubber consortiums. Plastics. Polymers. Chocolate underwear. Rap is about information. Information is power.”

“Pretty fucking vague, Boutros.”

“Diamonds. Arms. Money laundering. Animal porn. The trade in black market items is a 20 trillion dollar business and it’s entirely off the books. Tax free. The same men are behind hip-hop music.”

“The rogues. What about the rappers?”

“Rap songs are a way to communicate through code.”

“No shit. Did you learn that in your African American Studies course?”

“The messages in the songs communicate when a certain drug deal might go down or where the shipment of ivory can be found. Sometimes it’s a letter to the shareholders, declaring what the cartel’s revenue was for the year. Other times it contains a threat.”

“So LB’s album contains some type of information?”

“Some very damaging information.”

“For whom?”

“For me.”

The Boutros treats his friends with loyalty but his business dealings were quite another matter. His crooked clients expected a little cooking of the books but they didn’t want him to set fire to the fucking library. I knew whatever was coming was going to be bad.

“So I was doing some work for The Gap, setting up cheap labor, breaking strikes, greasing foreign politicians.”

“Sounds pretty straightforward.”

“I was also setting up certain executives with fuck pads and prostitutes. Drugs, also. Hidden expense accounts.”

“Boutros, these are all standard business practices.”

“Well, I took pictures of them doing their dastardly deeds.”

“Blackmail.”

“And how. It was a beautiful scam. I had them allocate certain funds to an offshore company that ran sweatshops in Panama—my sweatshops.”

“And?”

“And so I manufactured some Fila sweatsuits in my sweatshops.”

“You had The Gap secretly finance your maquiladoras in Latin America?”

“The loans were payable on the date of never. Great business model.”

“Let me guess. Somebody squealed.”

“One Gap executive, disgruntled by a blue-balling from a hooker I hired, informed a certain consortium of influential Africans, Mottola’s bosses, about my misdealing.”

“And they’re threatening to release the album to inform The Gap—”

“Unless I sign over all the Road Helmet recording artists. They want my whole label!”

“The blackmailer becomes the blackmailee.”

“The mane wags the lion.”

“Jesus, Boutros. This is one tangled knot of shit. Simplify for me.”

“The man you are going to see, Mbutu Clarkson, is a liaison of sorts. A man who knows things. A man who’s connected and could help us.”

“I’ll see if I can locate the album.”

“Please, Todd. Find it. Find it and destroy it. My life depends on it.”

VI.

The jet approached the Freetown airport in Sierra Leone. The tarmac was clogged with emaciated cats and children playing with tires. We fired off a warning round to clear the way. Sierra Leone makes the poorest Latin American country look like fucking Biarritz. I’ve been to some dangerous corners of the globe, but I can tell you that this particular shit hole had me jumpy. Good thing I packed plenty of ammo and a husky Swedish sorority girl who eats child soldiers for breakfast.

I sent the jet up to Morocco lest it be stripped for parts by the locals. Outside the airport we engaged a driver, Shaggy, as our guide and point person. He drove a 1986 Ford Festiva that had the top welded off. He assured us that what the car lacked in overhead protection, it more than made up for in horsepower. This was a flat-out lie but I liked his salesmanship.

“Are you in Sierra Leone on business or pleasure?”

“A little of both, I hope, Shaggy.”

“Here for the convention?”

“The convention?”

“African Congress of Speedboat Vendors.”

“Yeah, we specialize in outboard reach arounds.”

“Should I take you to the Hotel Bintumani?”

“Take us to see Mbutu Clarkson.”

“You’re not speedboat vendors, are you?”

“We’re just newlyweds, Shaggy. Honeymooning in Sierra Leone.”

Shaggy was smart and quit asking questions. The mention of Mbutu Clarkson put the kibosh on his chit chat. Shaggy drove the Festiva far out of town. I kept my hands on the ivory Uzis the whole way. After a few hours we rolled up to a French styled villa with a high wall surrounding it. Guarding the perimeter were young boys in Tupac t-shirts, do rags and AK-47s. Wild dogs circled the compound.

“Keep the meter running, sir?”

“Get yourself home, Shaggy, before they chop your head off and steal your Air Jordans.”

Ulla and I were escorted through the gates by the armed guards. A Vietnam-era Chinook helicopter was parked in the courtyard. The stencil of Jane Fonda being sodomized by Lyndon Johnson was still visible, though time had slowly worn it down. We made our way to the back patio that looked out over the sea. A man in white linen suit sat with his back to us, smoking a massive cigar. He swiveled around to reveal a pockmarked face and burnt arms. Gold Ray Ban aviators shielded his eyes.

“Mr. Barrel, I’ve been expecting you.”

“Thank you for receiving us, Mr. Clarkson. I very much appreciate it.”

“Who is this lovely Nordic creature you’ve brought?”

“This is Ulla Rodneysdotter, my, um, assistant.”

“How radiant. And strong. Please, Ulla, allow Decker and Toots to show you to your chambers where you can freshen up. Todd and I have a few things to discuss.”

“Ya.”

Ulla was hesitant to repair under the guidance of Decker and Toots but Clarkson’s voice was somehow reassuring. He beckoned me to sit down.

“Mr. Barrel, let me begin by saying that you have foolishly involved yourself in something much bigger and dangerous than you can possibly imagine.”

“You don’t say.”

“There’s no turning back now.”

“I need that album, Mbutu. Or else The Boutros’ ass is grass.”

“Ah, yes. The Boutros. His little scheme has backfired.”

“Mbutu, it could just as easily have been you or me.”

“Indeed. A few years ago, The Boutros helped me out of an Angolan prison. I had summarily executed a Pepsi executive with a Mont Blanc fountain pen and a box of chicken. The authorities found my prints on the chicken and detained me.”

“Your signature move?”

“Amusing, Mr. Barrel. His favor was appreciated and now it is time for me to repay my gratitude.”

“So let’s mount up a plan.”

“We’ll discuss it over dinner. My chef has prepared a casserole...of soldiers’ hearts.”

VII.

Clarkson was just fucking with us. We weren’t going to go cannibal and get all Heart of Darkness. Indeed the opposite—the dinner was candlelit and served in a Spartan yet grand dining room. The three of us were fed a six course, traditional French meal with heavy creams, et al. Ulla kept requesting seconds, thirds and fourths. She’s a big girl and needs plenty of fuel to run that rig.

It was explained that the African Congress of Speedboat Vendors was a front for a West African contingency of strong men, arms dealers, diamond traders and record executives. LB’s album was to be reviewed and prepared for distribution. Promotional pictures of LB in a coffin next to a crying Brazilian hooker had already been printed up. Time was of the essence as Boutros was close to being fucked, so we planned to strike early the next morning.

After dinner, Ulla and I nuzzled underneath the zebra sheets in our quarters. I went back for seconds. She pounded a few shots of Aquavit.

“Ulla, if we come out of this alive, I’ll see to it that your tuition is paid in full.”

“Ya?”

“OK. And grad school.”

“Ya?”

“OK. And rent. Damn, you drive a hard bargain.”

“Ya.”

“I think you’re the tits, too.”

“Ya.”

“Of course, I’d love a back rub...lower...lower...lower—ahh, right there.”

After a splendid breakfast of grapefruit, crumpets, beer and steamed gazelle blood, everybody convened in the courtyard for the briefing. The plan was simple—Mbutu’s men would ride in the Chinook, providing air support for the rest of us who would attack by sea in the hydrofoil. Like the Chinook, Mbutu had bought an old hydrofoil at auction from the British government. It was a retired ship that had been used as a ferry in the Cola Wars of ’78. Mbutu had mounted .30 caliber machine guns on the front and Kawasaki Ninja motorcycles in the back.

Mbutu and his men said a prayer and danced around a gourd. I thought I should add something, so I came in with an ad-libbed speech.

“Gentleman, tribesmen, warriors. Three score and some years ago, Grandmaster Flash, Russell Simmons and some other dudes brought forth to this world a new sound, conceived in break beats and street parties, and dedicated to the proposition that if you give a man a mic, he will fuck bitches and make mad cash. Now we are engaged in a global war, testing whether a hustler so hell bent on blackmail and money laundering can endure the wrath of his West African rivals. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to this fucking task—that from these corrupt strongmen we get LB Streetz’s album—that we here highly resolve that The Boutros doesn’t get snuffed by The Gap—and that whoever brings me the head of Tommy Mottola, on the body, off the body, or hanging from the body, shall receive a case of Johnny Walker Red and a signed autograph of J. Lo.”

The men stood silent. Nobody had understood a fucking word. I fired my Uzis into the air and the boys went wild doing the same. Mbutu’s men started up the Chinook and cranked the tunes—Tupac and Dre’s hit song, “California.” They set off in a dusty trail. Mbutu, Ulla and I boarded the hydrofoil with a handful of other rebels. We pushed off and started down the coast.

The mood was quiet as we neared our target, the Hotel Bintumani—the finest residence in all of Sierra Leone. (Which wasn’t saying much.) Mbutu had received intelligence that the meeting would begin at 8 in the morning. The cast of attendees read like a War Crimes Tribunal’s most wanted list: Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, President of Sierra Leone and proprietor of the Bintumani, Gyude Bryant, transitional Chief of State of Liberia and father of Kobe (guard, LA Lakers, 1996-present), Christiaan Rudolph de Wet, Senior Vice President DeBeers West Africa and known necrophile, and James “Puff” Beethoven, African reggae star and influential cultural leader. With these power players at the table, security would be tight and armed to the teeth.

The morning air was hot and salty. The hotel came into sight. Mbutu shouldered a vintage bazooka and fired off a grenade. The explosion was enormous and sent the top three floors of the hotel tumbling. Armed guards and military men came out shooting. Ulla and I manned the .30 calibers and jammed while Mbutu’s men launched Molotov cocktails from three-man slingshots.

Bodies littered the beach yet more African cannon fodder advanced. The hydrofoil pulled up to the beach and we held tight for a few minutes, fending off an endless stream of fatigued Africans. They closed in on us as the shooting intensified. Our numbers were getting dangerously thin as the body count rose. Just when we feared we were outnumbered, “Straight Outta Compton” rang out through the speakers of the approaching Chinook.

The boys in the chopper dropped grenades and feral attack cats on our adversaries and picked off the exposed fighters. Our prospects began looking up. The Chinook landed next to us on the beach and we all went on the offensive.

Mbutu, Ulla and I hopped on the Kawasaki Ninjas and hauled ass through the soldiers like a Japanese Yakuza cavalry. Ulla wielded a hatchet with deadly prowess. The days of chopping wood in the harsh, Swedish winter were serving her well. Mbutu and I handled our machetes expertly, cutting limbs from the enemy and popping sick wheelies.

There was a row of thick bodyguards lined up in front of a plate glass window facing the pool. Inside those windows was most certainly the boardroom where our foes were convened. I called to Mbutu.

“Time for a hostile takeover.”

We revved up the motorcycles and tore ass up the hill. We hit the chaise lounges and rocketed over the pool and through the window. Glass flew everywhere. I landed my Ninja on the boardroom table and swung around, unloading my Uzis into the bodyguards. Mbutu was slashing at anything that moved. Behind me, a Japanese executive slowly pulled out a small pistol and quietly pointed it in my direction. Ulla jumped out and tossed her hatchet right between the little guy’s eyes. Thanks, babe.

I looked around and saw the familiar faces—Ahmed, Gyude, Mottola, Christiaan, Puff and that old whore monger, Kofi Annan. I couldn’t believe it.

“Kofi, what the fuck are you doing here?”

“Todd, I can explain.”

“Explain what? You’re associating with known assholes.”

“I tried to get out...and then they pull me back in!”

Tommy Mottola stood up and addressed me.

“You’ll never make it out of here alive, Todd Barrel.”

“Tommy, I’m about to slap you six ways to Sunday.”

“It’s too late. The album’s going out. The Boutros is fucked. No more Road Helmet records.”

“Shut the mouth, Mottola.”

I saw the master tapes on the table and walked over to get them. Ulla and Mbutu guarded the room

as the fighting continued outside. I threw the tapes into a blue L.L. Bean backpack and addressed the contingency.

“Listen up, motherfuckers. The party’s over. You cum-chuggers are a lucky lot. I’ve decided not to kill you...today. If you try anything funny, it won’t be so pleasant next time. And Kofi, all I can say is that I’m disappointed.”

Ulla, Mbutu and I bugged out and hopped in the Chinook. Though we had lost a few men, the mission was a great success. The chopper took us to the airport where we rendezvous’d with the jet. I thanked the men and handed out parting gifts—Sony televisions, Chinese boom boxes and Russian AK-47s. I bowed to Mbutu, showing him the greatest respect.

“Mbutu, you sure you don’t want to come with? They’ll be looking for you.”

“This is my country, Todd. I cannot leave. We will fight another day.”

“Alright, dude. Thanks for everything. I won’t forget.”

“Send me a Christmas card.”

“You got it, buddy.”

VIII.

Ulla and I boarded the jet and took off. Smooth fucking sailing. After a morning of gun battle, I like to relax with pitcher of strong martinis. I was stirring the beverages when the pilot called me up to the front.

“Sir.”

“What is it, Guthrow?”

“It’s the UN. They just radioed that we must change course and land on Acension Island.”

“This is Kofi’s work!”

“They said we were in violation of international law.”

“Fuck it.”

“They threatened to shoot us down, sir.”

“You sure it was the UN, Guthrow?”

“Fucking positive, Mr. Barrel.”

“Change course, we’re being brought in.”

Under normal circumstances I would have rolled the dice and kept on going but being in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean seriously narrowed our options. Captain Guthrow landed our bird on the island’s airstrip where a battalion of UN troops waited.

The troops tossed us in jail and took the master tapes. Ulla and I were placed in separate cells and I took to howling like a sex-starved dog. Much to the guards’ annoyance, I sang chain gang songs and rattled my tin cup across the iron bars.

“That’s the sound of the men, working on the chain gay-ee-ang. That’s the sound—”

“Zip it, Barrel.”

“Guards, I’m innocent!”

“Everybody’s innocent in here.”

“I want my phone call!”

“You’re about to toss Fernando’s salad if you don’t shut up.”

“I’m a man, not an animal!”

Prison life didn’t suit me well. Prison suits didn’t fit me well. Prison everything was driving me bananas. Like an answered prayer, a guard came in, handed me a telegram and unlocked my cell.

“Free to go, Barrel.”

“How did this—”

“Somebody high up is pulling strings for you. Diplomatic immunity. For you and the Swede.”

I opened the telegram and read:

Todd,

Sorry about the Sierra Leone fiasco. It was whack. Still time to move. Master tapes are en route to North Pole Environmental Observation Station with Mottola. Broadcast is scheduled for 8:00 a.m. MST.

Godspeed,

Kofi

Ulla and I were released on our own recognizance. Our incarceration had been a harrowing experience though the duration lasted only 22 hours. I got all Helsinki Syndromey and hugged my guards. They didn’t reciprocate my jailhouse love.

The jet was taken out of impound and fired up for the trans-Atlantic flight. We had no time to spare. I made a list of Tommy Mottola’s enemies who could possibly help us—Michael Jackson, Mariah Carey, Al Sharpton. Shit, why not throw in OJ Simpson, Ann Heche and Jesse Helms? It seemed that everyone on the wrong side of Mottola was batty as hell. The more I thought about it, the more I began to like this Mottola fellow. I kind of wished that my enemies were as famous and fruity as his. But Mottola had decided to cross The Boutros; and when you cross The Boutros, you fuck with The Barrel.

I called up Michael Jackson, who was busy dangling Prince Michael out of a window in Dubai, but I managed to get him on speakerphone and he agreed to let us use his Neverland Sno-cats. He had purchased them in the event that twenty inches of snow fell in Los Angeles. Al Sharpton was more than willing to dispatch one hundred Nation of Islam Militants for our Mottola coup and Mariah Carey just went on and on about how “Tommy likes his eggs scrambled” and “Tommy doesn’t do missionary” and “Tommy this, Tommy that.” A whole lot of fucking good that did us.

IX.

At 7 a.m. the next day, The Boutros, Ulla, one hundred armed Islamic militants and I were gathered

on a snowy plane two miles from the North Pole. I was all out of speeches, so I just passed around a bottle of Bacardi 151 to warm our spirits. The North Pole is a desolate place where dreams are dashed and the ice always comes crushed. The Sno-cats were started and the smell of burning diesel lifted my spirits. This was going to be fun.

Mottola must have picked us up on radar because a missile blew up one of our Sno-cats. It could have been a meteor, but I'd rather err on the side of artillery. I gave the signal for the Sno-cats to pull into formation, creating a column of snow plowing vehicles. The Observation Station was in sight. A ten-story antenna protruded from the ground—Mottola's mouthpiece to the world.

Out from the barracks, armed Sony loyalists lined up like a regiment of British Civil War soldiers and knelt, loading their rifles and preparing to fire. There's no creativity in corporate America and this Victorian era military strategy was proof of that. Before they shot, a sonic pulse triggered and fried all of our electrical systems. The Sno-cats halted. My watch stopped at 7:34.

I shot off a flare, signaling the men to open up the back doors of the Sno-cats. Technology or no, we were game. Two by two, saddled polar bears leapt from the vehicles carrying Nation of Islam riders with pump action shotguns. The Sony loyalists didn't know what hit them. The sight of bow-tied black men riding polar bears was foreboding. The Nation of Islam's bearsmanship was unparalleled and their fighting fierce.

The snow ran red with blood. The Boutros, Ulla and I brought up the back. In all the confusion, we made it to the door of the Observation Station. The Boutros packed some C4 to the handle and blew it off its hinges. Inside we were met with more gunfire.

The station had been converted from a bastion of science to a monument to big business. Grey cubicles dotted the room with Sony loyalists taking protection behind copy machines and water coolers. The loyalists pinned us in behind a row of cubicles. Dell PC's, golf toys, Dilbert cartoons, wacky pencils and framed pictures of children were churned into dust as the armed barrage continued. The Boutros pulled out a brick of C4, gnawed off a piece and lobbed it across the room. The explosion was deafening. The floor was torn out and with it fell a large portion of the loyalists. We leapt over the hole and made our way down the hall, picking off random shooters and torching the break room. I called to The Boutros.

“Boutros, time to end transmission.”

“The studio's to the left, Todd.”

“Double cross, snatch 'n pass. Post up on three.”

“Two, one, break!”

Boutros sprinted down the hallway and I followed a few steps behind. He tossed the C4 back to me as he slid into the wall, covering the hall with gunfire. I caught the explosive, jumped into the air and threw it towards the studio like a shortstop throwing out to first. Kablammo! Ulla brought up the back and tossed hatchets into the smoke. We all entered.

Mottola's bodyguards lay on the floor, stoutly hatcheted. Tommy stood pointing a large pistol at me and his pinky ring at Ulla. I could see the CD tray with disc in it, ready to go live. I gave him the ultimatum.

“Put it down, Mottola. It’s three against one, and you’re one unlucky wop.”

“OK, OK. Just don’t shoot me. And please don’t make any racial slurs.”

“Slowly, pooppy-head.”

He lowered the pistol but with his other hand, he shot a laser out of his pinky ring at Ulla. She couldn’t dodge fast enough and caught the searing beam of heat on her left ear. Sliced clean off. Ulla screamed in pain.

“Ya!”

“It’s cauterized, baby. Stay cool.”

Mottola leapt toward the CD player, pinkie headed straight for the play button. The Boutros quickly fired a solo shot that landed square on the ring and blew his digit to bits. Eye for an eye. Pinkie for an ear. The Boutros spoke up.

“Don’t do it, Tommy.”

“Easy for you to say, Boutros. Those Africans have my nuts in vice.”

“So let’s make a deal.”

“I’m dead if I do and dead if I don’t. Not much room to bargain.”

“I’ll get down to brass tacks, Mottola. I like your style. Always have, always will.”

“Touché, Puchachos.”

“You showed real panache when you banged Celion Dion at six months pregnant. You demonstrated your manhood by sledge-hammering Diddy’s Maybach at the VH1 Kenny Rogers Roast. I was in admiration when you expense accounted that mail order bride for Burt Bacharach.”

“Accounting irregularities are my specialty.”

“I need a man like you who has the brains to swindle young hip-hop artists and the brawn to crack their skulls when they’ve served their purpose. Road Helmet Records needs the head of Tommy Mottola.”

“You’d step down as CEO?”

“I’d retain the title of Chairman and Exalted Grand Wizard, but yes, you’d run the show. My petroleum consulting is taking up much of my time and I’ve lost untold millions in billable hours taking care of this silly debacle.”

“Will you finance a new bionic pinkie finger and laser ring?”

“Whatever it takes.”

“And protect me from the Africans?”

“There’s an Israeli hit squad working on it as we speak.”

“Well then, you’ve got a deal, Boutros.”

“Forgive me if I don’t shake on it, Mottola.”

X.

Tommy Mottola took the helm of Road Helmet Records and delivered its most profitable quarter yet. All the members of the African Speedboat Vendors were summarily burned at the stake except for one—Christiaan Rudolph de Wet, who was arrested by Cape Town authorities for molesting parrot corpses at the local vet. The Boutros provided me with ample funds to set up a trust for Ulla that

would take care of her education and apartment near the NYU campus. I helped christen the place by ravishing the monosyllabic Swede on her fresh pine wood floors.

“It’s the end of the road, Ulla.”

“Ya.”

“Any Styrofoam cups in this place? I’m gonna finish this margarita in the car.”

“Ya.”

“Baby, wipe those tears from your face. You knew it wouldn’t last.”

“Ya.”

“Don’t get greedy, Ulla. A tall drink of Todd doesn’t mean you get the whole Barrel.”

“Ya.”

“Alright. Put on the PVC underwear, but afterwards I have to go.”