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ONIONS

Prologue

The desert air was crisp and sharp on the morning of February 3rd, 1980, but the cacti and scrub

brush that peppered the bleak flatland near Lozen, Arizona didn't mind the weather.

Winter, spring,

summer, fall, it was all the same to these hardy inhabitants of the desert.

It was a cloudless day. A beat-up Pinto station wagon wove erratically down Highway 60, a

newly constructed four-lane highway. Separated by 100 yards of sagebrush, the new highway ran

parallel to old Highway 58, a two-lane road that was a throw-back to the Route 66 days.

Highway 58

had served earlier, more gentle generations of drivers, and it was because of nostalgia that many locals

had urged the City Council to let the old highway stand and not tear it down. The Council had agreed,

at least for the time-being, and even though 58 was an eye sore, it was still there, cracks and all with

grass sprouting through the crumbling asphalt.

But Marvin Niebold didn't care about all that. He was nursing a broken heart because his wife

of 40 years had left him and moved out, leaving Marvin with the reason for her departure; a huge

drinking problem.

Niebold, a car salesman, was slumped over, bleary-eyed, his potbelly caressing the steering

wheel. He was drunk and barely awake. Marvin had spent the night boozing in a road-side bar a few

miles down the highway to the south and was due at work in two hours.

A local radio program featuring radio host Blake Burdett was blaring loudly. Host Burdett had

just finished playing a song. "That was Simon and Garfunkel's gorgeous 'Bridge Over Troubled

Water' it's 7 a.m., an' speakin' of troubled waters, this sports dome thing's gettin' out-a-hand ... my

wife Lanie and I are hardly speakin,' she's a Pro-Domer, I'm a no-Domer. I think it'll bankrupt the

county but Lanie doesn't care about that, all she wants is to get those pro football players here with

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their bulgin' muscles an' multi-million dollar swaggers. I suggested she get a lobotomy, she suggested I

jump off the roof. Ouch!"

Niebold was clutching the steering wheel tightly. He'd slowed to a speed of 40 miles an

hour

because of his double vision, but the car was still weaving down the road, crossing over into the

oncoming lane. Fortunately, there weren't any other cars on the highway.

Niebold's eyelids drooped momentarily, he shook himself awake, looked back at the road, then

glanced casually to his right. His puffy eyes widened.

He was staring at a profuse column of bubbles rising into the early morning sky a great distance

away. The bubbles were reflecting the early morning rays of sunlight and looked like thousands of tiny

sparkling suns rising upward into a sapphire sky. The sight so awestruck the tipsy driver, he forgot he

was behind the wheel of a car. The station wagon swerved, spun off the road, and came to a rest upside

down. A moment later, Niebold stuck his head out, looked around, and crawled out as the Disk Jockey

continued his harangue: "Lines are still open for that call-in vote: Pro-Domers use 555-1231, No-

Domers use 555-1232, and watch your language, folks, my kids Sarah and Janice are listenin'!"

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A little while later, a Sheriff's patrol car and a tow-truck pulled up to find Niebold sleeping on

the road beside his overturned vehicle. As the tow-truck driver hooked up the Pinto, the Sheriff, a tall,

leather-faced 45 year-old Chiricahua Apache named Goyathlay Terrell, awakened Niebold and began

instructing the weary drunk in the intricacies of walking a straight line. As he negotiated the mark,

Niebold was trying to explain to Sheriff Terrell the reason for his accident by pointing in the direction

of the bubbles. The Sheriff looked over and saw a bungalow a quarter mile away. The sky above was

clear and blue.

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When the Sheriff looked back, Niebold had fallen and was lying on his back on the ground

staring blankly at the sky. Terrell helped the woozy driver to his feet and into his patrol car. As the

squad car sped away, the faint sounds of a trumpet playing Ravel's Bolero could be heard piercing the

clear desert air.

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The white stucco bungalow had an old-world charm. It could have been a Swiss chalet or a

cottage nestling in a quaint hamlet in old-world England. To the right of the front door, a plaque boldly

stated: THIS HOUSE WAS BUILT IN 1922 BY JAMES GALANO AND THE GREAT BANDO.

On the side of the cottage, a small brook bubbled gently down a sloping hill and poured over an

outcropping of rock, forming a natural waterfall that dropped 8 to 10 feet into a shallow pool in the side

yard near the kitchen. On a flat rock by the pool, a towel was drying beside a box of Mr. Bubble.

The sound of the trumpet was growing more intense as it traversed the rigors of Ravel's driving

composition. A 1951 Red Crosley Hotshot sports car in mint condition sat in the dirt driveway. In the

backyard, a tightrope was stretched across the length of the yard 8 feet off the ground. A balancing

pole rested on the grass under the tightrope.

Inside the kitchen, the trumpet was driving relentlessly to the end of the piece. A big old Labrador named Boscoe was sitting with his head cocked to one side staring intensely at something.

Suddenly, the Lab threw his head back and howled as Roscoe, a Calico cat lounging languidly on the

cool, linoleum floor, sat staring at the same object ... which was ...

... Sandrine Galano Fuller, 80, retired circus performer, last surviving member of the famous

Flying Galanos. Sandrine was wearing a sweatsuit and red bandanna, standing on her head, feet

propped against the wall, playing the trumpet. She arrived at the climax of the piece and held the last

note ... forever ...

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Later that afternoon, traffic was light on highway 60. Sandrine's Hotshot convertible zipped

along, whipping past other cars. On the rear of her car, wedged between the bumper, were two card

tables. A rope was firmly tied around the tables attaching them to the spare tire mounting on the back

of the vehicle. Still wearing her sweatsuit and bandana, Mrs. Fuller was sitting behind the wheel,

ramrod straight. Beside her on the seat was a small cassette player along with some flyers. The voice

on the cassette was speaking French: "Il recommence a pleuvoir ..."

"Il recommence a pleuvoir ..." Sandrine repeated.

The voice on the tape spoke another line: "Quel est le plat-du-jour?"

Sandrine repeated, "Quel est le plat-du-jour?"

A pick-up truck cut in front of the Hotshot causing the elderly driver to swerve onto the shoulder. Without missing a beat, Mrs. Fuller shouted an obscenity, steered back into the lane, and continued down the highway.

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Chapter One

Onions Meets His Match

Charles Wesley Onions hated everything. He hated his father for dying when Onions was six

and leaving him alone with his alcoholic mother. He hated his mother for sending him off to a foster

home when he was seven. He hated his first foster mom who beat him and the 15 other foster parents

who abused him and made him work before and after school. But most of all, Onions hated himself.

He was chubby, had freckles popping out all over his face, and his nose was too short. At 12, he was

big for his age, and he knew his clot of red hair made him a target for those stupid, snot-nosed kids at

school. His eyes revealed a wariness gained from too many blows delivered too early in his young life.

This was Charles Wesley Onions' state of mind when he tried to steal Mrs. Fuller's purse. It was three o'clock in the afternoon and Onions had just gotten out of school. He'd only been

attending Mark Twain middle school two months, having just been sent to his 16th foster home in two

years. His new foster mother, Mrs Williams, had two young kids and a baby, and Onions, once again,

felt like an intruder. She hadn't abused him, at least so far, but he was expecting the worst. He knew

she'd taken him in for one reason only: the payment she received from the State Adoption Agency.

Mrs. Williams had already mentioned several times that Onions had to work. She needed the money.

They always needed the money. He'd thought about robbing a bank and taking off, but there was

something called prison ... and he'd heard that prison wasn't a nice place for young boys with freckles.

Onions was gliding slowly down the sidewalk on his skateboard near the town square of Lozen

when he saw Mrs. Fuller's Hotshot pull to the curb fifty feet ahead of him. As he watched, Sandrine

hopped briskly out of the car with the alacrity of a trained athlete, hurried to a parking meter, and

opened her purse. Onions saw his chance. He picked up his skateboarding pace and zoomed toward

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what he thought was a helpless senior. Just as Mrs. Fuller arrived at the meter, Onions whipped by, snatched the purse, and sped away.

In a shot, the "senior" jumped back in her car, switched on the ignition, and screeched away from the curb. Onions looked over. To his surprise, the Hotshot was zipping along beside him.

Suddenly the car accelerated, came to an open driveway ahead of the kid, did a sharp right angle turn onto the sidewalk cutting off the thief's escape. Onions slammed into the side of the Hotshot and hit the ground hard.

Without a pause, Sandrine was out of the car and standing over him. She snatched her purse back as Onions began moaning and holding his leg. When he glanced up at her, he had the fleeting impression of an army sergeant he'd seen in a cable movie who'd tripped a new recruit and sent him sprawling in the mud. Her blue eyes were blazing spotlights that shot right through him, and Onions knew instantly he'd made a big mistake.

"Really hurts, huh?"

"Yeah," Onions said between moans, milking the minor wound for all it was worth.

"Good. Let's get a cop!"

Onions sat up. If Mrs. Williams found out what he'd done, he'd be sent away again.

"Please,

lady, don't get the cops!" he pleaded, " I'm sorry, I'm really sorry, I need money, I can't get a job ..."

A crowd was gathering as Mrs. Fuller's eyes continued boring into him. "I've heard that before!"

"I'm not kiddin,' I swear it!"

Sandrine eyed the kid skeptically, then paused. "You want a job?"

"Yeah, yeah, I'll do anything, I swear!"

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By now the crowd had grown into a small mob. Onions glanced around with the look of a trapped ferret.

Mrs. Fuller thought a moment, then made a decision. "C'mon."

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The City Hall of Lozen, Arizona, located in the town square, was an old, rectangular, yellowed

4-story building that had seen better days. It had a short lawn bordering the sidewalk and an old Civil

War cannon stood under a hickory tree to the right of the entranceway. An American flag was draped

from the second floor along with the flag of Arizona. The ledge above the flags was

occupied by a string of pigeons who often relieved themselves on the sidewalk below. Visitors had complained about having to circumvent the mess, but no action had been taken. The town was named after Lozen, the female Apache who fought beside Geronimo in the 1800s. Lozen was a legendary warrior with special powers. She was a skilled Shaman who could foretell the location of the enemy. She accomplished this feat by going to a deserted area and raising her hands upturned to the sky. Then she would turn slowly in a circle. When her palms tingled, she stopped and knew that this was the direction from which the enemy would attack. The intensity of the tingling told her how close they were. She saved her fellow warriors and tribe countless times by this amazing power of vaticination.

The city had become the center of an important agricultural and cattle region. There were many wealthy cattlemen and farmers with money to burn, and Mayor Scriggins knew how to appeal to their sense of pride. And pocketbooks. The idea of putting Lozen on the cultural map had given rise to the private funding of many art galleries, a museum, and several libraries. The leap to a sports dome that would attract major league baseball and NFL teams to the area was a logical one, and after a number of City Council meetings (wealthy folks invited), the Mayor and his supporters had sold the idea to a number of backers.

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Sandrine Fuller was standing on the sidewalk in front of the City Hall building behind a card table piled high with flyers and circulars. A sign on the table read **NO ON THE SPORTS DOME!**

A somewhat bewildered Onions was pacing on the sidewalk nearby wearing a **NO ON THE SPORTS DOME!** picket sign over his shoulders, passing out flyers.

A couple approached Mrs. Fuller's card table and read the sign. As the man studied the information on the flyer, he said, "Why are you against it? Most people think it's a great idea, it'll do a lot of good for the city."

"It's all in the flyer," Sandrine said as she handed the man and his companion a circular. "VOTE

NO ON THE DOME! IT'S AN ALBATROSS ---!" Mrs. Fuller yelled to a woman passing by.

Onions had been checking his new boss out of the corner of his eye, trying to get a handle on the requirements of his new job. A woman passing by glanced at the sign hanging over Onion's neck.

"What's this all about?" she said.

Onions stared at her blankly. "I dunno," he said with a shrug, handing the woman a flyer, " ... somethin' about an albatross ..."

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Mayor Scriggins' office was on the fourth floor of City Hall with a window facing the street. As of yet, the Mayor hadn't heard about Mrs. Fuller and her campaign against City Hall, but he was about to. Sandrine's chant could be heard floating up from below.

The office was a typical politician's office with yellowing pictures of past office holders dotting the wall behind the Mayor, a tall, thin man with a ruddy face, a white mustache, and bushy eyebrows.

His eyebrows dominated his face. They'd never been trimmed or plucked or brushed or singed and now they were running amuck above the Mayor's eyes. His nose was bulbous and very red. His Honor had rosacea, a chronic inflammatory disorder of the proboscis that made it red and swollen. It looked

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like a bad case of acne. He'd tried every remedy on the market, but nothing worked except ice packs.

That's why he had a small cooler under his desk. There was also room in the cooler for a six pack of beer which His Honor imbibed daily at lunch with his usual ham and cheese on rye and potato chips.

There was a multi-colored throw-rug on the floor under the Mayor's desk that was more practical than decorative; it covered coffee stains from past years and several cracks in the wood floor that had been widening at an alarming rate since the Mayor had taken office several years earlier. An

old musty couch was stuck against the wall opposite the Mayor; it looked like a throwback to the days

of King Louis the Third. The overall impression of the room was one of musty degeneration, corruption, and throat-gagging cigar smoke which was presently filling the room. The ambience of

decay in the room was a reflection of the three self-satisfied men now occupying it.

Scriggins was sitting behind a huge, old-fashioned mahogany desk studying a newspaper. The

desk was cluttered with magazines, local bulletins from advocacy groups, requests for

personal favors
in the form of donated coffee mugs, snow globes, plaques, and other cheap bribes.
Scriggins was
obviously enjoying what he was reading; a smug smile of satisfaction broke out as he
spoke.
"Results of latest poll on Prop 3: For the Dome: 71% ... Against the Dome: 13 % ... Don't
know:
9%." Scriggins tossed the paper on his desk, then picked up a glass of champagne. "Well,
boys, looks
like we're in business."
Councilman Ted Bixel, a trim-looking, charismatic man in his late 30's, had his back
turned to
the Mayor. He'd been looking out the window, checking the activities of Mrs. Fuller on
the sidewalk
below.
Bixel had a law degree from USC where he'd played wide receiver. The Trojans had won
the
Rose Bowl his second year on the team and he'd never gotten over it. Bixel milked the
"big man on
campus" routine to the hilt, always had lots of girlfriends and was the life of continuous
parties. His
social graces were lacking, but he made up for it with his good looks and charm.
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Bixel came from money; he seldom had to mix with the riff raff who had to earn a living.
His
father was a wealthy cattleman in the county and Ted had an easy path to city
councilman. He'd met
his wife Marcia at USC, and although he had a high profile as a politician on the way up,
Marcia was
the power behind the man.
Bixel closed the window, shutting out Mrs. Fuller's chant, then picked up a glass of
champagne
from the Mayor's desk. "To the Scriggins' Sports Dome, Your Honor!"
"To my bank balance, Councilman Bixel," Scriggins said, raising his glass, "and to yours.
That
is, if Zinnerman Construction's going to be as grateful to us as it's been in the past ..."
The Mayor turned to a third man, Sam Zinnerman, a short, heavysset, jowly thug lounging
in an
easy chair across from His Honor. Zinnerman was smoking an obscenely large cigar
which was the
source of the grey smog billowing out of his petulant mouth and darkening the room with
its noxious
fumes. Zinnerman's short, hefty legs were crossed revealing his passion: red, green, and
orange argyle
socks.
Zinnerman raised his glass. His thin-lipped smile was like the bottom line of a ledger. He

said,

"Gentlemen, I will pour you out a blessing ..." and slurped the champagne down in one loud gulp.

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It was dusk when Mrs. Fuller and her new recruit approached the Hotshot. After tying the card

tables to the rear of the car and retrieving Onions' skateboard from the floor of the passenger side,

Sandrine opened her purse, took out a \$5 dollar bill, and handed it to Onions. The kid stared at the bill,

having trouble computing his good fortune.

"Thanks," he stammered.

"You earned it. Stay out of trouble." Mrs. Fuller walked around to the driver's side of the car

and opened the door.

"What's the dome?" Onions said.

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Mrs. Fuller paused, studying him. "You live here and you don't know?"

Onions shrugged, then looked away. "Just moved here ..."

"Where do you live?"

"With Mrs. Williams on 14th Avenue." He hesitated, not sure if he should reveal his situation.

"She's my new foster mom."

Sandrine looked at him with keener interest. "How many have you had?"

"This is my 16th," Onions said, dreading her reaction.

Mrs. Fuller retrieved Onions' skateboard from the car and handed it to him. "Got a name?"

"Charlie Onions. Charles Wesley Onions. A relative of mine put a dictionary together."

"Oh? Which one?"

"I don't know ... I think it was in England, Oxford or something ..."

Sandrine paused, deep in thought, studying the boy for a moment. "Are you speaking about

Charles Westcott Onions, English Lexicographer and Etymologist?"

Onions shrugged. "Yeah, I guess so."

Mrs. Fuller got in the car and started the engine. "Well, Mr. Onions, I could use a helper. Saturday morning, 8:30 sharp. 105th Avenue off Highway 60. Two bucks an hour.

Deal?"

"Yeah, okay."

Sandrine shook her head at the "yeah," shot away from the curb, sped down the street, and

disappeared around the corner.

Onions looked down at the \$5 dollar bill in his hand. It was all his to spend. A feeling of euphoria swept over him, something he hadn't felt in a long time. He was thinking about all the

different things he could buy when he spied a comic book store a block away. He shoved the bill in his

pocket, jumped on his skateboard, and took off down the street. The pain in his leg, caused by his fall on the cement sidewalk, was suddenly gone.

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Chapter Two

Felicia Hardy

Onions was in love. No one knew about his secret passion. It all began with the Spiderman

issue of comic book #194 the year before. Spidey had been introduced to Felicia Hardy, the Black Cat.

She was the daughter of Walter Hardy, a famous cat burglar. Felicia had learned daddy's burgling

tricks and added some special powers of her own to become a good criminal. Spidey changed all that,

and Onions couldn't wait to get the latest installment. He had every Black Cat comic produced and

always managed to come up with the .40 cents to buy them.

C.W. stopped in front of the store and gazed in the window. The latest issues were lined up,

temptingly laid out on a green velvet backing with an overhead spot illuminating their beauty. There

was The Trial of Galatus, Dark Phoenix Saga, She Hulk, the Hulk, Alpha Flight, Fantastic Four, and X

Men. His heart pounding with anticipation, Onions picked up his skateboard, opened the door, and

limped inside.

The store smelled like an old library, moldy and close, like the books were a thousand years old

and needed to be sprayed with disinfectant. The space was small and cramped but packed with comics.

There were books on shelves along the walls, on tables, comics visible through glass under the main

counter. There were several other tables with hundreds of back issues of almost every comic book

issued. You could browse through them and find some really precious nuggets.

There were two other boys hanging out in the store. The only other person was the owner.

At

least Onions thought he was the owner. He looked old (maybe Mrs. Fuller's age), had a beard, wore

glasses, was totally bald, and had a face with sharp features ... high, prominent cheekbones, a pointed

chin, and large ears that stood straight out. Onions thought he looked like a guy who'd just been tapped

on the shoulder, turned around and seen a zombie or vampire looming over him.

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Charles Wesley felt really good. He had enough money to buy several comics and

decided to
take his time, to enjoy every second, and not to hurry. He'd been speeding through his
whole life, from
one foster home to another, from one stupid school to another one even more stupid, from
one bad
experience to the next, and so on. But now, without a watch, he was wallowing in a
timeless universe
of pure pleasure. He wandered slowly around the store, checking under piles of comics,
looking for
some of his favorites and others he'd never heard of; he climbed a ladder that slid
sideways along the
shelves to check out comics high on the wall, then studied the latest releases under lock
and key inside
the glass shelves on the counter.
After much deliberation and deep thought, he settled on the latest Black Cat comic with
Felicia
on the cover dressed in her usual revealing outfit. He added the Dark Phoenix Saga comic
(he had
them all) in which Jean Grey died in the arms of her true hero, Cyclops. Onions had been
nuts about
Jean; he'd read every comic she'd appeared in. He'd been devastated by her death, but
when he
discovered Felicia, he switched affections. C.W. had seen a cardboard advertisement of
the Black Cat
propped up in a comic book store three foster homes ago in Tuscon and made off with it
when the clerk
was looking the other way. One of his prized possessions, it was sitting on his desk at
Mrs. Williams'
home at this very moment.
On the way to check out, Onions picked up the latest issues of The Trial of Galatus, The
Hulk,
Alpha Flight, and The Fantastic Four. His purchases would cut his fiver in two, but he
was glad to be
able to get the comics he loved.
The old guy was standing behind an ancient, brown, mechanical cash register. A throw-
back to
the '60s, it had seen better days. The two boys, probably in their early teens, were being
checked out,
and when it was Onions turn, the owner looked at him and smiled.
"Where'd you get all that hair?" he said in a friendly voice.
Onions was surprised. He thought the guy would be nasty like most comic book clerks
were.

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Onions laughed. "Ask my mom, if you can find her."
The man eyed the young boy standing in front of him and nodded. Onions instantly felt a
connection with the guy. It seemed he knew what the kid had been through. The man was

standing
beside the open drawer of the cash register.
"My cash register isn't working," the owner said. "A cockroach got into the electrical
wiring
and fouled everything up. That's why I'm not using it."
"Okay," Onions said and placed his purchases on the counter.
"I see you've got good taste, young man. The Trial of Galatus and the Dark Phoenix Saga
are
two of my most popular comics. How'd you feel about Jean Grey?"
"I didn't think they had to kill her off," Onions said. "She was a great character ... but I
like
Felicia Hardy more."
The old guy laughed. "Yes, I can see why! She's pretty shapely ... and pretty sassy. She's
a
good balance for Spiderman, don't you think?"
"Yeah," Onions muttered. He glanced out the window and realized it was getting dark
outside.
He was going to be late ... again. Mrs. Williams had warned him about staying away from
home after
school. "I gotta go."
The old guy took Onion's money and gave him change. "Want me to put these in a sack?"
"No, thanks, I'll take 'em like this."
"Okay. Thanks," the old guy said. "My name is Ramerio, Ram for short. Hope to see you
again."
"Yeah."
Onions stepped outside, placed his skateboard on the ground, stuck the six comics under
his
belt, and pulled his shirt down to hide the evidence. He didn't want Mrs. Williams to
know where he'd
been all afternoon.

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Chapter Three

Mrs. Williams

Mrs. Williams lived on 14th Avenue in a small, white, stucco house with a white picket
fence
and flowers along the front porch. There were only two bedrooms, so Onions had to share
the one
bedroom with the other two kids. The baby stayed in the bedroom with its mother.
Onions' current step-mother was in her 30s, plump, with a care-worn face. Her disheveled
blond hair hadn't been coiffed for months, due to a lack of funds.
It was after 8 p.m. when Onions limped through the door. Mrs. Williams was in the
kitchen
preparing a late dinner; her two boys were watching a cartoon on the TV in the living
room. As her
new border entered, she looked over.

"It's nearly 8:00, Charles," she said with an edge to her voice. "You know I want you to

come

right home after school. What's your excuse this time?"

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Williams. I met a woman on the way home, she gave me a job."

The mother looked at him a moment. "What kind of job?"

"It's somethin' about the Dome. We were picketing at City Hall ... we were handing out flyers 'n stuff."

"I know about the Dome. Why was she picketing?"

"She doesn't like it. She wants people to vote 'no' on the bond deal."

Mrs. Williams shrugged as she piled mashed potatoes onto a plate. "I think it's a good idea; I

don't know why she doesn't like it." A pause, then, "How much did she pay you?"

Onions thought before he answered. He'd already spent \$2.40 cents of his five. "It was a couple of dollars, I guess."

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"Give it to me. You know I want you to get a steady job. We just don't have enough to feed the

three kids, and now you. The State don't give me enough to pay for your costs. You're a big kid, you

require lots of food."

Onions handed Mrs. Williams two dollars. "She said I could come and work for her on Saturdays. Gonna' pay me ... \$1.50 an hour," he said, fibbing again about the amount.

"Good," Mrs. Williams said as she placed the food on the kitchen table. "I can sure use the

money. Get washed up. Dinner's pretty late tonight and the kids are really hungry."

Onions went into his bedroom and removed the comics from under his belt. He stuffed them

under the mattress where he knew they'd be safe.

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Onions was seated at the end of the dinner table. Whitney, the six-year old, was seated to Onions' right; Arley, two, was sitting between his mom and his brother.

Onions was staring at his plate, poking at his food. He didn't like macaroni and cheese or salad. Suddenly Whitney grabbed his younger brother's slice of white bread.

"MOMMA! MOMMA!" Arley yelled, "HE STOLE MY BREAD!"

"Whitney? Give that back. Now!" Mrs. Williams said sternly. Whitney tossed the bread back

on his brother's plate.

Onions hated being around younger kids, especially in a new foster home. They were never

nice, never treated him with respect or awareness of how he felt. Long ago he'd given up any desire to

be understood or commiserated with. He'd learned from his birth mother not to look for or want

sympathy or even an understanding smile. Life was hard, and Onions had accepted that fact. It made

him a good fighter when boys tried to bully him. He'd learned it didn't matter how big a

bully was. If

Onions took care of him at the first smart aleck remark or push or threatening look, it never happened

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again. Onion's favorite punch was a sharp slam to the belly. And Onions always hit with everything he

had. Sometimes he had to follow up with a jab to the face, but usually the quick body blow did the job.

He didn't like fighting. He never wanted to fight. But he was alone. He didn't have a big brother to back him up or support him or talk to him or make him feel wanted. Charles Wesley Onions

had accepted his lot in life and never looked for anything but a blow or a snub. So he was always ready

to be the first one to do the snubbing or slamming.

"How'd you get the limp?" Mrs. Williams said.

"I fell off my skateboard ... there was a big crack in the sidewalk ..."

Mrs. Williams nodded. "There are a lot of those in Lozen. The Mayor and City Council are

more interested in buildin' golf courses and country clubs than dealin' with us riff raff."

She studied

him a moment. "You be careful, Charles. I don't want no hospital bills comin' at me, you hear?"

Onions nodded. "Yeah, okay," as the baby started to cry.

"I gotta' change this one," she said. Mrs. Williams picked the baby up and walked toward her

bedroom. She turned back. "I got some Ben-Gay for that injury. I'll get it for you."

As she exited into the bedroom and closed the door, Whitney catapulted a macaroni at Onions

with his spoon. It hit the new boarder in his hair and stuck there. Instantly Onions grabbed a hand full

of macs and threw them with all his might at the boy, hitting him in the face.

Whitney's face fell as Onions got up. "You do that again, Whitney, I'll see to it that your head's

cut off," Onions said with his meanest face. Obviously shaken, Whitney looked back at his plate and

kept his eyes down. "Yeah, I'll have it sliced right off and it'll be real, real bloody! There's a Big Black

Monster in the Closet ... *your* closet. I've seen him in there a couple of times. He won't mess with me

'cause I'm too big, but he loves to slice up little kids like you and your brother and eat 'em ... so you'd

better watch it, kid. And if you say anything to your mother, I'll have him slice her head off and your

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little brother's head and the baby sister's head too! He'll do what I say, and if I say 'chop their head off,'

he'll chop ... and chop ... and CHOP ... and ..."

Whitney ran into his bedroom and shut the door. Onions sat back down, sighed, and took a bite

of bread. It was tasteless, but so what, so was life. But when he quieted down, he realized that he felt

good ... *real* good. Felicia Hardy was waiting ...

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Chapter Four

The Waterfall

It was Saturday morning, another cool and cloudless beginning in the desert. The little waterfall

was bouncing joyfully into the small shallow pool in Mrs. Fuller's side yard, creating tiny eddies and

swirls and a few ripples. The box of Mr. Bubble sat at a jaunty angle near the pool. Mr. Bubble, a

bubble with a happy face, was pictured sitting in his bathtub at home surrounded by overflowing

bubbles. If you looked closely, you could see he had little bubble arms and little bubble fingers.

.....

Inside Mrs. Fuller's cottage, the hands on the grandfather clock in the kitchen read precisely

7:59. There was a moment of silence ripe with anticipation. Suddenly, Sandrine Fuller entered the

kitchen briskly in a bathrobe with a towel over her shoulders and breezed through the kitchen door

leading to the side yard followed by a jubilant Boscoe and a more restrained Roscoe. The screen door

slammed shut. In a few beats, the hand of the old grandfather clock flipped over to 8 and began tolling.

.....

It was a little after 8 a.m. Onions was zipping down old Highway 58 on his skateboard a quarter of a mile from the Fuller residence with a copy of a Black Cat comic stuck in his back pocket.

He was dodging the grass-strewn cracks as best he could, heading toward Mrs. Fuller's cottage on the

outskirts of town, grateful he'd found a way to earn some cash. He could see mountains in the distance

to his left, and nearer, a gently sloping range of hills. Open grassland in the valley to his right stretched

for miles, ending in a blue haze where another set of mountains could be seen. Except for a dove's

plaintive call, all that could be heard was Onion's skateboard scraping across concrete along with an

occasional speeding car on Highway 60 a hundred yards away.

.....

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Onions had read his newly acquired comic books wall into the night, saving the best for last.

Felicia Hardy's exploits were always exciting! Her relationship with Spiderman fascinated him, probably because he identified with the guy in the spider suit who swung through the city on cobweb strings and chased down the bad guys.

The only way Onions could read unnoticed by Mrs. Williams or the two boys in the bedroom with him was to wait until the boys were asleep, then carefully slip the comics out from under the mattress. Onions always carried a small flashlight. He'd headed for the corner, placed his back to the sleeping kids, and made sure there was no spillage of light into the room. Mrs. Williams had promised to wake him up at 7 a.m. so he'd be sure to arrive at Mrs. Fuller's cottage on time. Having the next few hours to himself had been a great pleasure. Reading comics was a great way for the kid to escape the misery of his life, because when he read, he was lost in another world, a simple world of good guys and bad guys where justice usually triumphed.

Onions had flicked on the flashlight and opened the first page of *The Trial of Galatus* ... but his greatest expectation would be when he got to the final comic book ... **THE BLACK CAT!**

.....
C.W. glanced ahead. A massive array of brightly colored bubbles was rising into the heavens, dancing provocatively in the sky above Mrs. Fuller's cottage. The distant sounds of a trumpet pierced the crisp desert air. Onions coasted momentarily, listening to the trumpet and staring at the bubbles, puzzled by their coincidence, then continued moving down the deserted road.

.....
As the young worker-for-hire reached his destination and glided down the hard dirt path that led to Mrs. Fuller's cottage, the first thing that struck him was the waterfall. Water cascaded down the small hill near the cottage through an outcropping where two rocks converged. Its source was a natural spring several miles up in the hills behind the Fuller cottage that formed a natural creek. As it gently

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dropped to sea level, the creek had split off in small rivulets, one of them ending in Mrs. Fuller's yard.

The builders of the home had laid small rocks around the area forming the water into a small pool.

After dropping the ten feet into the pool, the water ran off through a rocky path and disappeared,

probably into an underground river.

It was an unusual phenomenon, and Onions was quite impressed by the natural beauty the waterfall presented. Mrs. Fuller told him later that even in dry weather, the little creek continued to

provide a source of water for the waterfall.

As Onions approached the cottage, he noticed the old Hotshot parked in the dirt driveway near

the garage, (the Hotshot that had slammed into him on his skateboard). He walked over and checked it

out, trying to see if he could locate a dent where it struck him. There was no mark.

Onions shrugged

and glanced into the garage. It was empty except for a bicycle leaning against the wall.

The sound of the trumpet had become too loud to ignore. Onions headed for its source which

led him around to the kitchen, close to the pool. He peeked through the screen door. Mrs. Fuller was

standing on her head in the corner playing the trumpet. Her rapt audience was a large dog and a

yellow-streaked cat lying nearby on the linoleum. Both were staring at the inverted body in the corner.

As Onions watched fascinated, Sandrine hit the last note and held it forever, causing the dog to break

into a series of loud howls.

Onions knocked on the screen, which was a major mistake. The dog yelped, then bounded over

to the door, jumped against it knocking it open and sending the kid to the ground where he lay spread

eagled. Boscoe was on him instantly, licking his face, whining, and scattering slobber everywhere.

"HELP! HELP!" Onions yelled, "GET HIM OFF ME!"

Mrs. Fuller appeared at the screen door holding her trumpet. "Boscoe! BOSCOE! KNOCK IT

OFF!", she yelled. The dog stuck its tail between its legs and headed back to his master.

"Come in,

Charles. Don't mind Boscoe, he gets a little carried away when I have guests."

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Onions sat up. Boscoe immediately turned back, bounced to the kid and began licking his face

again. Onions started to laugh. "Hey! Hey, boy! You're a friendly guy, aren't you?" He ruffled

Boscoe's neck which sent the ecstatic animal into greater paroxysm of joy. Mrs. Fuller shook her head

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