

Chapter 1

Munich, Germany

It was mid-summer and the first time in months Munich experienced sun. Most of the time clouds shroud the Bavarian city. Laying close to the Alps, the weather is dreary, rainy or a constant drizzle. Up along a narrow street, in the art district, the sunny weather gave Theodore an upbeat feeling. Happy but unsure, he dabs another color on the canvas. His mind is somewhat on his work. Down deep in his consciousness, a foreboding threat pesters.

The room flooded with north light. Theodore studied his last dab. He could not get it out of his mind what Leoma, his Art Rep said to him the other day: show your work in the United States. The problem shown—known—EXPOSED, a dangerous risk to reveal his past. Whenever Leoma brought up the subject to show in America, Captain Lawrence Lobo flashed before his eyes. Exploding red images and a thundering, splitting BOOM burst throughout his mind.

The name Lobo was synonymous with death. Never forgetting the expression on Lobo's face as though Theodore was vermin not fit for life. Lobo's stare was coldblooded as though squeezing any life from his victim. Since then, Theodore became another person—Karsten Tauber, to hide his fear and tragedy. At every moment, around all corners, Lobo threatened. A face glaring at him, snarling like a rabid dog ready to devour him, chunk by chunk.

Theodore stepped back and again viewed the painting. He stroked his white beard while making a last judgment. His untidy white hair swung freely back and forth with every move of his head. The last dabble did not work. Colors laid flat next to each other dead, no spontaneity, like unwanted memories. He scraped off the paint and mixed a new batch, brushed it on the canvas, then stepped back to view it, it shimmered. He applied more color to recreate the last impression—it lived—as though touched by its creator.

The doorbell rang. Turning to answer the intercom, Leoma's voice boomed, "Karsten, I've got good news."

"Ja, Leoma, was ist los?" His mind was not on the immediate statement. "What's up?" he reiterated.

“Let me in,” she screamed. “I’ve got good news.”

He pushed the intercom button to release the lock. Leoma entered and rushed up the stairwell to Theodore’s studio. She noticed him studying his brush strokes, stopped and waited until he turned his attention to her.

“It’s nice, Karsten. It’ll be great along with the others we’ve selected.”

Theodore mused biting his lip, his brow pinched. “I don’t know. I don’t think so, Leoma.”

“Why? This one’s lovely. It sings, Karsten.” “I’ve got enough. Why another painting?” She gazed at the combination of complementary colors shimmering across the canvas.

“It communicates. Pulsates. Lives. I sense the three guys talk to each other without saying anything. They appear to interconnect as though they

were one.”

“You see that?”

“Who are the boys? They don’t look familiar.”

“They’re people I knew many years ago. This is how I remember them.”

She stared at it, tilting her head. “I really love this painting. You brought out their personality, almost as if I know them...especially the one in the middle.” Her face churned. “Is it you?”

Theodore did not answer her question. “You really think it’s that good?”

“Of course. A good match to go into the exhibition.”

“We’ve got enough, Leoma. I don’t want to take more than fifty.”

“We’ll go over it tomorrow.”

“The first thing.” He glanced her way. “What was so important, Leoma?”

“We got Los Angeles.”

“Finally.” He expressed uncertainty. Los Angeles was his ultimate fear.

“Aren’t you proud? Happy? Excited?”

Remembering Abraham and George, their long, kept secrets, he stammered, “I guess so.” He could not conceive reuniting because of a bond long ago broken. Would his buddies remember him? Would they forgive him? The years became years of guilt.

She saw something in his eyes that was not right. “Do you want to go to Los Angeles?”

“Uh, yeah, uh sure. Like you said it’ll confirm my status as a world-renowned artist.”

“What’s the Problem, Karsten? Is there some- thing you don’t like about LA?”

“No problem. My mind is on my work.”

A week later, the studio vibrated with activity as light streamed into the room making the atmosphere, upbeat, bright, and gay. Everyone felt spirited. Theodore had reservations concerning his last painting. He rocked his head to the tempo of soft music, and bit his lip not really wanting to be confronted with a decision. Student aides brought paintings to the far wall. Theodore and Leoma commented on each painting to make the final selection.

Turning to Theodore, Leoma said, “What do you think, Karsten?”

“That’ll be enough.” His expression turned and twisted as though he was not sure. He pondered the last painting in the group. “It’ll be a good choice for MOCA.”

“I’d like to see that one you finished a week ago in the exhibition.” She pointed to the painting in the far corner.

“It’s not dry.”

“We still have time.”

“I don’t think so, besides, I like it the best of all my paintings. I’m keeping it for my permanent col- lection.”

“What are you waiting for, Karsten? To die, so people can see your greatest masterpieces?”

“My best works are for the Foundation.”

“You can select that one. What difference does it make? If it doesn’t sell, you’ve lost nothing.”

“Leoma, I’m only taking fifty...not fifty-one. The rest will stay here. Besides, that one’s my best. I don’t want it to go. Somebody might want it and I can’t refuse. You know how I am, I can’t say no.”

“Tell them it’s sold. We’ll put a sticker on it: SOLD.”

“I don’t know,” he said, glancing over at the painting.

“Good, it’s going. I’ll make the decision to eliminate one.” She smiled. “I’ll tell the courier to come next Tuesday.”

“If it’s not dry by the time they’re shipped, it’s going in my personal collection, the Karsten Art Foundation.”

The Lufthansa jet taxied along the LAX tarmac. It stopped and rested at the Tom Bradley International Terminal waiting for docking, then proceeded. Leoma watched the activity outside the window until a bell dinged indicating the seat belt lights turned off. She stood, stretched, and reached for her carry-on. “You look worried, Karsten. What’s the problem?”

“No problem. It’s strange coming here.”

“Why is it strange?”

“I’m not sure.”

“It isn’t any different from any other show. It’ll be like New York, Paris, London, Berlin, Moscow.”

“It feels strange, you know...Déjà Vu.”

“Have you been here before?” She projected a curious stare, probing.

Theodore avoided her inquiry, reached for the overhead compartment, and withdrew his valise. “Let’s get through customs. It may take all day. We have things to declare.”

A large man slipped in behind Leoma. “I’ll see you inside the terminal, Karsten.”

“Right,” he said, and gave a short wave.

When the two entered customs, Leoma smiled while Theodore glanced around as though under surveillance. Noticing a camera hanging from the ceiling, he visually searched the crowd for any curious onlooker.

The customs agent noticed the two, and nodded for them to step forward.

“Do you have something to declare today?” asked the customs officer.

Theodore glanced at Leoma. “Just my art work.”

“What brings you to the United States...business or pleasure?”

“We’re here on business. I’m getting my work ready to show at MOCA in two weeks.”

“You’re an artist?”

“Yes.”

“Modern, contemporary, traditional, or other?”

Theodore glanced at Leoma. She said, “He’s contemporary.”

“How long is your stay?”

They handed over their passports. While going through their documents, the customs officer kept glancing at Theodore making him nervous. The customs officer kept glancing at him as though he somehow recognized him, possibly, from an old photograph. Sweat dampened his brow, and he fidgeted with his fingers. His eyes darted around to avoid eye contact.

The customs officer handed back their pass- ports, and said, “Welcome to America. Good luck on your show.”

Three weeks later near MOCA, Leoma and Theodore sat at a nearby deli having lunch. Leoma picked up the menu and read the list of sandwiches. Theodore already knew what he was going to have—a Pastrami-on-rye. He skimmed over the items, and pondered what to say. “I’m staying here, not going back with you next week. Perhaps I’ll re- tune next month, maybe later. It depends on how things go.”

“Why?”

“I’m seeing somebody I met a few years back,” he said, not telling her the truth.

“I didn’t know you knew anybody here.”

“I called him last week, and he wants to see me.”

“Is he buying a painting?”

“He’s a collector, and there’s a chance of a sale.” “Where did you meet him?”

“In Italy. Do you remember the time I went to escape that horrid winter? It was when I did that series called Romanze.”

She peered into his eyes, searching for any hid- den thoughts. “You were always quiet and avoided people. Somehow, I got the impression you didn’t like being around foreigners, especially Americans. Why this now?”

“It’s a promise. Nothing more.” He spotted an elderly man who gazed at him as though he may know him. He glanced back and forth at the man while talking to Leoma. “We should be going, Leoma.”

The next week, Theodore entered the Belmont Shore Pier. Memories flooded back. A soft breeze came off the ocean and bathed his face. It gave him an overwhelming sense of being home. The salt- water aroma brought him back to his youth. He took a deep breath, and the salt

air filled his lungs. Seagulls lined the railing nearby. One searched for edibles, and another hobbled along the pier. Two

gulls danced and screeched in front of fishermen for discarded tidbits.

He recalled the breathtaking image spanning across the horizon—the Santa Ana Mountains to the east, and Palo Verdes west of Long Beach. Remember to get up early before sunrise, as George always said.

Seeing three boys coming up along the pier with their fishing tackle strutting to their favorite seat brought back a time he loved.

The stillness and serenity of the morning brought chills up and down his spine. Would they remember to come this Fourth of July? A day the three boys promised to meet.

Everything beyond the pier appeared unreal and mystic. The year 1945 remembered, a bitter end for him, but it meant his survival.

He leaned over the railing to kill time and pondered their reunion. It made him nervous and excited. They agreed to meet between eight and noon. Along the cliff, streetlamps dotted Ocean Boulevard giving off their amber glow. He arrived before the designated time.

The hour passed; soon fishermen would line the pier. It was what he remembered. Three boys going fishing before sunrise: get there early to get a place near the end. It's the best place to catch fish. Every moment echoed in remembered images.

The western sky remained dark and filled with stars. In the east, the sun began its morning ritual. Streetlights turned off. A few fishermen approached the pier to get an early catch, but most stayed home to celebrate Independence Day.

It was so long ago, but clear as yesterday. They were so young and innocent, and so naïve. The things they did, the things they wished to do. Were their dreams and ambitions fulfilled? His was.

People rushed to get a seat along the railing. The sun poked its head above the Santa Ana Mountains. Its fiery blaze gave him hope, warmth, invitation.

Three fishermen waited for the bait shop to open. Theodore looked for familiar faces or gestures.

Chapter 2

At the Pier

A troubled slumber woke Abraham. The night clock read earlier than expected.

Thoughts and memories made him anxious. He sat up and rubbed his eyes to release the tenseness. It was no different from any other Fourth of July, but somehow atypical this time. He whispered, "It couldn't be," reflecting on a dream.

Dressing became cumbersome, awkward, and sluggish. The dream he had kept gnawing at him. The expression on his face indicated otherwise, dreams do not come true. He smirked.

His left palm itched. Focusing on his scar running across his hand, it marked the boy's loyalty. An echo rang in his ears, beckoning, calling. He glanced around, was it George telling him something from the hereafter? He did not want a sign telling him Theodor died.

He blinked hard to wake up. Not wanting to disturb Barbara, he slipped from the bedroom. Slowly along the hallway to the living room, he tipped-toed, closed the front door gently, and stepped into the early morning damp air. The fresh air brought life to him.

The three hours-drive to the Belmont Shore Pier passes unnoticed. Driving along HWY-101, the I-405, Lakewood Boulevard, and Xemino was a blur. His palm kept annoying him. Then turning onto 2nd Street, Livingston, and Termino, became automatic. Not aware of his driving, unnoticed landmarks passed. His first awareness came when he saw the Olympic Pool. He turned into the parking lot and entered an empty space. To one side, campers ready for the holiday waited for the day's activities. A fisherman exited his camper and gave his wife a kiss. Abraham smiled.

The sun poked its head over the Santa Ana Mountains. Anxious, his gait appeared rushed. Abraham began his long walk up the pier.

Theodore turned staring up the pier. In the distance, coming toward him, he heard footsteps echo. He hoped. A fisherman came stomping down the pier to try his luck. Theodore's

smile turned to a grimace. A young man came into view, not George or Abraham. His buddies would not carry fishing tackle.

The sun, now in full view, promised a warm day. Seagulls hovered along the pier hoping a fisherman would discard a chum or bait or scrap. Two gulls swooped down near the water. They did agile maneuvers to encourage the fisherman to throw edibles. It did not matter what they discarded: bread crumbs, crackers, meat, anything—anything dead was just as good.

Fishermen prepared their rods. The morning air, damp, cool, and crisp gave promise. More cars filled the parking lot.

A fisherman sat next to Theodore. The man did not glance at the bearded stranger. To him, Theodore was another homeless killing time and waiting for a needed handout.

Far out at sea, a tanker sailed across the horizon, going, gone, never to return. A hint of Santa Catalina's Black Jack Mountain rose above the mist. The distant island familiar to Theodore brought back his youth and excited times, picking up girls and getting drunk.

Theodore glanced at the fisherman's wrist- watch, now eight-thirty. Would they show up? A promise made so long ago.

Chilly outside, he walked over to the bait shack to get a cup of coffee. In the distance, foot-steps echo up the pier. He stopped. Spotted a man dressed in leisure clothes, slacks, sweatshirt, and a black baseball cap came rushed his way. The man's stride was so familiar; he could not forget that pace.

Theodore stepped out in front of the man. The other man stopped and gazed at the bearded stranger. The gray beard is unfamiliar to him. A closer look at his eyes, something familiar grabbed his attention.

Theodore scanned the man's face. Was it his buddy? The shrug, the twinkle in the man's eyes was so familiar. Theodore smiled, hoping.

Abraham returned a doubtful grin. He raised his palms in defense. Theodore glanced at Abraham's left palm, smiled, and raised his palm. The recognition was immediate.

Clasping their hands together, the two men hugged.

Abraham said, "It's been a long time." "Too long," answers Theodore.

"You remembered."

"How could I forget?"

"We have a lot to talk about." "A lifetime."

Chapter 3

The Cemetery

The two men exited the car and entered the cemetery. They surveyed the tombstones.

The old tall majestic granite and marble monoliths echoed a time no longer. Scattered over the manicured lawn simple bronze plaques denoted the present. Each showed their age, weathered, tarnished. Abraham turned left and motioned for his friend to follow. Entering but nervous he winced. Three similar gravestones sparked a memory of three hopeful boys draped arm in arm over their shoulders.

The two men glanced across the cemetery. They walked arm in arm saying nothing. Their extended shadows caressed tombstones as they passed.

Abraham tilted his black baseball cap to shield his eyes from the glaring sun.

Theodore's white beard and tousled gray hair give him an ascetic quality. His clothes made him appear he came from a hippy commune, a mish-mash of assorted clothing. He carried three long stem roses—one white, two red.

Small birds tweeted and rushed into and from trees. The warm sun beat down on the dry, green grass. Parched yellow grass scattered here and there across the lawn indicated the sun's harshness. It marked the beginning of a long hot summer. Tombstones cast shadows resembled the deceased standing at attention.

Abraham stopped at a grave. He motioned with his hand. "Here he is, Ted."

Theodore noticed two unmarked bronze plaques next to George's grave. He stroked his beard and combed back his scraggly hair with his fingers, and read:

Never Forgotten SAMUEL GEORGE BUTZ

Born: Shamus Seoirse Bryan

July 4, 1925 — February 13, 1981

Theodore conveyed a queried stare. "How do you pronounce his middle name?" He stammered with the word, "See-oy-ers."

Abraham shrugged his shoulders. "As I remember, his mother telling me, his father was from Ireland. It's an Irish name, Shamus. She pronounced his second name Sheorghsh. They're the Irish equivalent of Samuel George. The Butz, if you remember was his stepfather's name. It became legal after graduating from Wilson High School."

Theodore chuckled. "I can see why he used George."

"If you recall, being 'Irish' had a stigma back then."

Theodore nodded. "I always thought he was a Butz. Remember we used to make jokes about it." Abraham returned a meditative nod. "Is his mother still alive?"

"No, she died after George. It was devastating to her. His stepfather died three years before from lung cancer. If you remember, he smoked like a chimney."

"I don't remember."

"We all smoked back then."

"Right! Those were the times. Everybody smoked."

"Remember the time we tried it?"

"It was funny, wasn't it? George was the only one who puked. You turned green."

"You still smoke, Ted?"

"No. I gave it up after I became a new person. You?"

"No! I gave it up because it no longer suited me." Theodore bent over and laid the three roses across George's plaque. Abraham bent over and laid three stones beside them. "One for you George. One from me, and one from Ted, here." Tears filled his eyes. "He's back George; after all these years." He took his handkerchief, and wiped his eyes and blew his nose, then

stooped over and touched George's plaque. "We're back together again." Choked up, he coughed. "Can you believe it? It's like a miracle. Ted's alive and here with us."

"I remember you weren't religious, Abe. Do you go to temple now?"

"No. I became a Catholic when I married Barbara."

"Why the stones?"

"I guess it's the Jewishness in me. When it comes to death, my Jewish nature takes over."

He wiped his eyes. "Do you practice any religion, Ted?"

"In a way. My art is my religion. It's the only world making sense to me. When I became Karsten Tauber, I had an awakening. I go to Mass with the Stadls on Sundays, though. Frau Stadl told me if I pray to the Virgin, my wish would come true."

"Did it?"

"Oh, yes, more than imaginable. Every day I thank God. It's been my salvation."

"I wish I had your faith, Ted. The daily hassle gets in the way. You're lucky. Most people are only religious on Sundays. After that, who cares? Many people would give anything to reinvent themselves." His eyes skimmed over the plaques and headstones. His eyes indicated he wished for the same opportunity. He wiped the tears from his eyes, blinked, and focused on the gravestones. A woman entered the memorial park. She stopped three headstones away and stooped.

She spoke with a Hispanic intonation. "Here are new flowers, Jesse."

Theodore nodded as though counting headstones. "She's the only one here, besides us. Everybody at home visits departed loved ones. Maintaining their graves is important. Fresh flowers and plants always cover the graves." He nodded in her direction. "Germans have always had an interest for the departed. I've never sensed that here. Have things changed?"

"It'll be like when we die, memories lost, everything forgotten. After two generations, who were you? A name on a headstone. No one will ever know our stories."

"How often do you visit George's grave?"

"I came every year on our birthday, hoping you'd show up at the pier." He adjusted his cap to shade his eyes. "I don't even miss my mother, but I missed George. I missed you something

awful, too. You never left my mind. It was what made me re- turn, hoping you'd show up one day."

"Is my aunt still alive?" asked Theodore.

"No!"

"Is she here?"

"No! George told me, she and her husband chose cremation. Their ashes blown to the wind."

"She married then."

"Yes, during the war. She married a fellow who worked at Todd Shipyards. Guy's name was Gus Tokken. They're both dead."

"Your mother?"

"She and her husband died a few years ago. She married a guy named Terry Bowing."

"That's not a Jewish name."

"No. Bowing was an atheist. He often reiterated, anyone who believed in God is a fool, and I was a fool for marrying a Catholic. He always said they're church puppets." He glanced at George's plaque, the three roses, and the three stones. "We never got along. He always tried to convert me."

"You go to their funeral?"

"No. I got a letter explaining everything. They didn't want a funeral. Mother's family had a memorial service. Then Terry died three years before. No one cared about him."

"How did they die?"

"Mom died of old age. Terry was obese and died from complications due to diabetes."

"Anybody we used to know still around these days?"

"When I married Barbara, Santa Barbara became my home. I lost all contact with our friends, except for George. He told me the changes around Long Beach."

"Did George ever marry?"

"Yeah, he married that gal he dated in high school. You remember Pauline Summers?"

"That cute girl he necked with all the time."

"Yeah, that's the gal. Do you remember the school prom? You couldn't pry them apart."

"They sucked face all night."

"I didn't see them dance."

"What's she doing these days? I'd like to speak to her."

"You don't want to talk to her. Their story is tragic. I'll tell you later."

An old tombstone caught Abraham's attention. "Do you remember the night we went to that Halloween party scavenger hunt to find names in this cemetery?"

"At Molly Hokum's house where the police caught you and George...the moon was full and bright, a perfect night for a Halloween party. Moonbeams cast spooky shadows across open spaces. Strange images hid in nooks and crannies. Trick-or-treaters rushed from house to house to get their allotted dole.

"Okay everybody, we're going to do this during the Halloween Party," said Mrs. Hokum.

"What's that?" Jane giggled. She turned to her friends and smiled. "We'll bob for apples."

"No! Everybody's going on a scavenger hunt."

"Scavenger hunt!" everybody shouted. "Where?"

"At the cemetery down the street."

"That's not a scavenger hunt," Theodore said. "A scavenger hunt is hunting for things nobody wants."

"This's a Halloween scavenger hunt."

"What are we going to hunt Mrs. Hokum...dead bodies, bats, skeletons...vampires?"

Everybody laughed. Abraham threw a queasy stare to George.

"Names!" Mrs. Hokum shouted. "Names of the dead. I want the date they died."

"What names are we going to get Mrs. Hokum?"

"I have a list I've taken from the cemetery. Every name is different." She smiled and scanned the expressions on the kid's faces. "I have one hint."

"What's that, Mrs. Hokum?"

"Every name on the list died before 1910. The one who gets the most names wins the prize."

George said, "What's the prize, Mrs. Hokum?"

She turned toward the dining room table. "You pick whichever package you want," and pointed at the three wrapped boxes.

George's eyes centered on the largest package. Abraham noticed George's face light up. He tapped Theodore, and whispered, "Look at

George's eyes. They're the same when he saw the treasure box. Remember?" He winked.

Theodore chuckled. "But this time I'll bet it's not gold. More like a bucket of bones...chicken bones. Maybe it's coal or both."

Abraham chuckled. "I wouldn't be surprised if it wasn't some monkey's paw."

The commotion buzzed in the room. Mrs. Hokum clapped her hands to quiet the kids. "Remember to be back by ten o'clock." The buzz quieted. "No prize for anyone after ten. Do you have your flashlight?" All the kids held up their flashlight. "Remember, the one with the most names get the first prize. There's a second and third, too."

George smiled, envisioning his name on the largest package.

The hunt was on. Everybody held their list of names, and turned on their flashlights.

George pointed his flashlight at his list.

Abraham said, "What are you trying to do, George?"

"Just seeing if I know somebody."

"Why? You're not from around here."

"Just curious."

They walked into the graveyard, slow and cautious. Flashlight turned on, the cemetery soon filled with beacons flashing, searching, pointing. Moonbeams cast across the graveyard. Tombstones appeared like the dead waiting. One girl clung onto her boyfriend. Her eyes darted from shadow to imaginary objects hidden behind tombstones.

Twenty minutes into the hunt, a slow-moving cop car drove by the cemetery and flashed its spotlight across the cemetery, probing for trespassers.

Everybody shouted, "It's the coppers."

One boy yelled, "Let's get the hell outta here before the fuzz gets us."

Abraham ran to the opposite corner of the graveyard. Theodore ran, weaving in and out tombstones. Then, he tripped into an open grave—PLUNK! A surge of pain shot through his leg.

The large moon cast its rays upon him as though he was center stage. He moaned and rubbed his ankle. His sprained ankle swelled twice its size. He waited.

Eager to get the last name on his list, George heard a voice above him. "Whatcha doin' kiddo?"

George noticed the dark figure. "I, er, uh, looking for names...sir."

"What're the names for, Sonny?"

A light flashed into his eyes. "Uh...shit!" "What did you say, Sonny?"

"Nothin' sir."

"I'd like you to join me down at headquarters, Sonny."

"Do I really...?"

"Yes, Sonny."

"But, but, but...uh!" He noticed the other policeman tugging Abraham by the collar.

All the way to the police station, George uttered, "Shit-damn, shit-damn, Mom's not goin' to like this."

Abraham whispered, "Shut up. You're making it worse than it is."

Now fingerprinted, George takes his turn in front of the camera. The photographer said, "Don't smile, look straight ahead, and into the camera." Flash! "Now turn to your left and stay still." Flash! "Now turn around and stay still." FLASH!

Another officer ambled to him. "This way kid-do."

"What's you gonna do to me?"

"You goin' to jail, kid. Spend time. Rot if you don't behave yourself."

"How long? I've got to call my mother." "Don't worry, Sonny. It's all over for you." "Shit! Shit-damn," he whined.

George walked into the cell and spotted Abraham and another man.

"I told you to shut up," Abraham said. "Now look at what you've got us into." "Shit!"

The man in the corner puffed up and growled.

"Shit-damn," uttered the two boys.

"HE HAD TO FIND that name as though it meant everything to him. Where did you go, Ted?"

"I fell into an open grave."

Abraham made a boisterous laugh. "Oh, that's right."

"I thought I broke my leg, but it wasn't, only a sprained ankle."

"You always sprained your ankles. Remember the time in the army..."

Not wanting to hear it, he interrupted Abraham. "George and you got the worst of it. You spent the night in the slammer. Remember?"

Each held onto each other's shoulders nodding. Theodore turned to George's plaque. "I'll bet he's turning over in his grave. He was so mad the next day."

"Remember what he said?"

"Right! They placed us into a cell with a hunk. He had hair all over his tattooed body, and every time we moved, the guy puffed up and growled."

"He had to go so bad he peed in his pants." "What a time that was."

"If only George were here. What memories we could bring back and talk about, laugh, cry, and wish we could relive them all over again."

"A time only in memories."

"Unreal, something you read in books."

A strong sensation surged through Theodore.

"He's here Abe. I sense him. He's alive in us, in our hearts. As long as you and I are living, he'll be alive in us...forever."

Abraham clutched onto Theodore's shoulder. "I bought two other grave sites." He pointed to the two unmarked plaques. "One for you and..."

"The other for you."

"Right."

"Why, Abe?"

"So, we can be together one day." "For eternity."

"E Pluribus Unum, like we used to say."

The two men left the cemetery and walked to Abraham's car. New buildings caught Theodore's attention. "It's like waking up in a different dimension. I recognize nothing. Even the pier changed from what I remembered."

Abraham nodded. "In 40 years, a lot can change." He rubbed his stomach. "I haven't had anything to eat this morning. Let's go to the Shore for a bite. For old times' sake, just like the old days."

"Sounds like a winner. I got all day."