

1

Emergency Meeting



Did you have a pleasant stay?" The perky front desk clerk of the Arm of Gold Resort and Spa, one of Napa's finest according to the brochure, seemed to demand this information more than inquire. Rory Angus Newman, head down and eyes fixed on the bill in front of him returned an amiable enough, "Yes, it was fine." As he signed a copy he felt a presence bearing down on him. He wheeled apprehensively, and collided with the oncoming dervish that was Brian Rettenauer. "Emergency meeting in the Merlot Room in five minutes," Brian panted as he continued his sprint through the hotel in search of other members of the Kitteridge Company's executive ranks.

Rory shrugged his shoulders, gathered his belongings, and headed straight for the coffee machine. So close to a quick and quiet getaway, he thought. Across the lobby, clicking along at a confident pace, strode Mark Alston, who picked up speed as he spied Rory filling a 16-ounce cup at the French vanilla

station. Rory kept his head down but to no avail; Mark was on him in seconds. “This doesn’t look good for you Newman,” Mark boomed, drawing the attention of a smattering of hotel patrons filling up on their free breakfast buffet. Rory took a sip of his coffee, faced his longtime foe and said flatly, “What was that Mark?”

“I said it doesn’t look good for you.”

“What doesn’t look good?” Rory was slightly irritated now.

Mark took a step closer. His cropped red hair and sharp features glowed in the light from the heat lamp warming this morning’s selection of waffles and pancakes.

“The sale, that’s what the meeting’s about. Old man Kitteridge is finally giving up the goods, selling the kingdom to Olivenhain Enterprises. And you know they aren’t going to put up with what passes for planning around here.” He paused for effect, like an anchorman delivering the six o’clock news, then added: “I’d polish up that resume if I was you buddy boy.”

“It’s *were you*. If I *were* you. They didn’t teach you that in grad school?”

“Whatever, smart guy. Bottom line is your days are numbered around here.”

His job done, Mark smiled like the Grinch who stole Christmas and slinked away. Rory paused, then glanced around the country-kitchen-themed room. At least a dozen people were staring at him now, most likely thrilled at what they’d overheard; a juicy anecdote of corporate shenanigans they could share with their own coworkers. He put a lid on his coffee, grabbed his bags, and followed the signs to the Merlot Room.