

The totem Lake Lesbian Coffee Society is the tale of Elizabeth O'Mally, the greatest detective in the galaxy.

The Totem Lake Lesbian Coffee Society

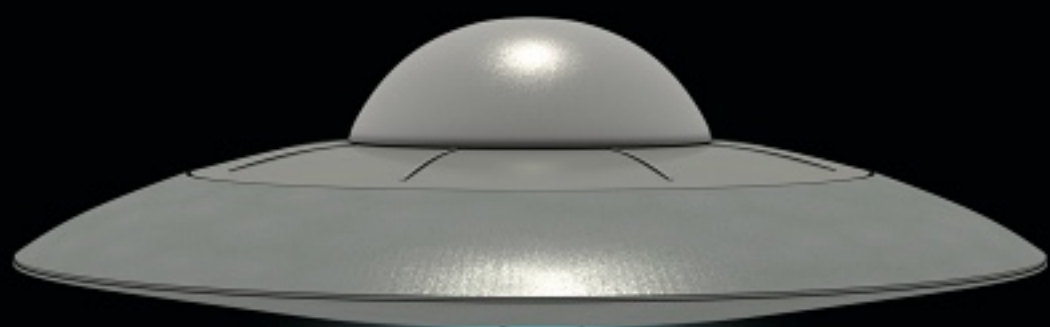
By Stuart Broderick

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**THE TOTEM LAKE
LESBIAN COFFEE
SOCIETY**



STUART BRODERICK

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Chapter #4

It's a Barracuda

As O'Mally set the parking brake and turned off the radio, she slowly revved her barracuda, listening for the faint ticking emanating from beyond the firewall. She'd been told that it was a bad lifter and the very idea of engine work on a big block V8 sounded expensive. Although she knew where her friends would be sitting, O'Mally waited at the counter, quietly noticing a well attired man in his fifties struggling not to check her out lest he drew the ire of his wife. The woman pivoted to see what her husband was struggling with. O'Mally removed her glasses and turned with a smile to the couple, trying to maintain an air of courtesy after a long night at the station. She rocked back sniffing up and twisted at the hips, exposing the badge that glistened on her belt. The smoky aroma of bacon permeated the restaurant, reminding her of just how hungry she'd gotten.

"Lieutenant O'Mally, it's good to see you this morning," the waiter said as he charged forward with a coffee cup. As he escorted her to the table, she noticed that there were only four ladies present. The far end of the table appeared barren without Lucy and her yoga breathing instructions for the gang. On the left Theresa and Whitney, clad in their usual crimson and grey WSU sweats sat together, wolfing down huge mountains of biscuits and gravy that steamed out greasy wafts of deliciousness. "Damn that smells good but if I ate like that," O'Mally thought, "I'd have a fat ass too." With their fishbowl haircuts and crimson rimmed glasses, they looked like identical twins, despite the fact that Whitney was black and Theresa Japanese. One thing for

certain, those girls could absolutely crush a softball and were the best pitcher and catcher duo in the county.

O'Mally took a seat between Nikki and Molly Ann. The two ladies fidgeted nervously trying to avoid showing any mutual attraction. Molly Ann had announced the change of seasons by swapping her Mariner's baseball cap and tee shirt for a Seahawks beanie and jersey, while Nikki sported a perfectly pressed brown pants suit, highlighted by a periwinkle button down blouse. "My favorite color, I need that periwinkle blouse," O'Mally thought. "It's exactly the same shade as my new Italian flats." With the two pens protruding from her breast pocket, Nikki embodied the air of a persnickety old school marm, even on a Saturday. Hell, Nikki looked like an English teacher when she wore her softball uniform.

"Long time no see," O'Mally said to Nikki as she took a seat at the head of the table.

"It's been two eggs since we've eaten breakfast together," Nikki replied. "I'll be thirty-eight soon, two fewer chances to have a daughter. I fear my time may be running short."

Obviously, you're not interested in men, but what about artificial insemination?" O'Mally asked.

That's disgusting, impossible." Nikki replied firmly.

"Is it more disgusting than sex with a man? You'll probably need to do it a whole bunch of times, some couples go years trying."

"I couldn't consider it, besides the women of my family are extremely fertile. Some random male that I don't even know becoming the father

of my child? Not on your life. Now things like height, eye color and even to a certain point intelligence can be selected for, but what's most important in a man is his character. The apple never falls very far from the tree, especially with a boy and the sort of man who'd volunteer for such a program is undoubtedly a self-important brute. There are many good men, but so many others are just bad." Nikki ranted.

"How right you are," O'Mally quietly pondered. "Compared to those asshole Johns I busted working vice, little brother is a gem."

"Someday my daughter will come and ask me about her father," Nikki protested. "What am I going to do then, show her the turkey baster? No, I've got to figure this one out."

"Well," O'Mally huffed, "It looked like you had that one figured out two eggs ago. Remember that dude in the cycling outfit that Lucy invited over? He seemed to be a good guy, a kind man. You could see it in his face. He even gave off an aroma of decency when he sweated you know the good stink. There he was and you just ran him off. As Lucy said, you'll never get pregnant if you're treating men like that. Speaking of Lucy, where is she? She's never late."

Molly Ann, Whitney, and Theresa all turned to Nikki for a moment and scowled.

"Hana is picking Lucy up and bringing her here today." Molly Ann eventually said.

"So, I finally get to meet the mysterious Hana Olson." O'Mally smiled, removing her ponytail clip and shaking out her long brown hair. She bounced slightly in her chair and adjusted the collar of her blazer.

“Yes, you’ll get to meet Hana today. She became ever so excited once I told her you drove a roadrunner.” Nikki replied.

“My car is a barracuda, not a roadrunner,” O’Mally said. “Speaking of cars is Lucy’s broken down and Hana is fixing it in her shop?”

“Lucy’s car is fine.” Molly Ann stated. “Hana’s got to drive her here today and it’s all Nikki’s fault.”

“It’s not my fault.” Nikki retorted.

“Yes, it is.”

“No, it’s not.”

“Yes, it’s your fault Nikki.” Molly Ann vented with a snort. “You should have known that George and Wendy were switch hitters.”

“It’s not my fault.” Nikki said as she pushed her glasses up and crossed her arms.

“Ok, just calm down ladies,” O’Mally pleaded. “It’s a long-standing tradition in softball that some players bat both left and right-handed to take advantage of the defense.”

Molly Ann took a slow sip at her coffee before turning first to Nikki, then to O’Mally, “This doesn’t concern batting, it’s all about sex. Isn’t that right Nikki?”

Now it was O’Mally’s turn for the angry glare. “Jesus Christ just what kind of fucking softball league are you girls in? No, never mind I don’t want to hear.”

A ferocious silence roared over the table as all eyes suddenly turned to Nikki. They held their collective breath in anticipation of the hellfire and tarnation to follow. Nikki removed the red pen from her breast pocket and stared at it intently as she slowly rolled it in her fingers. She turned and pointed the red pen at O'Mally. "Blasphemy," she said with a pause as she folded her hands into her lap, "is incommensurate with your station. You're not a vice cop any more lieutenant."

O'Mally looked over the menu, realizing that her usual veggie scramble with avocado wouldn't settle in her stomach after that. She lifted her finger and turned, knowing that the waiter would be staring at her. "I'll have biscuits and gravy with a chicken fried steak and two eggs sunny side up."

"Well, that's a change, I'm downright shocked to hear you of all people ordering anything that heavy." Nikki blurted out, "I believe that Hana is very much looking forward to meeting both you and your roadrunner."

"It's a barracuda, not a roadrunner, I just told you that" O'Mally demanded. As she looked around, she could see that girls could smell blood in the water and were about to pounce.

"I really like the roadrunner. He sure knows how to handle that coyote." Molly Ann mentioned.

"Shouldn't a roadrunner have that little bird badge on it?" Whitney asked.

"Yeah!" Theresa added. "And the horn should go 'meep-beep' why haven't we heard your horn, Liz?"

“Ough, spare me,” O’Mally moaned. “It’s a barracuda not a roadrunner.”

Molly Ann perked up and pointed towards the restaurant door. “Well, if that isn’t Miss Hana Olson, then my name’s not Molly Ann Thogpistle. It’s so good to see you, Hana, and it looks like you’ve brought Lucy along. My goodness Lucy, what happened to your hair? How much have you had to drink this morning?”

“Hey gals!” Hana beamed. “Lucy put too much gel in her hair and stuck her head out the window on the way over. It’s plastered out sideways now. Did you see what’s out there? That’s one sweet 383 ‘Cuda in the parking lot. I’m gonna find the guy that owns it and challenge him to a drag race for a hundred bucks.”

O’Mally got up and as she turned, she locked in on Hana’s big hazel eyes and beaming smile. Hana had very nice teeth but seemed to have forgotten how to close her mouth. About five six with a curvaceous body and big boobs, Hana was much prettier than she expected. She wore tight fitting jeans and a white oxford shirt with “Hana” embroidered above her pocket. Neither of them said a word for a moment as they froze in place. “The purple seventy-one is my car.” O’Mally stumbled out.

“Nobody told me you were a cop.” Hana said meekly as she nervously stuffed her mechanic’s hands in her pockets and stared down at the badge on O’Mally’s belt. “I was just joking about the drag racing thing.”

“Yes, I’m a policeman and you are a terrible liar. Pleased to finally meet you, Hana. I’m Elizabeth O’Mally.”

“But Nikki said you drove a roadrunner.” Hana replied.

O’Mally deflated and hung her head. Hana reached out and put her hand on her shoulder. “It’s ok Elizabeth.”

“It’s a barracuda, my car’s a barracuda not a roadrunner.”

“So’s mine.” Hana shot back, “I’ve got a sixty-five that I’ve had since I was twenty. I just love that old car. It’s got a screaming fast small block that I built in my shop. It absolutely hauls ass.”

O’Mally grabbed a chair and motioned for Hana to sit next to her before looking over at Lucy who wobbled drunkenly in her seat at the opposite side of the table. “What’s up with her?” O’Mally asked, pointing at Lucy. “She’s never been out of control like this, not even when we were teenagers.”

“Like I told you, it’s all Nikki’s fault.” Molly Ann proclaimed.

“It’s not my fault.” Nikki answered emphatically.

“Oh yes, it is, it’s all our fault,” Molly Ann retorted.

“Ok, so why is Lucy drunk at this hour and why is it Nikki’s fault?” O’Mally asked.

“Indeed, why don’t you just tell Elizabeth what happened?” Molly Ann snapped at Nikki.

“Well,” Nikki began slowly, “Lucy, Wendy and I were all at the grocery store picking out some wine when we came upon George, one of my students. Now George is to put it rather politely quite gay, so I saw no harm introducing him to the ladies. George and Wendy hit it off and abruptly left together. I can only surmise that they had some sort of a

past. How was I to know they were switch hitters? I realize that it was rather sudden and disturbing, but who would suspect that a master yogi would fall apart like this?" Nikki said, gesturing towards Lucy who had just passed out.

"Okay," O'Mally spouted, "you guys meant that kind of switch hitter, nothing to do with softball. So, Nikki introduced George to Wendy, and they ran off together, leaving Lucy broken hearted and that's what's all Nikki's fault?"

"Now you've got it." Molly Ann proclaimed, pointing an accusing finger at Nikki. "See it's all her fault."

"No, it's not."

"Yes, it is."

"Okay you two just quit," O'Mally ordered. "With Lucy out of commission, I'm left here to keep you ladies in line, and you're spouting off like a couple of bickering little schoolgirls. So, Lucy got in a tizzy over losing Wendy and went on a drinking binder. I know she's mostly a vegetarian, but we need to get some biscuits and gravy in her. Speaking of biscuits and gravy, when's mine going to show up?"

Lucy slowly raised her head and slurped down half of Whitney's coffee before scanning the table through bloodshot eyes. Her shoulder length blonde hair was badly matted and stuck straight out like some sort of clown. Even standing on her head in a hundred five-degree hot yoga studio had never mangled the perfect style of Lucy's hair. She looked over at Whitney and Theresa and seemed to get herself all wound up. "Look at the two of you. You're so fucking fat you can't do anything anymore. You got your Jeep stuck in the mud a couple of

weeks ago and couldn't even move. We had to get those men to drag your fat asses out before we could winch that poor overloaded little Willys out of the swamp you drove into. You're just too fucking fat!"

The Totem Lake Lesbian Coffee Society collectively gawked at her in disbelief. Lucy, the ultimate picture of inner peace and self-control, had not only just insulted Whitney and Theresa in a most vile fashion, but she'd also shattered everyone's opinion of "Ms. all Perfection" as Molly Ann was known to call her. A broken heart and drinking binge were no excuse. Lieutenant O'Mally wasn't putting up with any such nonsense in public.

"Ok Lucy, that's enough out of you." O'Mally said as she got up and came around to the other side of the table. "Now come along peacefully." she said, hefting the slender yoga instructor to her feet.

Hana got up and took Lucy by the hand. "I'll take her home. She lives near my shop."

"Oh Hana, please don't take this wrong," Nikki pleaded, "We're actually very polite people. I've known Lucy since she was a little girl and we've never seen this sort of behavior. She's not usually much of a drinker."

"Oh, what the hell," Hana sighed. "I've been in the yoga studio a bunch of times, and this isn't her normal self. You just never know how some people will behave when they get dumped. Come on Lucy, you won't be living this one down any time soon."

As O'Mally helped escort their drunken friend out of the restaurant, she saw Hana's bright yellow barracuda magically glistening in the sun.

“So that’s a barracuda too?” O’Mally said. “I guess those must have been the original model. Just look at that gracefully swooping rear glass and the moon rims are a classy touch. That yellow is amazing, I’ve never seen anything like it, hard to explain but it sorta glows in the sun.”

“I once rode a two fifty Suzuki in that color and really loved it. I did some engine work for a guy who owns a body shop. The dude was a total weirdo, tin foil helmet stuff. We put eight coats of yellow lacquer and hand rubbed it front to back, no circle motion, side to side or back to front at all. He said that when we did it that way Barracuda would be immune to flying saucer ray guns. We finished it off with two coats of clear again hand rubbed front to back. Then he put some bluing agent on my rear bubble glass. That’s supposed to make the alien pulse weapon bounce off.”

“Never can be too careful with flying saucers and spaceship ray guns,” O’Mally joked.

Barracuda’s got a narrowed Dana sixty rear end with five thirteens and a close-ratio four speed.” Hana boasted as they eased Lucy into a fiberglass racing seat and clicked her safety harness on. “I think the blue roll cage really goes well with the yellow paint on my interior, the blue is a Suzuki motocross color too. I’ve thought of putting the headliner and panels back in, but it’s kind of funky with a six-point cage. Let’s pop the hood on your seventy-one just to make sure I’ve got all the parts in my shop. Nikki said your ‘roadrunner’ has a bad lifter.” Hana joked, gently slugging O’Mally in the shoulder. As Hana lifted the hood, she turned and laughed at the ladies in the restaurant. “Look at Nikki and Molly Ann squabbling away. Have you ever seen two people more obviously attracted to each other?”

“Everyone in the world realizes that they’re the perfect couple. Everyone in the world that is except Nikki and Molly Ann.” O’Mally said with a chuckle as she looked over the engine bay of her car. “All stock as far as I know.”

Hana quickly looked the engine over, then stepped round to the firewall. “BH VIN code yep, it’s a barracuda like you said. I thought it was a ‘Cuda, but that would be a BS VIN code. It does appear stock other than some aftermarket plug wires. I’m surprised to see this 383 and a four speed with factory air conditioning and the luxury interior. Not unheard of, must have been custom ordered. Could you start it so I can have a listen to this beast?”

O’Mally cranked the barracuda up and let it settle into idle. Hana stuck her ear next to the valve cover, then came around to the other side to check her findings. “Yeah, the right rear exhaust lifter is giving out, may as well replace them all while I’m in there. I’ve got all the parts for this in stock. I’ll fix it for you at cost.”

Hana turned off the engine as Hana shut the hood. She looked again to the restaurant and pointed to a fresh pile of biscuits and gravy, steaming on the table. “There’s my breakfast. You know I never eat fattening crap like that, but the smell was too much for me to resist today. Soon as I know my work schedule, I’ll arrange to bring this guy down to your shop. Thanks for taking care of Lucy, what a disaster. Like it or not, you’re now officially a member of the Totem Lake Lesbian Coffee Society. See you around Hana it’s been nice to finally meet you.”

The ground trembled with the imposing clatter of a perfectly adjusted solid lifter camshaft as Hana motored quickly away. O’Mally reviewed

her favorite periwinkle flats. She'd polished out the nasty scuff on the left shoe from when she'd punted Lisa's garbage can across her car port and they were good as new. As she looked up, she noticed that all the ladies were staring intently at her as she watched Hana leave. Their heads snapped away in unison when they realized O'Mally had caught them eyeing her. Once back at the table she sniffed at her breakfast as it wafted up invitingly. The chicken fried steak was smothered with an oozing river of country gravy and the yokes quivered away, staring back at her like two big yellow eyeballs. She sat solemnly and forked a gob of dripping goodness into her mouth and closed her eyes to determine if it needed more pepper.

Molly Ann was of course the first to chime in. "Now what did I say about you and Hana? Was I right or was I right when I announced that Hana Olsen was the perfect girl for Lieutenant Elizabeth O'Mally. I'll say you two did an awful job of pretending to discuss the various merits of your barracudas. We all know what was really going on out there."

O'Mally put her glasses back on and considered lighting into Molly Ann and putting her in her place, but the chicken fried steak was calling. The wimpy table knife supplied was ill suited to dismember such a magnificent slab of bovine, so she reached around her back and drew her switchblade from its' sheath. The girls all flinched with the metallic clack of the dagger snapping open. As she prepared to dig in, Nikki huffed, pointing to the deadly chrome and black implement.

"Aren't switchblades illegal?" Nikki asked.

"Maybe you should call the cops," O'Mally responded with a smirk as the razor-sharp blade sliced through its target. She stabbed its double-

edged tip into a substantial chunk of meat and held it aloft, admiring the gravy as it crawled down towards the handle. She jammed the morsel into her mouth and as she began to chew, the dialogue from the neighboring table caught her ear. She held her finger to her lips, signaling for her friends to be quiet so she could listen in on the conversation. The six people sitting at the adjacent booth were discussing options for getting away with murdering someone and ways to avoid drawing any attention to themselves. Their conversation strayed into subsequent disposing of bodies. Looking the bunch over, she found them to be quite an odd crew for an organized crime syndicate. There were two muscular young men in black turtlenecks that certainly fit the bill for gangsters. At the head of the table sat an older gentleman who appeared like someone who ought to be fishing or playing golf instead of planning murders. At the other end of the table sat serious middle-aged woman in a fabulous yellow and paisley dress and sporting leopard print pumps and a chunky amber necklace that brought the whole outfit together. A giant diamond ring on her left hand finished off the look. She was obviously the brains of the crew. She flipped her head to move the long silver-grey hair that draped elegantly over her shoulders. Most women her age would color that hair, but she wore it proudly as if to say, "I might be old enough to be your mother, but I'm still damned hot." The woman turned gracefully, and her long lean legs slid out from under the table, revealing those fantastic leopard print pumps. O'Mally gloated desperately over the shoes and realized that she needed a pair. She feared that if she was unable to get her hands on some of those leopard print heels the entire planet just might cease spinning. The other two girls seemed to be a couple of frumpily dressed lab assistants or something. "Wolves in sheep's clothing, they look like the type of serial killers that poisoned people," O'Mally told herself.

As the two young men began arguing in Russian, O'Mally determined that one of them was disturbed that the other had bumped off someone named Jones in what sounded like a most horrific fashion. The other stated that Jones simply had to die, and the deed couldn't be undone. His only question was who he'd need to kill next and how he was going to avoid getting caught. O'Mally had heard enough. She licked the gravy off her switchblade and wiped it down with her napkin before sliding it back in its' sheath. As she approached the table, she slid her thumbs along her waistline, pushing her blazer back to display her badge and gun. She placed her hands on her hips with the left resting on her revolver's grip. "Ya panimayou Russki yazik," she commanded. The elderly man began to fidget nervously and O'Mally responded by unsnapping her holster strap.

"Robert, can you please put your hands where she can see them," one of the young men said to the old guy before turning to O'Mally. "He doesn't speak any Russian."

"He understood what I said and what the hell makes you people so damned arrogant that you think you can openly discuss committing murder in a crowded coffee shop?" O'Mally asked.

"My goodness," the older lady gasped. "You're a real policewoman and so stunningly beautiful. I always scoffed at those gorgeous actresses portraying female cops on TV but you're even prettier. You've got us all wrong officer. My name's Barbara and we're the Brown Bag fiction writer's club. Sergi here is working on a murder mystery."

"What?" O'Mally sighed. "So, you're saying you guys write stories? Hell, I'm sorry to bother you, but after what I heard I just couldn't let

it slide. I'm Lieutenant O'Mally with Seattle homicide." She looked down pointing at Barbara's shoes. "Where did you get those? They're stunning I need a pair."

"I got them at that new women's clothing shop in Bellevue Square. They're sold out for now, but a little bird told me they've ordered more and will have them in stock soon." Barbara replied.

"I know the place," O'Mally answered with a grin. "I'll be on the lookout."

"You speak Russian," one of the young men marveled. "Would you like to join us? We could all use some advice from a real detective."

"Thanks, but no. My breakfast will get cold and again, I'm sorry to have disturbed you." She said as she turned back to attack her mountain of food.

Chapter #5

The Magic Rock of Molly Ann Thogpistle

A white aerosol mist fizzed out and gathered on the stainless-steel refrigerator where it bubbled away. The smallest of squeaks snuck out from underneath the cloth as Vincent spread the polish over the left door. He worked a circle motion against the grime and fingerprints near the handle and finished it off with long strokes parallel to the metal's grain. The gleaming sheen contrasted with the right side, and he rocked back on his heels to admire his handiwork before proceeding to spray the other door down.

Having recently returned to work after his recent brush with death, even menial tasks allowed some modicum of pride in the achievement. Despite his physical limitations after the skull fracture and his subsequent speech impediment, receiving disability benefits left him feeling like a beggar at the unemployment office. The scowls of disapproval a woman had given him when using food stamps at the grocery store was the last straw. It was time to get back to work. Since coming back to life after having been declared dead his ponderous, stuttering voice prevented him from returning to his old sales job. Janitorial work suited him adequately. It didn't require any quick wit, instantaneous mathematical calculations, or a clear voice. Most importantly he wasn't around many people, especially women after the trauma of having his ex-girlfriend bash in his skull. He'd set up his own lunch spot on the vacant seventh floor of One Union Square by dragging a chair and old desk in front of a huge window facing Puget Sound. The panoramic view was especially grand on clear nights with

the lights of passing ships and sunsets silhouetting the Olympic mountains.

As he rinsed out the coffee cups and loaded the dishwasher, he thought back to his teenage days. Back then he was working as a janitor, and he'd witnessed men in their seventies who'd been forced to return to work after cashing out generous Boeing pensions and squandering the money. The funds that he'd been squirreling away over the subsequent sixteen years had started to add up and his out of court settlement with Lisa left him pretty much set. He'd paid cash for a new pickup and was confident that he wouldn't wind up scrubbing toilets in the final decades of his life but the idea of retirement thirty years into the future was nothing more than a hazy concept. The silence and low light in the law firm's office he was cleaning provided ample opportunity to reflect on his future. It was a strange bunch of circumstances that had led him back to being a janitor.

At that hour, the only two offices that remained lit up belonged to the senior partners in the law firm who were obviously working late on something important. He was waiting for them to either leave for the evening or go out to eat so he could go into their offices and do his job without disturbing them. A clunk on the door on the opposite side of the lunchroom signaled that they'd taken a break. As Vincent turned to go empty their trash cans and dust, he was shocked to see Harold, Lisa's ex-husband. They were clearly oblivious to the presence of their janitor and were talking about trucks not legal matters.

"Nice truck Mike," Harold said. "I'm surprised Laura let you get a new one so soon. Wasn't that last one a ninety-three? Major upgrade, brand new F-150, sweet."

Vincent began to move silently towards the door with his janitor cart. He hadn't thought about Lisa much recently. In fact, he'd done his best to put the entire episode behind him. The memory of her sitting stoically across the huge table from him in their settlement hearing reminded him just how much he didn't want to deal with another girlfriend.

"That blue and white ninety-six isn't mine" Mike said. "My pickup's going to take two weeks in the shop to fix the tranny."

"Transmission problems on a three-year-old pickup?" Harold asked. "Sounds like your son Bill's been doing neutral drops."

"Neutral drops?" Mike quizzed. "That's the term the mechanic used. What made you guess that's what did in my truck?"

Harold let out a hearty cough before continuing. "I was a teenager once and I tore the transmission out of mom's Buick doing neutral drops. Wind her up in neutral and bang it into gear to get the awesome burnout. Dad about tanned my hide when he found out what I'd done."

"Come on," Mike complained. "Bills a good kid. He wouldn't do anything like that to my truck."

"Bill is a teenager and a boy," Harold shot back. "Prima face, you know the preponderance of evidence so yes, he's our prime suspect and guilty until proven innocent. I say he did it. So, if that's not yours, who's truck is it?"

"Mea sunt enim omnia," Vincent interjected. "That's my F-1 50. It's been a while, Harold."

The two attorneys stared at Vincent then at each other. Vincent gained a rare moment of self-respect, knowing that the attorneys weren't accustomed to classically educated janitors. "Do I know you?" Harold asked, "and If you don't mind me asking, how does a janitor afford payments on a truck like that?"

"I paid cash for the truck with part of the settlement I got from your ex-wife. I don't know if you remember me, but I'm Vincent and we met outside Elliot's on Lisa's birthday."

"Settlement with Lisa?" Harold asked. "Wait a minute I remember you. That's a nasty bruise on your head. Oh my god, you're the guy that got killed and Lisa was the one that did it to you. Damn I should have guessed, who else but her. So that bitch and her scumbag friends over at the DA's office managed to sweep the entire thing under the rug. Mike, believe it or not our janitor is the Lazarus effect guy. My ex-wife murdered him, and he came back to life while he was being given last rites. Somehow, they put the kybosh on the whole thing and hid everyone's identity."

"Yes sir," Vincent responded in a slow stuttering fashion. "Unfortunately, I did die, and it really sucked. I'm the one who asked to hide my identity and Lisa's lawyer jumped at the chance. I just happen to remember the location of a certain sixty-three split window. Unless she's changed the combination to her storage locker, you could go get it tonight."

"You'd do that for me? Harold responded.

"Nope," Vincent mumbled looking down. "Not for you, I'd do it to her. She had no reason to hit me with that ashtray and I couldn't return to my sales job after that. I hated being on disability, so I'm working as a

janitor now. She keeps that car out of spite for you. I snuck in there last week and stole some of her pot. She's got at least a kilo in the storage unit, so I seriously doubt she missed what I took and changed the lock. Your corvette should still be in that orange self-storage place right off I-90 on Mercer Island. The gate code is 0700 and her locker is the second on the right. Its combination is her birth year 1951, nineteen then fifty then one. I'd love for you to take back that car. Actually, I'd prefer to see her die, maybe get run over by a garbage truck or something gruesome."

After taking out the trash from the big corner offices, Vincent pushed his cart to the waiting room and uncoiled the power cord from his old Sanitaire industrial vacuum. He put down a pattern of Vee shaped tracks in the entrance way's carpet and rounded the corner into the cubicles. As he completed the final aisle he worked his way up to the messiest desk in the office, perhaps the messiest desk in the entire world. He looked at the name tag on the cubicle wall. "Molly Ann Thogpistle," he read aloud over the beat-up old vacuum's rattling din. Surrounded by scattered reams of paper he saw a magnificent white rock. It was a little smaller than a quarter and looked like it might be quartz, but it had an eerie sheen, almost like the view through a kaleidoscope. The little white rock on Molly Anne's desk had started out as a massive boulder of pure quartz, expelled from the gates of Hades on Mt. Etna. For untold millennia, the forces of nature enhanced its energy. Wind and waves ground the boulder down, concentrating its inner force into a small stone, barely over an inch across. The Magic rock of Molly Ann Thogpistle was endowed with powers far beyond the realm of human science.

He pulled the chair off its clear plastic mat and vacuumed up the various and sundry detritus littering the floor of Molly Ann's cubicle. The chrome motor cover clipped the edge of the desk's cabinet sending an odd shock through the vacuum. He touched the steel rail of the drawer to release the small static charge that had built up. It jolted back severely, causing his neck to spasm. The little rock flashed from white to an iridescent pale blue with purplish lines pulsing through its interior. It began to sparkle yellow and flicker. As the Sanitaire got near, the rock rolled over, bounced off the desk and got sucked into the vacuum with a sharp crack. It started banging loudly against the beater bar. It then jammed into the drive belt with an ear-piercing screech, followed by a strange jolt of energy that rolled down Vincent's right arm. His fist clenched the white plastic handle with such force that it immediately cramped his forearm. The energy surged through his shoulder, down his spine and into his feet. His hand froze uncontrollably and for several seconds, he couldn't release his grip. The shock flowed down through his work boots and into the carpet and he was slowly engulfed in a staticky blue fog. The lights in the building flashed on and off throbbing with the pulses of the luminous blue energy cloud. He managed to stomp the chrome power switch on the Sanitaire and shut it off as his knees locked up. His body thumped down on the carpet, and he watched the florescent ceiling bulbs fade out. He opened his eyes to see two men standing over him.

"You ok man?" he heard. It was Mike and Harold, the attorneys from the lunchroom.

"I'm not sure," Vincent replied as he popped to his feet. "That wasn't an electrical shock. There was a weird blue flash and found myself laying on the floor. Was I out for long? The doctor told me to watch

for signs of a stroke after my brain injury, but I'm fine. In fact, I've never felt better."

"You were only down for a minute, but something's happened to your voice." Mike said with a perplexed look. "You sounded very slow and deliberate in the lunchroom. With the exception when you spoke Latin, that is but you stammered along with a stuttering hesitation. Now you're yammering away like some slick salesman."

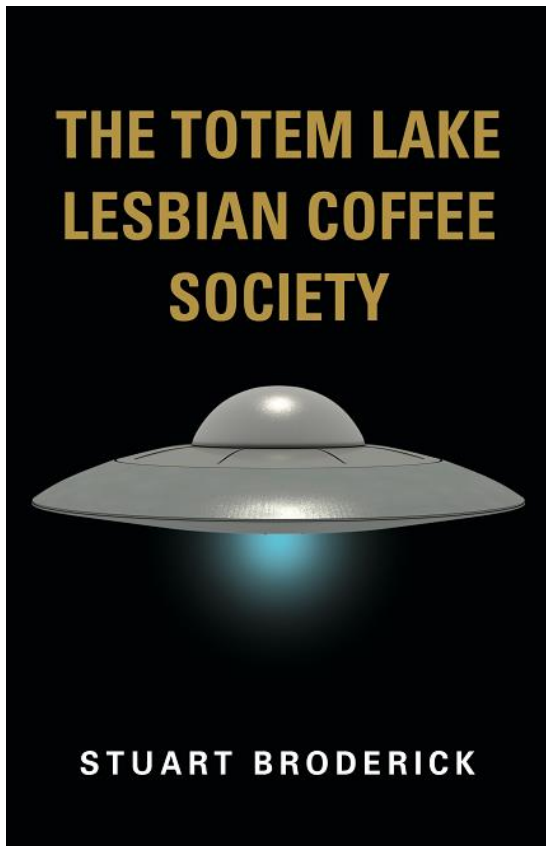
"I was vacuuming up this confetti stuff and I think it sucked up a little white rock. I got hit with a blue bolt that lit up the room as the lights strobed on and off." Vincent said.

"Molly Ann Thogpistle... what a mess," Harold sighed. She's super smart, but what a disorganized dingbat, I mean look at this desk. How she can possibly be our most productive employee is beyond me. So, you're good?"

I'm strangely energized. I haven't felt this good since before I got killed... injured I guess." Vincent replied as he flipped the Sanitaire over and opened its bottom plate. "That's odd, the rock isn't here, and I heard it jam in the beater bar's drive belt. I'll take care when I empty the bag, it was a different looking rock. I've taken a bunch of geology classes and I've never seen anything like it. Maybe quartz, but almost like a white gemstone and it lit up blue and purple. I'll get Miss Thogpistle back her rock."

He righted the vacuum and pushed it over to his janitor cart. He'd volunteered for some overtime and would need to put the Sanitaire in his truck for a job in Kirkland near Elizabeth's house. His outboard's prop was in the shop so no fishing this weekend. After he wheeled the setup out of the law office, he tossed his bag of trash in the freight

elevator. All he had left was to mop the lunchroom floor and he'd be done for the night with enough time to spare until clocking out so he could go up on the roof and watch the ships in Elliot Bay while he smoked a fat joint of Lisa's pot.



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