

Chapter 1 The Furies

“The rich man will fade in the midst of his pursuits”

The whirling golden logo arced out in its unfolding spiral, like an animated, technicolor petroglyph jettisoned from the ancient rock forms that hemmed in the dark grey strip of desert highway. Ever so briefly, it seemed to hang stationary in the air. [It could have been a “3,” an “M”, or a “W.” Or maybe just a set of saggy tits.] Then, as the car sped on its way, the spinning sack of trash appeared to accelerate. Contents sprayed along the shoulder as it hit the sand and grit. Time stood still for a moment.

Then the whole mess shuffled slightly as the next car glided past.

In the speeding sanctum of a posh Plexxus, with garbage pitched to the wind, a gold-pinkie-ringed hand fumbled for a cell phone. “Yeah, Mike. Yeah, I talked to him. Yeah, he wants to do a deal. I told him what we had, and I said, so – do you want to do a deal?.....So we’re gonna do a deal...” Behind, as if borne on the self-same wind, three souls in an ancient, dark blue Dodge Charger descended like angels of destruction.

A hollow thud shook the Plexxus, jolting the driver, prickling his chest and neck with a rush of sudden fear. The cell phone was lost on the passenger side floor. Moments later, the Plexxus was broadsided, and a boarding party assembled. The door opened, and in loomed the loud, luminous face of Linda Moon – besunglassed and bedazzling as desert sunset rays reflected down into the cab. The eyes of the driver of the Plexxus squinted, and his mouth muttered something profane.

Moon was a plump-looking lady who was hard as a rock, with bonecrushing hands born of years working the dirt on organic farms and planting trees. The hands lashed out like whips, locked

onto lapels, and yanked the object of their ire out onto the pavement. One of her two wiry companions quickly pounced on and encircled the captive, who was divested of his sportcoat and thrust roughly into a bright orange vest.

After the initial threats, or lamentations, or both, Linda had become accustomed to sullen silence on the part of prisoners. For indeed, what could be said in defense of their transgression?

As they eased back down the road to the scene of the crime, Linda delivered her standard lecture on littering like a drill sergeant, occasionally querying the prisoner rhetorically on his awareness of product life-cycles and ominously stressing the “grave” in “cradle-to-grave.” The centerpiece of Moon’s lecture was always the expression of the suspicion that someone who would litter would be capable of just about anything, and therefore needed to be pre-empted.

While he stooped, knelt, and stood more times than a parishioner at a Catholic mass, picking up his own and everybody else’s roadside garbage, the prisoner prayed for the police. But it was Linda’s experience, and this was a bright spot for her in an often frustrating world, that police were no more likely to show up when she had a “clean-up crew” at work than when you were broken down or some bourgeois twit in an outsized SUV was careening down a residential street scattering children and pets.

A number of young ravens alit nearby and for a time rooted about amidst the plastic and styrofoam, but soon were aloft and away on sable wings. “Even they,” observed Linda acidly, “get tired of picking up your shit.”

The prisoner served his sentence, scouring a halfmile of somewhat less than scenic east bound shoulder. The fruits of his labours were stuffed into the back seat and trunk of the Plexxus. Moon

then drove the “perp” to a landfill, actually quite a long drive, during which she made light-hearted references to the vehicle as a “garbage scow, replete with regular trash, white trash (smiles coquettishly) and,” with a theatrically withering gaze at the perp, “well...I don’t even know if there’s a name for your kind of trash.” After the perp had deposited the payload and paid his debt to society, Linda politely surrendered back the keys and disappeared with her familiars back into the flooding twilight.

They laughingly referred to themselves as the vice squad, but preferred not to adopt a particular name. They felt it might lock them into a particular mission, or worse, behaviour pattern, that might render them inflexible and ineffective. And identifiable. As it was, they didn’t really want anyone knowing “who” they were. Then they would have been truly ineffective.

Moon was under a geasa – an ancient something akin to a curse. Or perhaps more appropriately a burden. Okay, let’s do modern psychiatry – a compulsion. For instance, the ancient King of Ulster, Fergus, could not turn down an invitation to a feast. The ancient Irish hero Cuchulain (I’ll spare you, say it like Coo-HOO-lin) could not be woken up out of his sleep without dire consequences. A geasa (pl?), thus, sounds like some sort of rationalization for hedonism ringing down through the ages. But damn, it puts a special gloss on things. In any case, Moon’s particular geasa – who knew who put it on her – was that when confronted by anything she perceived as unjust, inequitable, arrogant or just plain bullshit, she had to take action. No matter how futile, no matter how rude, no matter how insulting, no matter how self-defeating, no matter how many pearls she cast before swine, no matter how risky.