



**By Douglas Clark**

*"Is all that we see or seem but a dream within a dream?"*  
*Edgar Allan Poe, A Dream Within a Dream*

**G**ordon Blanchard was shown into the Controller's office.

"Mister Blanchard, your message was somewhat cryptic. May I ask why you are coming directly to me rather than to Chuck Haley?" Fred Morrison asked.

"Sir, with all due respect to Chuck, I thought the fewer people who know about this....this information, the better," Blanchard answered. Blanchard was a senior internal auditor for Global Resources & Logistics, GRL, a

large multi-national company. Chuck Haley was his boss who reported to Morrison the company controller.

"Very well, Mister Blanchard, what have you got to tell me?"

"It's about Caspian, Sir. I'm afraid there is the likely possibility that serious fraud and corruption is going on. Probably for some time. Years. I have----"

Morrison cut him off, "What the hell are you talking about, Blanchard?"

"I am suggesting that there is evidence of fraud, money laundering, and probably bribery involving Caspian Enterprises."

Blanchard went on to explain that he had been at Caspian Enterprises corporate headquarters in Moscow for two weeks, followed by another three weeks probing deeper into various suspect areas he unearthed.

"What specifically are you saying you've found?" Morrison asked.

Blanchard paused to organize what he wanted to say. Like any exec, Morrison did not like a problem thrown into his lap. "In brief, Sir, Caspian is selling gas, oil, and electrical power at well above market prices to all sorts of government entities across the former Soviet Union states. There are poorly documented outflows of large sums that I believe are probably bribes. More disturbing even than that is the buy side. As you know, Caspian leases all manner of transportation equipment and services. Many of these leases are with companies that are merely shells. Frankly, I believe they are vehicles for laundering drug money."

Morrison was visibly in distress. "Christ, Blanchard, you know how things are over there. Markets are more volatile, the controls are loose. Documentation is inherently poor."

"I understand what you're saying, Sir, but I've gone beyond that in several lines of investigation. There are major gaps, inconsistencies, and outright areas that cannot be explained with documentation. Frankly, the outside auditors have been sleeping or they would have latched onto the same things I found."

"Do you have evidence as to who is involved?" Morrison asked as he hunched over his desk leaning towards Blanchard.

"Not specifically, but the scope suggests it must be senior executives at Caspian. I understand that Caspian was formed from three acquisitions a few years ago. The former Russian principles are still the senior management. They have to be in on this. This could drag down Global just like Enron."

"I have written a detailed report with supporting documentation as addendums. It's all here on this CD, Sir." Blanchard said and handed the CD to Morrison. "Management needs to act quickly on this. If they go about it right, they can eliminate the problem quietly, or at least downplay Global's involvement. After all, it's the Russians not the U.S. that got screwed."

Morrison was dumbfounded. Finding his voice he said, "I can't agree with your conclusions until I have studied your report. Give me a couple of days and I'll get back to you. If I concur, I'll kick this up to the boss. In the meantime, don't discuss this with anyone. Not Haley, not your wife, not anyone. Even if you're dead wrong, this sort of thing can cause a volcano on Wall Street."

"No problem, Sir. That's why I brought it to you."

Blanchard left Morrison's office.

Morrison called the office of the Chief Financial Officer for Global, William Ryder. "I don't give a damn if he's in a meeting, put me through immediately," Morrison yelled at Ryder's secretary.

Three days after his meeting with Morrison, Blanchard still had not heard from him. Repeated calls and a visit to Morrison's office were unsuccessful. The following morning he left for Los Angeles on a new assignment. For the next two weeks he was part of a team doing due diligence for a possible acquisition.

There was still no word from Morrison, two days into his work in Los Angeles. The brass were probably still struggling with how to manage the crisis. Probably were pursuing some sort of verification. Probably just didn't know whether to shit or go blind. Fuck'em. If they're too stupid to act on his investigation, then there's nothing more he can do. He did his job. His ass was covered.

Day three in sunny Los Angeles was anything but sunny. Neither were the first two days here. It was early June. *June gloom* the locals called it. Gray mornings with a fair amount of fog mixed with the usual pollutants. It was supposed to 'burn-off' at mid-day, but sometimes not.

Blanchard had set a small morning routine. It was a five-block walk to the investment banking office where he was working. There was a non-franchise coffee shop with a couple of seats outside. It was reasonably chilly at seven AM, so he was the only one sitting outside. Cappuccino, a scone, and the New York Times.

A large SUV accelerated from a parked location two blocks away. Blanchard had his back to the vehicle as it approached along with only modest traffic at this early hour. Close to the coffee shop, the vehicle veered onto the sidewalk.

Blanchard was struck from behind, the impact hurling him through the plate glass window of the coffee shop. The SUV reversed, then sped off.

Carol Simmons had been coming to the UCLA Medical Center in Santa Monica, California every day for the past week to visit her brother Gordon Blanchard. She and Gordon were not close, but they were the only family either had. She was in Dr. Edward's office, the neurosurgeon treating her brother.

"Miss Simmons, your brother has been in a coma since the accident. I am amazed that he survived this trauma. Still, we're hopeful that he will regain consciousness. We think there is good reason to be hopeful that will happen. However, you can well imagine the emotional issues he will suffer."

Carol Simmons knew full well the extent of her brother's injuries. Paralysis from the waist down with no possibility of recovery because of the extent of his spinal injuries. Loss of his right arm. Loss of his right eye. Substantial disfigurement to his face. She was told that even with extensive reconstructive surgery, his appearance might still be disturbing.

"I understand he's not married. No known girlfriend. Your parents are deceased. He's from New York. No friends out here on the West Coast. You would seem to be his only intimate contact. He'll especially need your support, and probably professional help."

Gordon Blanchard regained consciousness the following night. His moaning alerted a nurse. He would have screamed had he been able.

After an examination by the shift resident, a strong sedative allowed him to return to sleep for the remainder of the night. The next morning his sister was at his bedside.

"Jesus, Gordon. I don't know what to say. I'm so sorry to see you like this."

Blanchard struggled to move his damaged face to form speech. It came out barely distinguishable.

"The doctor told me how bad I am. Never going to walk he said."

His sister struggled with tears. "Gordon, it's too early to make those judgments. You've just come out of a coma. Don't despair. We'll get other opinions. Just try to get your strength back now."

"The driver? Who?" Blanchard asked.

His sister answered, "The police don't know. It was a hit and run. They have not been able to locate the vehicle."

"How long have I been unconscious?"

"Gordon, you've been in a coma for over a week. We weren't sure you would even live."

Blanchard struggled to stay awake. "GRL? Anyone from GRL been around?"

"I don't know. There's flowers here from your company, though," his sister said.

A nurse entered the room. "Miss, I'm afraid the patient needs to rest. The doctor said to limit your visit to only a few minutes. You can see him again tomorrow."

Blanchard's sister told him to rest and she would be back tomorrow. She wanted to kiss him, but didn't know where. She left after a gentle squeeze to his hand.

Blanchard eyes fluttered and he lapsed into a sedated sleep.

He woke in the early morning. Sunlight was evident through the cracks of the window blinds. The remains of his dream were still with him. He had dreamt he was back at the Caspian offices in Moscow. He was walking. He was whole.

His sister visited again midday.

"Anything further from the police, Carol?" he asked.

"No. I don't think they hold out much hope. The detective suggested that the vehicle has probably been repaired by now," she answered.

"I don't think it was an accident, Carol."

His sister was not sure she heard him correctly. "What do'ya mean?"

"I discovered some things when I was in Russia. Major things going on at Caspian. Things that could destroy GRL if they became public. It would be worse than Enron."

"What sort of things?" she asked.

"Corruption. Criminal stuff. It's very technical. I want you to get my laptop from the hotel."

His sister paused for several moments. "I got your clothes and stuff from your hotel room. The police helped me. But ---- but there was no laptop in the room."

Gordon Blanchard just groaned and mumbled, "Shit." He was defeated. It was them. He had no evidence and he was a cripple.

"Carol. Call the nurse. The pain's real bad. I need a shot."

The nurse injected morphine into his IV. He said goodbye to his sister and drifted into sleep within minutes.

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I left my Moscow hotel and got into the old Mercedes that picked me up every morning. "Good morning, Igor," I said to my driver. I smiled thinking of the Marty Feldman character in *Young Frankenstein* with the name pronounced *Eye-gor*. It was October. Cold and gray, but no snow yet. Moscow would look better with a blanket of snow. Now she looked like a whore without her makeup in the morning.

Caspian Enterprises corporate offices were located in a fashionable business district on Chistoprudny Boulevard. I arrived at the small office I had been given for this

audit assignment at Global's Moscow subsidiary, and unlocked the door.

The office gopher girl brought me a coffee. "Helga, where are all the files I had on this table?"

"I do not know, Sir. You keep door locked, do you not?" she answered.

I was a little confused. I remembered leaving stacks of files on the table adjacent to the desk. Today I had planned on probing business transactions with a firm known as Eurasian Consulting. I had pulled a number of contracts with EC that I intended to research, but now they weren't here. In fact, the office was clear of everything except the telephone. Things just weren't right.

As I was booting my laptop, a striking woman opened the door. "Mister Blanchard? I am Irina Petrenko from the Information Technology Department. I was instructed to assist you in your work."

Instructed by whom? He did not remember requesting specific computer help. Wonderful however. It was hard to take his eyes off Ms. Petrenko. "Thank you, Ms. Petrenko. Maybe later I will have something you might help me with. Right now I need to locate certain contracts. Where would those files be?"

"The originals would be in Contracts Administration. However, it will be much quicker to access them on the computer. Everything is scanned and filed electronically. Much easier to provide wide access and still maintain proper security."

"What about receipts and payment voucher authorizations? Where are those hard copies kept? Blanchard asked Petrenko.

"Hard copies? You mean paper copies? Most are also electronic. We have electronic signature capability to our system. I will explain all details if you like. Please to come to my office and I will assist your search. I am told



by my superior you have highest access security." She said.

What seemed like at least a pleasing collaboration, turned out also to be productive. In what seemed like no time, I had enough information on two contracts to raise suspicions.

"How long your visit to Moscow, Mister Blanchard?"

"Well, Miss Petrenko...." but she interrupted with "You may call me, Irina."

"Excellent. And you may call me Gordon. I will be here for a few weeks."

"Perhaps you would like to join me and some friends for a drink after work? We could get something simple for dinner later."

I easily accepted. Irina was not only pretty, but smart and talented. I couldn't remember the last time I had a real date.

Close to midnight I found myself helping Irina out of the taxi at her apartment building. She was still laughing and navigating poorly with all the vodka we had consumed. Curiously, I was not feeling drunk myself though. Fortunately, Irina's flat was only on the third floor since there was no elevator.

"Come in for a drink, Gordon," Irina said slurring the words slightly.

"It's pretty late, Irina. We both have to be at work in the morning."

"How do you say, *to hell with it. No, fuck it!*" she said. "See I know American slang good," she said. She closed the door and threw her arms around my neck. Her body pressed hard against me and she kissed me hungrily with her mouth open.

We pulled off our clothing and quickly moved to the bedroom. The lights were fully on. Her magnificent body captivated me as I entered her.

Irina lay asleep next to me on the narrow bed. I remembered feeling the sensation of being inside her, but not of climaxing. Something like the missing pieces in a dream. Probably all the vodka I drank. I was also sleepy and soon drifted into unconsciousness.

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“Mister Blanchard, time to bathe you,” the nurse said. With the aid of a large male orderly, his unresponsive body was elevated onto its left side. He could do nothing but tolerate the indignity of the nurse sponge-washing his back and butt. Worse yet, when she washed his genitals. Blanchard could see, but not feel any sensation.

Recalling the dream for the next several hours gave Blanchard alternating thoughts of pleasure and utter despair. Lovemaking would never be part of his future.

The next dose of pain narcotic lapsed him into sleep.