

Chapter Seven

Deosil go by the waxing Moon—sing and dance the Wiccan rune.

Widdershins go when the Moon doth wane, and the Werewolf howls by the dread Wolfsbane.

"The Rede of the Wicca"

Bob awoke and his eyes instinctively looked at the alarm clock, eleven o'clock. He sat up and stared at it in disbelief. He had set the alarm for nine so that he would have time to scout out the stores some more before the one o'clock interview at the town hall. He grabbed his wristwatch to check the time to see if the alarm clock was correct. It was.

"Damn. The drive must have tired me out more than I thought," he said as he shoved the covers aside and sat on the edge of the bed. He felt nervous anxiety creep into his chest because his original plan was spoiled by his sleeping late.

Calm down Bob, there's still plenty of time.

"Okay, this is not a problem," he said as if he was coaching someone else. "Just relax. Get a shower, grab a quick bite, and you'll be on your way."

He rose and gathered his clothes for the day. He hadn't been expecting to dress for an interview, so he had picked up a new pair of pants and a shirt at the local Wal-Mart last night; it was casual, but still better than the jeans he had already worn the day before. He opened the curtain to let some light in and was pleased to see that the day was clear and sunny as warm sunlight flooded the room.

Heading to the bathroom, he glanced at the painting. The sunlight from the window splashed directly onto it—and it looked different. He stopped and stared at it. There was something there, in the cone of light with the woman. It was vague and undefined—like a

shadow of something. He placed his clothes on the bed and sat down opposite the painting. He ran his finger along the area that had caught his attention to see if he could feel some kind of outline, but there was none, just the smoothness of the paint on the canvas. He wondered if the artist, Julia, originally intended to paint something else and then decided not to and covered it up—but it ended up bleeding through anyway. He flipped it over and looked at the back, but saw nothing. "Just the light maybe...I don't know. I'll have to ask her when I see her."

He placed the painting back on the dresser, grabbed his clothes, and headed for the shower. He slid the shower curtain back and turned the water on. Seeing the bottle of shampoo and conditioner lying near the drain, he scooped them up and placed them back on the ledge next to the soap dish. He remembered how he had knocked them over last night when he threw the small hand towel in frustration. "No fits or bad dreams today. This is *MY* day, and I'm going to do this right." He stepped into the warm water and let it flow over him.

As he lathered his hair with the shampoo, he remembered he would have to call old man Cartwright today and tell him he wasn't going to be in on Monday. He didn't look forward to that task and worried that it might put him in a bad mood for his interview. So he decided to put it off until Monday morning. At least that way he would only have to hear the old fart bitch about it for one day instead of two. His karma would be good today and nothing was going to mess it up.

Once out of the shower, he dressed quickly. He placed his dirty clothes into one of the plastic bags in the closet. He had reserved the room for another night so he wasn't concerned about gathering up his things right now. Shoving his bag into the closet, he closed the door. He placed his wallet in his pants, grabbed his car keys and made for the door. As he turned the doorknob and prepared to exit the room, his mind reeled with a pressing thought.

What about the painting? Are you going to just leave it there? What if someone comes in—the housekeeper and knocks it over? Or even steals it? My painting...

"Okay, we'll have to take you along," he said without any further thought as he grabbed the painting and gently wrapped the paper back around it. "Besides, you might be my good luck charm." He carried the painting down to his car and wrapped it in a towel he had in the trunk. Then he positioned it carefully so that nothing would tip over or fall onto it.

Feeling satisfied that the painting was safe, he walked over to the hotel office, which had advertised a continental breakfast. He imagined it was probably donuts and instant coffee, but that would have to do for now. He checked his watch, it was almost noon, which gave him an hour to get to the interview; he estimated the drive would only take about twenty minutes. As he walked, he noticed there were other people walking around, throwing bags into their cars and getting ready to move on. As earlier, a thought demanded his attention.

Had someone seen me put the painting into the trunk? The car door isn't locked. Someone could pop the trunk from the inside.

He stopped and turned back toward his car. He inserted the key in the door lock and turned it hearing the reassuring sound of the locking mechanism engage. He felt better, even though he thought he was maybe being a little paranoid about it, but better safe than sorry. The thought of someone stealing or messing with his painting was unimaginable. He headed back toward the main office and entered.

"Morning," he said to the woman at the front desk.

"Good morning, sir," she said without looking up from what she was writing. When she finished what she was doing, she looked up and said, "Mr. Whitworth?"

Bob turned toward her. "Yes."

"You just had a phone call."

"A phone call?"

"Yes. A Mr. Cartwright called. Here you are," she said as she handed him the piece of paper. Bob felt his stomach knot as he reached for it. He had told his secretary at work that he would be out of town in case anyone needed him, and he had left the number of the hotel with her. But he had also told her he would be there only one night, not the two that he now planned. He unfolded the piece of paper.

*Large order placed last night. Start early on Monday morning. Be there extra early.
Cartwright.*

The old man must be psychic, he thought. As soon as he planned to do anything, something would come up. He could call and try to explain, but he knew it wouldn't do any good. Besides, he was not going to ruin this day. He would call him tonight or first thing in the morning as he had planned to do. He balled the piece of paper up and tossed it into the trashcan. He immediately felt a good feeling rush from his action. He grabbed a donut and a cup of coffee and was out the door.

He left the parking lot and got back on Route 12, Grove Street, and headed toward town. A few minutes later he saw the parking lot where he had parked yesterday, and smiled as he checked his watch and saw that he had estimated the time of the drive correctly at about twenty minutes. But today he would not park there, and proceeded onward to the Town Hall. He assumed there would be parking, and being Sunday, there shouldn't be any problem getting a parking spot. He checked his watch, twelve-thirty; he had thirty minutes until the interview. He made the left onto Front Street and proceeded toward the intersection of Main Street. As he passed many of the shops, he noticed there were quite a few people walking the shops already,

early shoppers, he assumed, making a last stab before they headed back to where they were going.

He decided to make a fast drive past what he hoped would soon be his shop. He turned left onto Main Street and pulled over to the right side. He placed the car in park and sat and stared at The Special Touch.

His shop? A little premature thinking there Bob isn't it? Have you forgotten about the interview process? Hmm...

He chuckled at his lack of confidence. Got to think positive. Best person for the job—no—correction, the best person for the town. Remember what Tony had said: "What can you bring to the town is the key thing. Highlight the community issues."

Bob watched as some passersby stopped and looked into the window at the items on display. Potential customers. His mind kicked into his marketing analysis of his potential customers; a man and a woman and probably married. He guessed they were forty-something, dressed as they were in jeans and light sweatshirts with hair starting to gray at the temples. They moved toward the door, either ignoring or not seeing the "closed" sign. They tried to turn the knob and found it locked. The frustration was evident in their faces as they grimaced. Lost customers. The two shook their heads and walked away.

Bob checked his watch, twelve forty-five; he checked the map to confirm the location of the town hall. Satisfied he knew how to get there, he put the car in drive and turned left into the parking lot and headed out in the other direction toward the intersection of Main and Front Street. At the intersection he made the left onto Front Street, and then a quick right onto Kennedy. On his left was a park, and beyond the grassy portions was a line of trees. Above the treetops, he saw the steeple of what he assumed was the town hall. Coming up to Bridge Street,

he turned left and crossed over the river. As he came to the stop sign, he saw the sign that pointed to his left for the town hall.

When the town hall came into view, it reminded him of a church for some reason, probably the steeple on the front side of it. The old brick building was two story; the smaller windows on the lower portion were probably for the basement. He wondered if it was a full three floors. The steeple portion had three or four levels, but the small windows on the bottom level made him unsure. The building was not very wide, but appeared to have some depth to it.

He turned right into the driveway and slid into a parking spot. He stepped out of the car and took a step toward the building, then stopped. *Had he locked the door?* He stepped back to the car and checked the door. It was locked. Feeling satisfied, he turned back toward the building and walked briskly.

Opening the large wooden door, he stepped inside. He immediately smelled the age of the building, old wood, he thought. Dim lights from fixtures that may have been in style fifty or sixty years ago hung from the ceiling. The yellow globe of the bulbs cast a golden hue to everything. To his right, there was a stand with a small sign on it. "Town Council Interviews, room 201."

He went up the steps, the wood creaking and sounding like an old man wheezing. As he ascended, he held onto the large wooden banister, discolored and smooth from years of hands rubbing along it as people went up and down the steps. He guessed the building was probably at least a hundred years old. As he crested the landing, room 201 was directly in front of him. The door was closed, a piece of paper tacked with a piece of masking tape hung crookedly on it and read: *Interview in process, please have a seat. We will be with you shortly.*

There were two old wooden chairs to the right of the door. Bob sat in one of them, the wood moaning as he sat. He checked his watch—exactly one o'clock. He looked left and right

for any signs of any other people in the building, but he didn't see anyone. Then he pressed his ear to the wall to see if he could hear anything—nothing. He wanted to get some idea of how many people were on this interview and what were they like. Old—young, male—female...anything that would be helpful. He should have asked Tony yesterday about the council members before he left.

As he sat and waited in the silence, anxiety began to invade his earlier positive thoughts about getting the store.

What if they ask about the accident? If they didn't, should he mention it? Let it go...it was a long time ago. It was an accident...

The door opened and a young man dressed in jeans, sneakers, and a long sleeve T-shirt that had an image of some musical group on it came out. His dark skin and hair seem to indicate an Italian descent, probably from New York or Jersey, he thought. His face looked flustered, red with splotches as if he was holding in anger or disappointment of some sort. In his hands were a leather jacket, several papers, and a large brown envelope. He stepped to the other empty chair and dropped his jacket on it while he stuffed the papers back into the envelope. He sighed heavily.

Another man dressed in a suit stepped out of the room and moved toward Bob. His actions seemed rushed and hurried, but somehow not uncharacteristic for the man. "Mr. Whitworth?" the man asked.

Bob stood. "Yes."

"Hi, Clyde Sanders, town attorney," he said as he extended his hand.

"Nice to meet you," Bob said as he shook his hand.

"We'll be with you shortly. Some of the members need to use the restroom and then we'll get started. I'll come and get you when their ready."

"Fine." Bob said as Clyde Sanders returned to the room.

"What a strange bunch," the man who had been stuffing the papers back into his envelope said.

"How so?" Bob asked.

"The questions they ask—they're off the wall. I own several stores and I never have seen any kind of procedure like this," he said as he stuffed the last piece of uncooperative piece of paper into the envelope. He put the envelope down and donned his jacket. "I'd wish you luck, but you know what—maybe we'd all be better if we skipped this one. Just have a funny felling—take it easy." The man bounded down the steps, seeming to be very glad to be out of there. Bob sat in the silence and waited thinking perhaps that this was not going to be his day after all.

A few minutes later, Clyde Sanders came back out. "Mr. Whitworth, I just want to make sure you understand the procedure. I know your realtor had you sign the agreement about it, but you might have some questions before we start. You understand that it is not a dollar issue because the price is fixed?"

"Yes, I do understand."

"Fine then. If you're ready, we'll go in."

"Let's do it."

###

Sharon turned away from the young man wearing the Aerosmith shirt they were interviewing and covered her mouth as she yawned. Where do these people come from? She thought. I'm surprised that their heads fit through the doorway.

The first interview, Mike Richman from New York, had been terrible. All he wanted to prove was that he had the cash readily available to buy the store outright. His plans were clear; he was buying up real estate as fast as it came available to open a series of chain stores throughout the Northeast region. He had no plans of living in the area, but did overemphasize to the point of nausea that he would hire "local" people to run it. He produced slide after slide of how his "business prowess" had been successful in generating profit and revenue for other communities.

The second interview, currently in progress, was a man by the name of Joe Juliano, who was from New Jersey. He, too, owned several stores in New York and New Jersey and was interested in expanding. But he couldn't hide the fact that he found the whole interview process a waste of his time. His facial expressions reflected impatience with the questions asked and his sighs were becoming thunderous with each following question.

"Mr. Juliano," Martin Daniels began, "have you ever been in trouble with the law? Been convicted of any crimes?"

"Well," he said as he exhaled strongly. "What does that have to do with anything?"

"Mr. Juliano," Martin began again. "A part of the purpose of this interview is to establish the character of the individual. This community is very small and—"

"Okay—okay. I get your point. I had a little accounting problem with the IRS two years ago."

"And the specific type of problem?"

"I failed to report some income, and I didn't pay some taxes. It was an honest mistake."

"The charge was tax evasion?"

"You know how those people are; always sticking their noses into honest working people's pockets. We have to skim...er...juggle the numbers in order to make a living."

"So you were convicted of tax evasion?"

"Well...sort of. I got off with a fine and community service. That's not exactly the same thing...is it?"

Clyde Sanders looked in Sharon's direction. She saw in his eyes the same answer she had already. Scratch off number two. She looked at her watch; it was two minutes to one.

"Well, we seem to be out of time," Sharon said, perhaps in a tone that had a little bit too much enthusiasm in it. "I and the Town Council appreciate you taking the time in your busy schedule to speak with us. We should have a decision in the next few days."

With one last heavy sigh, Mr. Joe Juliano quickly gathered the papers in front of him and left the room. When the door closed, several of the council members covered their mouths to hide the laughs they had stifled earlier at Mr. Juliano's concept of the law.

"I'll check on the last appointment," Clyde said as he rose and made his way to the door.

"Let's hope we saved the best for last," Sharon said softly. Then in a louder voice she called, "Clyde give us about five minutes so we can refresh ourselves." Clyde nodded his head in acknowledgement.

Sharon got up and walked around the room. She had awakened late this morning; too late to attend morning service at the Catholic Church she normally would on Sunday morning. Although she had fully embraced Wicca, she had opted to play her "normal" role with the Catholic religion because it was the one she was most accustomed to when she was growing up.

She would have to call the priest, Father Anthony, and explain she hadn't felt well and with these interviews, she figured it was best to stay in bed and rest a while longer. She knew he would understand.

It's not that she didn't feel well—that didn't accurately describe her feeling. Her emotions were a jumble this morning from the previous night's disturbing revelation, which had opened a new barrage of questions into the death of Joe Caruso. *Joe*. The name was distant to her now, although it had not always been like that. Although they had only dated three times, their fleeting and brief relationship, unknown to anyone on the council, had started to awaken a side of her that she thought was no longer possible. The thought that he may have been killed added a new perspective to life in *her* small town. Also there was a feeling of anticipation that something was going to happen today. She had a nervous feeling in the stomach as if having drunk too much coffee, a jittery sensation. Even through the boring interviews, something inside her was still tickling her interest with anticipation.

"Ready?" Clyde called as he stepped back into the room.

Sharon looked around the room to check that everyone was there. She clicked off the eleven members in her thoughts and saw they all were present.

"One minute Clyde, then bring him in," she called.

Everyone moved toward the chairs at the large wooden table where little place cards with names and positions had been placed so that the interviewees could see who each was and which positions each held on the town council.

"Let's see who our next victim is, shall we?" she said aloud jokingly. Several giggled at the Mayor's humor. She knew everyone was as tired as she was of this interview process, and she hoped her humor would help them cope with the last one.

The members busied themselves by reaching into their stack of papers to get the information packet on the next interviewee. Sharon brought hers out and scanned the top line where the name had been filled in. Mr. Robert Whitworth; she recognized the name from their discussions the night before.

Oh yes...the man who had found the poppet in the store. This should be interesting. I wonder if there is any kind of connection between...

The door to the room opened up and the sound of footsteps followed. Sharon took her eyes off of the packet in before her and looked up at the man. As she looked at him, she was struck by a vague sense of familiarity which was quickly replaced with recognition.

I know you...

###

Bob entered the room and was surprised to see how large it actually was. It appeared to run the full depth of the building. A large oval wooden table sat in the center, its polished wood grain top reflecting the sunlight from the windows. Around the table were several people, perhaps a dozen or so who watched him, making him feel very self conscious.

"Please sit here, Mr. Whitworth," Clyde said as he showed him to an empty chair at the end of the table. Bob sat in the chair trying to not act nervous, but his stomach clearly felt differently, its acid churning away at high gear. Once seated, he scanned the faces of the people who were anxiously watching him.

As his eyes roamed quickly across the people seated at the table, he came to an abrupt halt as he saw recognition in one. The woman at the end of the table, opposite him from where

he sat—he had seen her before. But where had he seen her? He searched his thoughts for her face.

It was yesterday. She came up to me when I was looking at the witchcraft store when I first arrived. She asked me if I was alright.

His eyes scanned her nameplate. Sharon Robbins, Mayor.

Mayor. Oh Christ...Mayor. I was eyeballing the Mayor yesterday. Great...what if she thinks I'm a jerk...

He realized he was staring at her, but he thought she was looking at him with similar curiosity. He thought he should look away, but he didn't want to seem as if he was...embarrassed or anything. He forced a small, but honest grin on his lips to break the tension and then looked away before he could see her reaction.

"If I may do brief introductions," Clyde began. "From your left we have Robin Host—Citizen Representative; Merchants' Representative—Pete Arleen; Commerce Department—Jane Rosen; Treasurer—Cindy Lawless; Transportation Director—Joe Robinson; and Mayor Sharon Robbins..."

Bob nodded in greeting to each member. He tried to look nonchalant as each was introduced, but he waited nervously until Clyde came to the Mayor. When his view centered on her, his gaze was drawn to her dark eyes, and he felt himself begin to flush with embarrassment for staring again. But he saw a thin smile of amusement pass across her face as she nodded.

"...Education director—Sandra Campas; Public works—Bob Muller; Emergency services—Joan Santiago; Chief of Police—Martin Daniels, and of course myself, Clyde Sanders—City Attorney."

"Thank you, Clyde," Sharon said. Bob felt himself jump at the sound of her voice. He tried to wrestle his nervousness away.

Calm down...just calm down. Everything is fine. Don't screw this up by being so darn nervous.

Mr. Whitworth," Sharon began, "I'm sure Clyde has described the purpose of conducting this interview. We have your package before us with your information to review. Do you have any questions before we begin?"

"I," Bob began but his voice sounded weak. He cleared his throat and started again. "I'd just like to say thank you for allowing me the opportunity to come before you today. I understand you all are very busy, and I appreciate you taking your personal time today to see me." Bob hoped his beginning statement would put them at ease and maybe help in the questions to follow.

"Thank you for your concern, Mr. Whitworth," Sharon responded. "Shall we begin then?"

"Sure," Bob blurted sounding squeaky and mousy to himself. His anxiousness to get through this interview was showing.

Slow down. Short polite answers and don't ramble. You're only going to get one chance at this.

"I guess I'll start with the basic question," Sharon began, "Why do you want the store?"

Bob swallowed hard. Obviously the mayor was a straight to the point person. He thought for a few agonizing seconds, the silence felt overwhelming as he saw them all watching him and waiting for his first answer. He felt perspiration forming on his forehead.

Come on...say something.

"I love the business. It's all I've ever wanted to do. There's something about old things...a sense of an era that has gone and can never be replaced. I feel like I am helping people regain some of that era by selling them a piece of it."

As he finished his answer, the silence settled upon them again. He nervously watched as some of them exchanged glances. *That was good...I think. Short and to the point.*

"Why here in Putnam?" Robin Host, the citizen representative asked. She was a plain woman in her late forties-early fifties. Her hair was tied into a tight bun and she wore no makeup of any kind. Bob found her question not as direct as the mayor's. He thought she was really asking what kind of person he was.

"In all honesty, I didn't pick the area. It was a matter of the right place coming up for sale. I've been searching for this type of store for quite a while. The first time I stepped into the town was yesterday, but I walked around for several hours talking to some of the other shop owners, and I think I would like it here. I think I can not only help the economy, but I can feel I could also help the community as a whole."

"Help the community?" Jane Rosen the commerce director asked. "How so?"

"It's hard to explain. Did you ever just have a feeling about a place and its people? I feel like I could fit in very easily and be part of something greater." He saw some puzzled faces at his answer and decided to keep explaining. "For example, yesterday when I was walking around, I stopped in one of the stores, I think the name was, *Simple Elegance*, and I bought a painting. That may not seem strange to you, but for me it was my first time. I bought it because it touched me on some level and I had to have it. Like the feeling for the painting, the sense of belonging or being here in this town is similar. You can't explain it, it just feels right." His answer even

surprised him because it felt like it just flowed out of him. He felt his own face twist in puzzlement.

Where did that come from? Don't be so vague...be direct and specific with answers.

He looked toward the mayor and found she was staring at him curiously. He averted his gaze and looked at the other council members. The tempo picked up and the next few questions came quickly, fired in rapid succession that he answered.

"Do you own any other stores?"

"No."

"Have you ever been in any financial difficulty?"

"No."

"How many years have you worked in the business?"

"Eight years."

"Do you plan to begin some kind of franchise?"

"No."

"Have you had any problems with the IRS?"

"No."

It was during this quick barrage of simple questions that he answered automatically that the strange sensation came over him.

Did you lock the car? The painting is in the car. Did you lock the car?

He tried to remember as he visualized his steps from the parking lot and remembered that he had, in fact, locked the car. The sensation of fear vanished as quickly as it had appeared.

"Mr. Whitworth. What is your religious preference?"

"Excuse me?" Bob asked. He had heard the question clearly enough, but between his brief digression of thoughts and the oddity of it, it caught him off guard as he delayed for a few seconds.

"Religious preference?" Bob Muller, the public works director asked again.

"Mr. Whitworth," Sharon interjected, "I know that this question is rather of a personal nature, and if you feel you do not wish to answer, that is well within your prerogative. We do not mean to invade your personal privacy in any manner. The question is to get a sense of your complete background. You may answer it in any manner you feel is adequate."

"Thank you," Bob said and suddenly panicked. He had never thought of that question being asked so he had no answer ready. He had been raised a catholic, attended church with his mother every Sunday. But after the accident, he had lost his faith in a sense. He thought he attributed it to the constant bombardment of the cliché answer that, "all things happen for a reason." That answer no longer satisfied him, and after all these years, he hadn't changed his view on the subject.

"Most of you could probably answer this question in a word or two. For some very personal reasons, I'm not what you would call a practicing anything. Do I believe in God? Yes, I do. As to a particular religion that I adhere to, I would have to say none at this moment."

Silence. He watched as some of the members scribbled with their pens on the paper in front of them.

"Mr. Whitworth," the strong and deep voice of Chief Martin Daniels boomed away the curtain of silence since Bob's last answer. He had been quiet up to this point and his voice's entry into the question and answer period seemed to bode something ominous. Bob felt his stomach muscles tighten as if was about to be hit. Chief Daniels held a piece of paper in front of him. His

eyes remained focused on the paper as he began to speak. The words flowed ominously from his mouth, "Have you ever been convicted..."

Bob's stomach lurched as the word "convicted" settled on the air in front of him.

He knows! Shit! He did a background check and he has all of it in front of him right now.

Now what? Game over...

"...of a felony?"

As Bob thought how he would answer, he began to feel an odd sensation settle over him, replacing the feeling of immediate defeat he always felt at this stage of being asked about his criminal record. The sensation was hard to describe, but it was as if a blanket of reassurance covered him and that he had nothing to fear. Normally he would stiffen and be unable to speak for several seconds but he felt ready now. More ready than he had ever felt in his life.

"Yes," Bob answered firmly. "Vehicular manslaughter. I was young, only eighteen and I was involved in a traffic accident, over twenty years ago. Another teenager, about my age had been drinking and stepped out in front of my car." The image appeared in his mind in its usual vivid detail. Then he saw the robed figure, the woman who had appeared in his dream the night before was sitting next to him. She extended a hand in front of his eyes and the image vanished.

I can help you...her voice drifted off as the image vanished.

"He was killed," Bob continued as his eyes, relieved of the images from his mind, focused on the Chief of Police. "Because there were questions about stopping in time, and being a new driver, I was still charged with vehicular manslaughter, and placed on probation for two years and lost my license for one year."

"And that was where?" Chief Daniels asked.

Bob wanted to tell him to just read it off the paper in front of him but suddenly Bob realized what had just happened.

He didn't have the information.

Bob had been lured into thinking that the burly Chief of Police had the information in front of him. But he didn't. It was one of the oldest games in the book. Make someone think you know something by holding the paper in front of you and play his or her own conscience against them. He had tricked Bob, but it really didn't matter, it would have come out at some point during the background information for the loan. At least it was out in the open and done with.

"Norfolk, Virginia." Bob answered coolly, trying to not sound annoyed at being led like a cow towards the slaughterhouse.

"Thank you for your honesty, Mr. Whitworth," Chief Daniels said. He placed the paper down on the table in front of him, scribbled something and then placed the pen aside. It was evident that there would be no more questions from him.

"I have one final question, Mr. Whitworth," Mayor Robbins said.

Bob looked in her direction: the word final never sounded so good to him. "How would you describe yourself...as a person?" Her voice sounded less formal to him now; almost as if in a friendly tone.

"A person?"

"Yes," she said. The faint glimmer of a smile danced upon her lips as she spoke. "What kind of person are you? Surely you have an opinion?"

"Ah...I don't know—an easy going sort of guy who gets along with others. Not too ambitious, yet knows what he wants and continually strives to attain it but not to the point of

obsession. Yearns to be part of something where others feel similar as I do, so that they can all work for the greater good."

He felt all the eyes upon him as he spoke, but he kept his fixed on the Mayor's. Their darkness offered him some sort of odd comfort, whereas the rest were empty and vague. As he had yesterday, he sensed some sort of vague but definite attraction for this woman. He only hoped that he had not overdone it on their first meeting and that she hadn't misinterpreted his reaction for some vain attempt at a quick pick up.

He continued. "Yesterday when I saw the vacant shop, I knew it was for me. I immediately felt that we would be perfect for each other." He immediately saw a shift in her facial expression to one of amusement and realized what he had just said and how it might be misinterpreted as to regard their meeting yesterday as well. "The store and I," he clarified quickly and felt a red blush rise to his face.

"Well, that concludes the interview," Clyde Sanders said as he rose from his seat. "If you wouldn't mind stepping out for a few minutes Mr. Whitworth, so the members can discuss anything they feel might need clarifying before you leave."

"Of course. I'd like to thank the council again for their time." Bob said as he stood from his chair and exited the room. The door clicked shut behind him and he exhaled a long breath of air.