

Shopocalypse

David Gullen

-1-

Josie was an hour early, unable to sleep, up before dawn. She'd cut her own hair, scissors in front of the mirror: a ragged, gamine cut and all she could afford.

She took her time on the long road out to the desert prison, the old split-screen camper wasn't good in the heat. She drove with the window down, the morning air hot and humid. Arizona desert stretched all around, patched in the far distance with vibrant green. Once in a while mirage-ponds resolved into real water.

High on the prison walls auto-guns slid along recessed rails, steel singing on steel. One tracked Josie as she drove. Behind those high concrete walls were thirty-thousand inmates – a small fraction of President Snarlow's great roundup. One of those inmates was Novik. Josie had been waiting two years.

The ground was bare all around the prison; the new and old growth hacked down by chain gangs.

You can try, but you can't stop change, Josie thought. The politicians had stopped her life for a while but now it was going to start again. It was going to be good.

Novik was two hours late. The system ran to its own schedule and changed the rules as it went. When you were this deep in all you could do was accept.

Finally a steel gate swung open. Half a dozen men filed out onto the dusty apron and blinked uncertainly under the open sky. Two prison guards in navy pants, short sleeved shirts, and gold-framed sunglasses followed them out. One was fat, one was tall. Both chewed on matchsticks; both held shotguns.

Up on the wall the autoguns clustered above the men. Josie climbed out of the camper. The sun on the gun barrels dazzled and she shielded her eyes. A brand-new solar-electric diesel hybrid sped by. An autogun raced along the wall after it.

There he was.

'Hey,' Josie waved her arm. 'Novik.'

Novik raised his hand, a slow gesture. He swung his bag onto his shoulder and walked across the road, shoulders hunched, a downbeat silhouette. Josie studied him intently – dusty loose hair, lean hips and broad shoulders. That scar on his brow. He looked the same, he looked different.

Two other vehicles waited: a battered pickup with a woman in late middle-age at the wheel, and a gleaming black sedan with tinted windows. One man climbed into each of the vehicles, the rest set out on the long dusty walk into town.

Novik and Josie sat in the camper. He stared through the fly-specked windshield as she started the engine.

Josie kissed his cheek. ‘What do you want to do, hon?’

Novik closed his eyes. ‘Just drive, babe.’

Josie took them out towards the interstate, away from town.

Novik looked back at the receding prison, as if only half believing he was outside that enormous, bleak structure. An autogun perched at the corner, its black muzzle aimed towards them. Novik kissed his middle finger and held it out the window.

The road crested a rise and dropped into a shallow dip leaving the prison was out of sight. Josie pulled onto the verge and stopped the motor.

Once again it was just the two of them, Josie and Novik, like it always was. Like it always should be. They climbed out of the camper and looked at each other. Josie wore an old green top and flat shoes, her skirt a faded Mexican print Novik remembered from long ago.

Novik had the same clothes he’d worn in court two years ago: brown boots, blue jeans, a collarless white shirt, a black leather jacket. Now he also wore the black metal hoop of his parole tag clamped round his neck like a dog collar.

Novik buried his face in her hair and breathed in.

Josie did the same, her face against his old jacket. It still smelled good.

‘Hey,’ Josie said after a while.

For the first time in a long while Novik’s smile reached his eyes.

The cut on Novik’s scalp that had bled so much was now a ragged scar. Josie brushed back sandy hair that could never decide if it was in a parting or a fringe. He’d always been

lanky. Now, like her, he was several meals on the wrong side of thin.

They discovered a shallow pond, reed-flanked, the water skimmed by iridescent damselflies. A frog croaked, wild yellow iris bloomed. The trunk of a rotting saguaro cactus lay collapsed in the shallows. A year ago the pond had not existed. Now it rained most weeks.

All around, the desert was blooming out of season. It was strange, beautiful, and unsettling.

Five miles down the highway they passed a huge area of new construction. Pristine tarmac and skeletal steel frames covered a hundred acres of desert scoured washboard flat. Billboards announced three cubic miles of self-store warehousing. Occupancy was already at 80%. Avoid disappointment, reserve your foot-cubes now.

Josie looked across at Novik. He shook his head. 'No more, Josie. Not me. Never again.' He looked down at his hands, broken fingers never set quite straight. 'I'm through with protest. Look where it got me.'

Look where it got us both, Josie thought.

He'd given her the right answer, the same one he'd used on visiting days. Until today, until he was out, Josie had never been sure. She pressed down on the gas and the half-finished warehouses sped by.

They passed by more construction, a new mall with walls of pink granite and gold glass. A small group of activists stood between a stand of mature desert ironwood and the bulldozers. Novik turned his head away.

See no evil.

Exhausted by the stress of the prison release he closed his eyes and slept.

When Novik woke they were on the interstate. He felt refreshed, reborn, made anew. Cool air blew through the dashboard vents, the sun shone in a blue sky. Josie was beside him. The blacktop ran ahead for miles.

'Want to eat?' Josie said.

Novik settled back into his seat. 'Sure.'

Up ahead was a diner, a single car in the parking lot. Josie pulled in. Novik walked over to inspect the other vehicle: a drop-head Cadillac AFC-16 lobsterback in charcoal grey, a model he had never before seen. The design was radical, near

Mil-Spec in its muscularity, sleek and powerful, the folding roof segmented like a carapace. It was an awesome car. Novik gave a low whistle of approval. He'd missed out on a lot in two years.

Then he saw the fibre-glass Viking longboat on the roof of the diner, manned by three turnip-headed warriors with horned helmets.

He gave a disbelieving laugh. 'Where are we?'

'Cheese-a-Swede,' Josie gave Novik a hug. 'We can still get a burger.'

he looked up at the garish sign. 'Are you sure?'

'Trust me.'

He always trusted her. It was why she'd waited.

There were three other customers in the diner: older men, clean-shaven, smart, dark suits, their grey overcoats neatly folded across the backs of empty chairs. Their conversation was sparse, their gestures careful. One of them glanced up as Novik and Josie came in.

Novik saw a pale, heavy face under oiled and combed back black hair. The men didn't look made but neither did they look like businessmen. He wanted to turn around and walk out but he'd learned not to make such simple mistakes. Instead, he turned up his collar and kept on coming,

The waitress was a stocky Mexican girl. She wore a plastic Viking helmet with built-in blonde pigtails. She poured them coffee and her eyes moved over Novik's parole collar like spit sliding off glass.

Even so, the coffee was good. When Novik went to the counter for a refill the man who'd watched them come in left his table and came over. Close up, he was younger than at first impression: early middle-age, deep-chested, muscular if a little overweight. His forefingers beat a fast rhythm on the counter top, he bared his teeth in imitation of a smile. 'Howdy.'

'How's it going?' Novik did not meet his eye.

'Name's Black.' The man finished his beat with a drum-roll flourish, 'Happy birthday.'

Novik stood very still.

Black leaned on the counter, 'Don't tell me you walk around with that fucked-up expression on your face all day?'

‘No, sir,’ Novik said carefully. ‘And thank you, it is my birthday.’

Black flicked Novik’s parole tag with his finger then called back to his own table. ‘Hey boys, it’s this gentleman’s birthday.’

The two men at the table were older than Black. One was slim, bald, his skull elongated, his jaw narrow. The other had dyed hair, bad skin, a pock-marked lump for a nose. He gestured to an empty chair:

‘Be so kind as to join us.’

Helplessly, Novik looked down the room to Josie.

‘You too, ma’am,’ the pock-faced man said.

‘He didn’t do anything,’ Josie said. It came out shrill, louder than she meant. Nobody appeared to hear her. The three men stood until she was seated.

‘Novik,’ Novik held out his hand. ‘Thanks for asking us over.’

‘I’m Josie,’ Josie said.

‘Names are masks,’ said the man with bad skin. ‘We’re the Old-fashioned Boys. That’s who we really are.’

Novik put his hand away.

‘Jimmy, I already told them my name,’ Black said.

Pock-faced Jimmy swore vilely under his breath and massaged the bridge of his lumpy nose for a long, cold moment. ‘Fuck it then.’

The narrow-headed man slowly inclined his head. ‘Morgan.’

‘Please to meet you,’ Novik said into the following silence.

‘We need drinks,’ Black blurted out. ‘A man needs a drink on his birthday.’

‘If I’m going to drink, I need to eat.’ Jimmy snapped his fingers at the waitress, ‘We’re going to eat.’

‘I’ll get the drinks,’ Black said.

‘You’ll get it all,’ Jimmy said.

Black patted the seat of his pants. ‘Wallet’s in the car.’ He hurried out the diner.

‘Fucking young punk.’ Jimmy gave Novik an apologetic nod, ‘No offence.’

‘None taken.’

Jimmy pointed at Novik’s hairline, ‘You get that from the Feds?’

‘The Weekenders.’

‘God bless the National Guard.’

They ordered burgers and fries, whisky and beer. Black paid the waitress in cash. Novik carefully sipped his first drink in two years.

Morgan traced a line through the condensation on his bottle with a well-manicured finger. ‘Tell me something, Novik. When did you stop ass-raping your cell-mate?’

Despite the beer Novik’s mouth was dry as dust. ‘I didn’t–’

Morgan looked around the table. ‘He says didn’t stop.’

Novik knew where this was going.

‘Forget it,’ Jimmy said. ‘It’s just a joke.’

Jimmy told them a good story, Black told a better one, funny, nasty, illegal. When you thought about it, it wasn’t funny at all. Novik and Josie laughed with the rest of them.

The waitress laid out another round.

‘My glass is dusty,’ Morgan said.

Jimmy gave a loud sigh. ‘How’s the burger?’

‘It’s good.’

‘It’s a great burger,’ Josie said.

Jimmy shook his head, ‘It’s not a great burger, it’s a good burger. You’re a pretty woman but you should always tell the truth.’

‘It’s a good burger for five bucks,’ Black said.

‘My aunt used to give me five bucks to fuck her,’ Jimmy said.

‘Which side?’ Black said.

‘What difference does that make?’ Jimmy said.

‘You fuck your mother’s sister, that’s disrespectful.’

‘She only had brothers,’ Jimmy said.

‘She had a mother too.’

‘That’s disgusting.’ Jimmy jabbed a finger at Black, ‘You know what, you’re disgusting.’ He sat angrily in his seat. ‘I did not fuck my grandmother.’

Josie shifted uncomfortably, a rabbit in the headlights.

Jimmy made a conciliatory gesture. ‘Back then, five bucks got you more than a burger.’

‘No shit,’ Black laughed.

The drink had gone to Novik’s head. ‘You’re from Alabama?’

‘How the fuck did you know that?’

Novik thought about it. ‘I don’t know how, but I do.’ Something wasn’t quite right.

‘My father used to touch me,’ Morgan said. There was a sibilance behind his voice, the skittering of cockroach legs.

Sometime during the third round Black jumped up on the counter and made like he was surfing. Josie and Jimmy were in a deep conversation about karma and predestination. Morgan ordered pie and held the first spoonful at eye-level for minutes on end.

It wasn’t the drink. Something was *in* the drink. Novik lurched across the diner, went behind the counter and grabbed two bottles of coke. In the kitchen the Mexican girl was sharpening knives.

When Novik looked up at Black, surfing on the counter, he saw the waves break and heard the Beach Boys. When he listened to Josie and Jimmy their words held a wisdom so far beyond the ken of mortal man their auras glowed. Josie’s shone rose gold, Jimmy’s pulsed old blood and meconium. It was as if an angel debated with a demon.

Novik drank a bottle of coke and felt a little better. Then he saw Morgan and Black had auras that dripped filth and grew very frightened. He Josie’s hand and led her outside. Behind them Jimmy sat weeping.

Inside the camper, Josie collapsed on the passenger seat. Novik didn’t know where he wanted to be but it wasn’t here. The van wouldn’t co-operate. It went forwards, then it went back. There was a bang, a jolt, the engine struggled. Novik slipped the clutch, revved the engine and finally the old vehicle gained some traction. Out on the interstate they finally began to accelerate.

With the windows down and the passage of time and miles Novik’s head began to clear. After an hour Josie stirred. Novik opened the second bottle of coke, took a mouthful, and offered her the rest. She gulped it down and stared bleakly out the window.

‘That was very wrong, very bad,’ Novik said.

‘Where are we?’ Josie slurred.

‘An hour away. Fifty, sixty miles.’

Josie looked back down the road. She screamed and cowered in her seat. ‘They’re here! Oh, God, Novik, they followed us.’

Novik checked the mirror. In cold horror he saw she was right. The big charcoal grey Cadillac was right behind them,

so close against the rear fender he couldn't see the hood. His guts turned to water. How could he have not noticed? The road had been empty. Had he looked? Perhaps he had never looked. What did they want? Novik knew the answer: they wanted to kill them, murder them for kicks and feed the dark auras of their wicked souls.

The Cadillac matched their speed perfectly, nose to tail. 'What're they waiting for?' Novik muttered. 'They got the power, the speed; they can force us off the road any time.'

'Don't stop,' Josie begged. 'Never stop.'

A mile went by, and another. Novik studied the Cadillac in the mirror. What he saw was crazy. He looked and looked until he was sure. Then he took his foot off the gas and changed down into third, into second.

'What are you doing,' Josie shrieked. 'Keep going!'

He pulled onto the shoulder. 'They're not here. The car's empty.'

Southern States Littoral – Still part of the USA!!!

‘Of course it is,’ Vice President Oscar ‘OMG’ Gordano told us on the steps of his official residence at the DC Naval Observatory. ‘And you can quote me.’

Gordano dismissed suggestions that the coastal regions of Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana – colloquially known as the Southern Littoral – were effectively outside the law.

‘There are some local difficulties,’ Gordano admitted. ‘This administration is committed to returning the rule of law to every square foot of our territories.’

He also dismissed claims that organised crime, specifically Mitchell Gould, had established self-governing enclaves along the Littoral.

‘Hurricane Larry knocks down conventional structures and it’s uneconomic to build hardened facilities. Frankly, who’d want to live there anyway?’

The Vice President was on his way to the Presidential ball. Semi-official on the political calendar, it is described as a low-key, intimate affair for the President and four thousand of her closest friends.

– Syndicated feed, KUWjones.org

140. Westbound.

Josie and Novik stood beside their camper. The Old-fashioned Boys’ car was locked onto their rear tow bar by its front fender.

Empty mesquite landscape stretched away in all directions. The interstate was deserted.

Novik did not understand. How was it possible to accidentally steal a car? How could anyone do that? One more strike made him a three-time loser. They were supposed to be on holiday; this trip was their fresh start. Now it was a disaster.

He rubbed the parole transponder clamped round his neck. Back in the diner Jimmy had talked about the pleasures of his profession. Beyond good and evil there was only truth, and the acceptance of truth. The dreadful things the Old-fashioned Boys did for money were simply events. At the time they had been protected by a golden light. Here on the hard shoulder that tranquillity was replaced by a grimy, trembling dread.

‘You ran the tow hook under it in the diner parking lot,’ Josie said.

‘I – I’m sorry, Josie, I don’t remember.’

Between pulling in to the Cheese-a-Swede and about five minutes ago he only remembered fragments. That wasn’t right.

‘Why am I not surprised?’

Novik saw how fear made Josie angry. ‘Somebody spiked my burger.’

‘Oh, come on,’ she exclaimed, then hesitated – one thing Novik didn’t do was lie. ‘Really, hon? That’s what really happened?’

‘Something synthetic, radical, maybe a cocktail. A fast burn, like Briefstacy, but with more mind-fuckery.’

He had screwed up again. These things just happened to him, he didn’t know how. He’d spent his life doing his best to impress, trying to be as smart as she was, eternally worried she’d leave him for someone more together.

He needed to fix this. ‘I’ll let down the rear tyres and jack up the front of the Caddy.’

He wriggled under the big car with the old bottle jack from the camper. With most of the air out of the van’s back tyres the Cadillac would only need lifting three or four inches. As he offered up the squat, blue metal jack it transformed into a smiling, pot-bellied Buddha.

‘I’m too short,’ the jack said.

Novik blinked and the jack was a jack again. Under him the road was hard and cold, above him an electric eye watched him from the Cadillac’s floor pan. He crawled out from under the car and tossed the jack back into the camper.

‘Unbolt the fender,’ Josie said.

‘These new cars are single-piece extrusions. There’s nothing to unbolt.’

‘Actually, I was printed,’ the car said, in a polite mid-western drawl.

‘Jesus Christ!’ Novik leaped away from the car.

‘Detroit engineering, sir,’ the car said.

Novik waved his fingers in front of his eyes. ‘I thought I was coming down.’

‘I heard it too,’ Josie said.

Novik studied the car, goggle-eyed. ‘You’re a real talking car?’

‘Yes, sir, I am.’

‘Wow. That is so cool.’

‘Thank you, sir.’

‘Please don’t call me sir.’

‘All right.’

‘How big are those printers?’ Josie said.

‘I don’t know, ma’am,’ the car replied. ‘I wasn’t there.’

‘You could print your own spare parts.’

‘Then I would be a printer instead of a car.’

‘You’d last forever.’

‘My substrate is photo-unstable, a deliberate design decision.’

‘I can fix that.’ Novik dashed back to the camper, rummaged in the foot well, and returned with a bottle of sun block. ‘Factor forty,’ he said as he sprayed a film of white cream onto the Cadillac’s wing.

Josie and the car exchanged a look.

‘A considerate gesture,’ the car said. ‘Unfortunately, few people will want last year’s model.’

Novik peered through the tinted windshield at the empty driver’s seat. ‘Mr Car, your fender’s locked onto my rig. Can you pop your trunk so I can get your jack?’

‘Technically, no. I may only grant ingress for the owner, or his or her designated associates.’

‘The Old-fashioned Boys? The three men at the diner?’ Josie said.

‘No, ma’am.’

‘Who is your owner?’ Novik said.

‘Technically, nobody, sir.’

‘You’re stolen?’

‘Technically, no, sir.’

‘Stop calling me sir.’

‘My apologies. I have a speech-pattern modifier request timeout. My firmware needs patching.’

‘You opened up for those Old-fashioned Boys,’ Josie said.

‘They acquired me via a method which evaded legal niceties.’

‘So have we.’

Mr Car thought about it. ‘I concur. I let them put things in, you can take things out.’

Josie and Novik walked round to the trunk. ‘What kind of things?’

‘Money, mostly.’

The lock clicked open, the lid swung up. Josie and Novik looked into a trunk filled with lidless boxes stacked with used ten, twenty, and hundred-dollar bills.

During that tumbleweed moment a distant look came into Novik’s eye.

One of the boxes contained a packet of latex gloves, a pair of filter masks and ten fist-sized packages of white powder. Some packs had burst open, a fine layer of powder coated the money and had seeped down into, and between, the cash-filled boxes.

‘Please note the currency is contaminated with fluorinated LSD, mammalian Oxytocin, trans-PTTH and brominated ketamine, mixed with an inert carrier in a ratio of 100,000:1,’ said Mr Car.

Josie pulled on a pair of the gloves and picked up the bundle of notes behind the burst packets. A hole ran part way through. She flicked through the sheaf and extracted a flattened bullet. She held it up for Novik to see. ‘Black lied when he said he had forgotten his wallet, he just didn’t want to spend his own money. He used some of this cash and we all got spaced. How do you know about the drugs, Mr Car?’

‘The Cadillac AFC-16 is not only the model of choice for senators and chief executives, it is also popular with other gangsters and hoodlums. BFBM magazine says this is because I am Awesomely Fucking Cool. As required by legislation, I am fitted with an integrated air analyser interfaced to GPS and law enforcement agencies.’

Josie tossed the money back into the trunk. ‘Novik, get the cars unhitched. We’re out of here.’

‘Stress not. My GPS uplink was disabled by a bullet fired from a handgun. The very round you are holding,’ Mr Car said.

Novik looked at the car open-mouthed. ‘They shot you?’

‘In actual fact, yes, they did. It was why I decided to take your tow.’ A speculative tone entered the car’s voice, ‘I always wondered what it felt like to be a hitcher.’

The wind blew damp, gusting from the south-east. Unseasonal rain clouds swept up from the distant gulf and gathered over the hills. Powder from the split packet lifted on the breeze and settled in shallow drifts over the money.

Novik didn’t like hard drugs, he didn’t like the way they ate people’s lives. Ambitions became daydreams, daydreams became could-have-beens. Home became memories, and your home became the street. He had seen it too many times. In prison it was a way of life, and it was encouraged.

‘Stand upwind, Josie.’ Novik snapped on a pair of gloves and fitted a filter mask. He took each packet, tore it open, and emptied it onto the road. A plume of white dust swirled away, a few hundred-dollar bills spun up into the air.

‘Be careful, babe. That stuff goes through your skin.’

Novik watched the dust cloud dissipate. When it next rained desert flowers would bloom strange new colours and coyotes would form rock-and-roll bands. He affectionately ran his hand over the rust-pocked rear wheel arch of the camper. ‘We’ll put her in storage. When things are quieter I’ll fix her up.’

It was an old mantra, a prelude to every big idea Novik had. Josie did not like it at all. ‘This is a bad place, babe. We need to go.’

Novik stuck out his chin. ‘And leave all this money here? We can do something with it. Something good.’

She grabbed him by the lapels of his jacket and shook him like an old rug. ‘I don’t know whether to slug you or get on my knees and beg. Two years I’ve waited for you and now this? If you break parole you’ll go back inside for four more. Any ideas about doing good, about making a difference, just forget it.’

Novik gently took hold of her hands. ‘Two years for me too.’

She broke away, still angry. 'You don't think things through. You do something crazy like stealing a car full of drugs and money and it will be ten times that—'

'We haven't done anything wrong, Josie. We've taken a stolen car from some very bad people. That money doesn't belong to them, it's not set for a good purpose, just more misery.'

'Then burn it.' Josie gestured wildly at the car, 'Burn it all.'

'I'd prefer a different solution,' Mr Car said hastily.

'You keep out of it,' Josie snapped. 'Whose side are you on?'

'The side of not getting burned, ma'am.'

'And you can't just burn a talking car,' Novik said.

She challenged him, hands on hips. 'Why not?'

Good question. Novik gave the thinnest of answers: 'It's a *talking car*.'

'I just meant the money,' Josie said. The anger drained out of her, she gave Novik an unhappy, tearful smile. 'I've just got you back. Don't make me wait again, babe. I can't do it.'

'I'm sorry.' Novik reached out. 'Hey.'

She came into his arms, held him tight. 'I hate arguing.'

'Me too.' It made him feel so fragile. 'Listen, it won't be like last time. I promise.'

Josie traced the scar that ran from just below his hairline back across his scalp. She rapped the steel band of the parole transponder with her knuckle. 'What are you going to do about that?'

President Guinevere Snarlow came to office on a promise to revitalise the economy and end the protests.

'Hard times, tough love,' she told them. 'People want a liberal, socialist government, they can cross the pond.'

People didn't like what she did but they tolerated it. Once it was all over, the prison population had doubled and everybody knew somebody in jail. Quite a few knew someone who was dead.

Citizens kept their heads down; the country was quieter than it had been for a decade. The malls stayed open.

'When I was inside, people said you're OK if you cut it off under water,' Novik said. 'Lie in a bath, breath through a tube.'

While they talked the two cars separated. The Cadillac's fender slowly flowed back and over the tow hook.

'Did I see that?' Novik said.

'I think so.'

'Fender-morph technology,' Mr Car said. 'Memory Kevlar means I never have a scratch or a dent.'

'And no bullet holes,' Novik said.

'It's a gift.'

The sight of all that money had re-kindled a spark in Novik. President Snarlow had beaten him once, now he had another chance. 'Josie, think about it. We could really do something.'

They had been together since high school recycling club. They camped with the Occupy protests, joined the flashmobs, signed up to the networks and petitions. For a season it felt like something was going to happen, things were going to change. An American Spring.

Then Snarlow was elected. Novik went to jail and Josie worked for nickels and dimes. They were the lucky ones. All Josie wanted now was to stay out of trouble.

And now Novik had that look in his eye.

'You really want to try again?' Josie said.

Novik swallowed hard. He had already made up his mind: he was ready to break his promise. 'Yes, I do.'

Josie punched his shoulder, thumped his chest, each blow punctuating her words. 'So how's it going to work?' *Thump*. 'What's this good thing we're going to do?' *Thump*. 'I'm not going to try unless there's a plan, so you tell me a good one.'

Put on the spot, Novik hadn't a clue. Josie was the smart one. He had dreams and enthusiasm; she thought things through and made them happen.

It came to him: 'We'll just buy everything up before anyone else does.'

'Then what?'

He had it. So perfect he had to laugh. 'We'll give it away.'

'That's crazy,' Josie said, but she laughed too.

'We can't get arrested for shopping. We're doing what they want us to do.'

Right away she could see the utter impracticality of the idea – they would never have enough money. As usual, Novik simply hadn't thought that far ahead. Josie looked into his eyes and for a moment she was back in high school, seeing

him for the first time, his taut muscular body, the change from uncertainty to happiness when he knew he'd said something that made her laugh.

The concept was ridiculous but he was right about it being safe. Purchasing commodities was the one thing Snarlow's government wanted them to do. She closed the Cadillac's trunk. 'We still need to move. You take the Caddy, these cars can half drive themselves.'

'Ma'am, I can completely drive myself if the driver is incapacitated or distracted by drugs, blood loss or amorous intent,' Mr Car said.

Novik saw the change in Josie. He didn't understand why, all he knew was he couldn't do this without her and was glad. Guilt twinged inside. He'd finagled Josie into another of his schemes and, despite his explanations, it was a highly dangerous one. If those Old-fashioned Boys caught them – People like that killed without hesitation.

'You're sure?'

'One condition – when the money's gone, if everything's still the same, we'll walk away and never look back. No regrets.'

She'd take this chance, she'd stand by him while he tried one last time. Then he would be with her for good. No more waiting. She'd have her man.

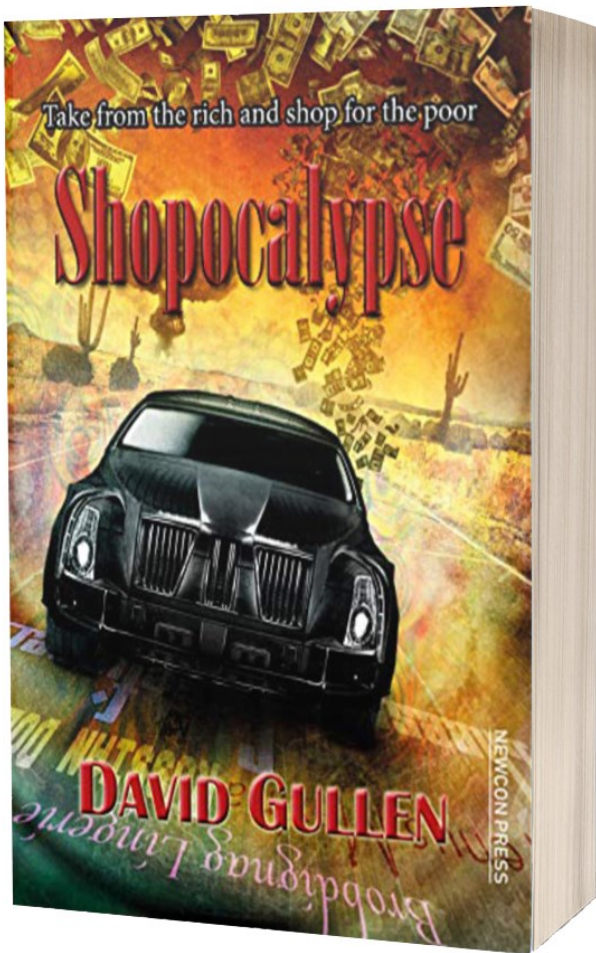
Like he said, shopping wasn't illegal.

'No regrets,' Novik said.

'Then let's start shopping.'

Call it love.

[Keep Reading](#)



[Keep Reading](#)