

Behind the Maserati Tent
Or
You Gotta Serve Somebody

By

Pat Hanson

Everybody has a Room 222, a personal nemesis. For some it's filled with snakes or spiders. For many women it's trying on bathing suits in the confines of a department store dressing room. This personal horror may be the mirror image or exact opposite of some deep secret fear, but for me it always induces a cold sweat.

Mine has something to do with red cars. The sight of a red car doubles my pulse, as it must those muscular highway patrolmen that stride Harleys, or even city cops in black and white sedans. Every time a bright red Camero passes me I'm afraid I'll be sideswiped. When a dark red SUV is pulled over I smile inside. It may have something to do with the red Alpha Romeo convertible I owned when I was a bleach blonde at 23 and got three tickets in six months before I sold it. ~~One was for 35 in a 25 mph zone!~~ My travel agent has 'no red cars' on his computer screen for my account. Once I surrendered and took a red Chevy Cabrolet or some such, and it was backed into in a parking lot with me in it. Never again.

I rarely break out in a sweat anymore, but I did several times during the 2003 Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance, the most elegant and expensive car show on the planet.

The tiny ad in the paper read ‘DRIVERS NEEDED FOR CONCOURS - Apply in person. Universal Hosts.’ My professional career as a college teacher had been spiraling downward in the wake of California’s budget cuts. *I can do this* I told myself. Maybe I’ll break the gender barrier and become a valet parker next year, I’d heard the tips were great. The receptionist said to bring a DMV printout of a clean driving record (no problem), and wear a blue blazer and khaki pants (problem).

“For the interview?”

“It wouldn’t hurt,” she said, “we get some pretty high-end clients and lots of applicants.”

A quick scan in my closet revealed only one pair of stained khaki’s I hadn’t worn in way too long, a maroon polyester blazer that would have to do for the interview, and one yellowed white silk blouse from my Dr. Hanson days as a state bureaucrat. Being prepared for all contingencies, I stopped by the office of a good friend and picked up a small olive jar of her pee ‘just in case.’

The application was simple enough. Occupation: laid off college teacher. Education: too much. Qualifications: articulate spokesperson. Love the Monterey peninsula and know it well. Experience driving: plenty but not for hire. One of my favorite things is to do when I need to get calm, is take a long drive (Big Sur, San Francisco, Fresno, LA, where-*ever*). At the wheel of my car, my music or a book narrating, I just relax into control and before you know it I’m where I was headed. As close to beaming me places as a body can get. And that’s in my ten year old Honda Civic, *not* a limo. I’d always wanted to see what it was like to be a taxi or long distance truck driver. This gig would be a cinch.

The interview was short and sweet. Why'd I want to do this? I needed the money and I thought it would be fun. ~~I didn't tell them~~ My last part-time teaching job had been in the 'Service Learning' department at CSU Monterey. All undergraduates there had to volunteer 30 hours of 'service' to local community organizations and do coursework on a list of 'isms,' like racism and sexism, including a new buzz word to me: 'white privilege.' Heck, limo driving in Pebble Beach should certainly get me an inside look into that. The Concours weekend brings in more money to the Monterey peninsula economy than any other in the year.

I got the job. No pee requested. All I had to do was show up for training on Friday morning at 10, listen to some safety regulations with the other temps they'd hired, drive a Lincoln sedan and be signed off by a veteran driver. They told us where to fill up, how to sign for Universal Hosts and tip \$2 at the car wash.

"Communication is huge guys! Ooops," Gary, the manager who'd just moved here from Tucson said, quickly switching tactics spying two women among the 20 temp employees.

"HUGE! Call me anytime with any question no matter how small. We've got water, sodas, coffee, and granola bars for you to keep in your cars for breaks. But never ever eat in front of your customer. Do not even *let* them see you drink water while driving. And yes, bring your personal cell phones to contact the other drivers, but never *ever* use them while driving. Verboten!"

We were to check out radios that went to the dispatcher and him directly if you pushed a certain code. When we knew we had a few hours free, there might be someplace else they could dispatch us too.

“Take your car out for a spin,” he told us. “Get familiar with it, drive those curves at Pebble Beach *before* your client gets in the door.” Then he had Charles who’d just retired to Carmel from a career of driving in Hollywood, demonstrate how we were to run around the car, open the passenger door, and stand hands clasped behind our backs as your client approaches.

“Remember Pebble Beach’s Pebble Beach’s ‘15-10-5’ rule, Gary went on, “returning crew members, what is it?”

In unison about five men repeated the mantra: “At 15 feet make eye contact, at 10 smile, and at 5 feet greet.”

“Very good!” Gary replied, mimicking the stance and the smile.

“Jesus!” I thought, I’ll have to practice that on the street.

“And by all means, be *sure* to know where you’re going. These streets inside Pebble’s Beach would make you crazy even if there weren’t ten thousand spectator pedestrians descending upon us. Our clients must trust *we* know where we’re going. Any questions?”

A few hands went about time sheets, and keys, and over-time. \$12 an hour became \$18 between 8 & 12 hours, and double time after that! Mentally I tried to do the math about profit margins since I overheard that the clients were billed at \$270. a day.

We were not to expect tips because they were included in the contract the company execs and car designers from Cadillac, Ford, Ferrari or General Motors we’d be shuttling around had paid Universal Hosts for. But word had it from other drivers who’d done this previously, that hands had been greased with twenty’s, even hundred dollar bills.

Raising my hand I asked, “Here’s a scenario I might need help with. Has anyone ever gotten clients who were so inebriated they needed help walking, or were borderline violent?”

“Rarely, this is a pretty high class crowd,” Gary said, “but you radio the dispatcher and me immediately and we’ll send someone to take care of it. I’m sure you’ll be able to think on your feet.”

The walky-talky, excuse me the radio, they put in each of our hands felt like it weighed ten pounds and looked like a cell phone on steroids. 7-4-7 was the dispatcher, Gary 9-8-9. That should be easy to remember. But I wrote it on my hand just in case.

On the break over chocolate croissants and coffee from silver urns at the hotel they’d rented for the training, I listened with the other limo-drivers-to-be as Charles entertained us with stories about driving in Hollywood.

“I once left Charlton Heston in a gas station somewhere in the desert dressed in a kilt and formal long sleeve shirt! I thought he was still ~~prone~~ sleeping prone on the back seat. He got over it, but not without giving me hell.”

~~The first sweat I broke into was not a red car, but shopping for my ‘uniform.’ It was an uncharacteristic humid 85 degrees the day I hit every thrift store in town, looking for pants and white shirts I’d be comfortable in for sixteen hours a sitting. Who was that fifty something woman in the mirror of those fitting rooms? At Nice Twice I scored a classic navy gold-buttoned Hunt Club blazer for \$9.95. The khaki’s weren’t as easy. Had they changed the waist sizes on size 12’s since I’d tried on clothes last? Five thrift stores, Macy’s sales rack, and Ross Dress for Less where I gladly applied my over 55 discount later; I’d spent almost \$100. on two pairs of polyester pants I’d be embarrassed to be seen in, three white blouses I might~~

~~wear again, the jacket and a pair of soft-soled black loafers. Sandals weren't allowed. Oh well. Uniforms were tax deductible I told myself as I filed the receipts.~~

In the thankfully short week before my new gig I had fantasies of driving handsome Italian men and their zophtic consorts in revealing elegant gowns. They would ask me to take them to the best view of the coast, ask me to take a walk while they made love. Then I'd return to blood, wine and broken glass on my back seat, me giving CPR and rushing them to Community Hospital instead of some midnight party. Or my client, a rich billionaireess who looked like Sophia Loren would become fond of me. She'd love my book, which I gave her while waiting in traffic. She'd invite me to take the winter writing in the cabana at her estate on the coast of France or her other mansion in West Palm Beach. Or she'd be a short, round bitch. Eventually I calmed myself into visioning that my clients would just be nice, not rude, so that I could step into my role of 'service' easily.

"I got the perfect gig for you," my manager said the day before the Concours.

"Easy. Just came in. Syl-VAHna AppenDINo," he went on. "She's the executive assistant to the president of Ferrari, Giorgio Banini. She wants a private car at her beck and call all week. I got the last Lincoln sedan between here and San Francisco. It'll be here in the morning. Be here at 6:15 a.m. I'll have the coffee on for you."

Wednesday. Driving Day # 1. A little sweat.

In the dawn pre-light as I walked past a line of identical black and white Lincoln Continentals in front of Universal Hosts I was nervous as a cat, performance anxiety personified. Did it show? Something about the

smell of money so intimidated my now educated once poor working class self, that I was sure my inexperience would be found out. Those old fraudulence fears, ghosts of inadequacy once squashed, kept knocking to be let back in. I glazed over when I looked at the two-way radio I'd used in training. It looked like an IBM/PC desktop to this lifelong Mac person. Shit, I'd forgotten how to use it.

“You look great Patricia. Here,” Gary said as he personally pinned a gold nametag on my lapel and handed me the keys to a 2003 white Lincoln Town Car Executive. He shook my hand and gave me a clipboard of forms.

“Just keep a log of hours, and turn it in at the end of the week. Do whatever your client wants. Just keep ‘er happy.”

He trusted me! I could even take my white town car home at night.

“I've got 40 other drivers and five dispatches to worry about. Have fun! Feel free to drop by if you have any long layoffs though; I might need something.” And off I went, or rather tried to.

In the parking lot Armand, a tall African American retired army sergeant who'd been similarly assigned to the CEO of General Motors, showed me for the fourth time how to work the radio. Then he took my hands which looked tiny next to his long well kept fingers, looked me in the eye and said, “Breathe! ... Just remember to breathe ... from the diaphragm, you're taking this far too seriously.”

With plenty of time to pick up SYLVANah, I called my husband because I wanted him to take a picture of me in my latest costume. I told him to hurry, I needed help deciphering the dashboard on this brand new car; it befuddled me. I couldn't get the lights off, or turn down the fan for the air conditioner. I'd never seen a keypad as complicated. Just before he came I must've hit the panic button and set the piercing car alarm off. Another

driver ran to my dumbfounded rescue. My husband found the light switch that was regulated by something that looked like a spinning wheel where I never would've found it. The fan controls were on the steering wheel of all places. He was unable however to disarm the light that over a flap above the rear view mirror, in full view of any passenger that said 'Change Oil Now.' My husband had checked the oil and it wasn't that low.

Through my menopausal memory I remembered 9-8-9, called Gary and told him about the oil light. He checked but Universal hosts couldn't switch vehicles. Every Lincoln Sedan from San Francisco to Fresno had been brought into Monterey that week. I'd have to explain that to Ms.AppenDINo, *if* she noticed that it was a computer glitch.

Not two seconds after my husband snapped his cell phone picture of me beside my 'limo' and disappeared, a tiny dark attractive thirty something and a taller round man approached the car.

"Pat-ree-ci-a? Universal Hosts? Ciao!" she said reaching to shake my hand. I'm SylvaHna, this is Carlos."

"First we go to the hair dresser." SylVAHna said, her English meticulous, thank goodness. Del Monte Plaza, whew, I knew where that was.

"You will wait, and return us to the Hyatt. Then I won't need you until 5:30 at THE LODGE. I must go in Mr. Benini' stretch limo to meet his family at San Francisco Airport. Charles was his driver. I'd seen that black limo, it looked long! Very long. I sent prayers of gratitude that my change of career fantasies hadn't gone as far to get a license to drive on of these monstrosities.

“If the plane is late I will call you,” Sylvanna said. “Then we go back to the Hyatt to pick up Carlos and you take us to dinner. Can you suggest something? Seafood?” she asked.

“Certainly, I know just the place.” I agreed in my best service-orial manner, ready to put the skills I’d put on my application into action. I thought of *The Fish House* on Del Monte or *The Fishwife* in Pacific Grove. but settled on *Cafe Napoli* in Carmel. It was Northern Italian, but had a reputation that surely Ms. AppenDINo would confirm. I called but they were booked all weekend.

Fine. Easy. Sounded like a good first day to me. Luckily Sylvanah’s hairdresser was only one exit down the road. Fan tamed and lights off thanks to the sneak visit from my husband, this would be a breeze.

Once she and Carlos were in the back seat, and all I could see of her was these round brown eyes in the rear view mirror, I was so self-conscious, I was sure it showed. Here I was in a \$70,000. vehicle, *responsible* for the lives of two human beings, not merely chatting with them while I took them fancy places. As my eyes scanned all the mirrors, watched the speedometer register in both kilometers and miles, saw in red on the dash that it was 63 degrees outside, and 71 in the vehicle, I realized: this limo-driving is heavier shit than I’d anticipated! ~~Yeah. Duh!~~

I got Sylvanna and Carlos safely back to the Hyatt after going through only one yellow light tinged with red. Hopefully Sylvanna and Carlos hadn’t noticed. His hair was buzzed, hers looked exactly the same; well maybe a little shinier. On the clock with six hours to myself, I decided I’d better do as told and get familiar with my car. I studied the map, traced the way to three entrances to Pebble Beach, and the most direct route to the THE LODGE.

Good thing I had this trial run. Everything looked different. The roads they'd showed us in training from a mini-bus, not to mention the signs they'd pointed to, seem to have changed in Alice and Wonderland nonsense style. And this was in broad daylight. Pebble was famous for not having streetlights at night. I spent two hours, eating the lunch I'd packed in a small ice chest in the trunk, doing some centering tai chi near Seal Point, and asking many many questions of my allies the bell men, valet parkers and gate keepers that protect the rich in front of THE LODGE, and got 'readier' and less nervous than before.

I circled Seventeen Mile Drive and Stevenson Road which would be closed on Sunday, the 'big day' of the Concours, that featured a competition among gazillionaires to get their privately owned vehicles worth sums well beyond nine-digits each listed as 'Best in Show.' Jay Leno was the emcee.

I located the private road to the LODGE, Pebble's new spa Casa Sereno. On an expanse of lawn overlooking a then calm sea, stood a huge half-acre silver-gray tent that formed two giant tits from a distance. It stood attached to a large white trailer with green fake-carpeted steps, that later I discovered contained the most expensive porta-potties ever made.

The parking lot behind the Maserati Tent was to become my second home for the next five days. It was where cadres of multi-national workers, all in sharply pressed PB emblazoned uniforms, were scurrying about in electric carts, carrying boxes of every shape and size to big white tents throughout the grounds. Employees could drop by for lunch, coffee, soft drinks, or just wait as I would.

This 'MASERATI TENT' had gigantic silver zippers for front and back doors and a uniformed armed guard at each entrance. Inside guests on the invitation list, rather prospective buyers, would be wine and dined all

weekend, building to the final event when next year's models would be unveiled, literally.

I got to go into the trailer's wooden shuttered bathrooms from the rear entrance that the caterers used. They were madly filling trays with tiny hordeuvre's that didn't look like they would fill anyone up. I cringed when I saw the teeny little lamb chops that had white little fringed caps on the ends of their bones.

I imagined myself one of the rich and famous, here to purchase my next Maserati or a Testoserossa like Don Johnson used to drive in Miami Vice each time I took a whiz in those green marble toilets, washing my hands reflected in a beveled mirror lined on three sides with dressing table lights. Perhaps I'd drive away that silver Ferrari I picked from the lines of them parked outside the tent on the lawn. Not a red one for sure.

This was two days before the big crowds would hit. Mr. Banini was well known as top priority by the captain of the LODGE's Valet parking service. This 'Maitre'd of Parking' in a navy suit gave me permission to wait in the circular turn-around driveway in front of THE LODGE and the Pebble Beach shops. "You are one of the very few that can wait here. But only today and tomorrow, not Sunday. This circle gets filled with thousands of slightly slippery, sometimes drunk auto-voyeur pedestrians. If anything happens the buck stops with me. My entire world extends to the edges of this square mile," he said proudly. I noticed that behind his ear, running down his neck behind his straw PB golf hat, was a curlicued phone wire that ran into the pocket of his shiny navy suit. He looked like one of CIA agents I'd seen on the X-files.

“Can I run into the bathroom for a minute?” I asked. “Okay, but only today. There’s an employees cafeteria in the basement of that first set of buildings. It’s open 24 hours a day.”

I’d never been inside THE LODGE. The view of Point Lobos through its glass doors was breathtaking even on a cloudy day. A tuxedoed musician at a grand piano was playing light jazz. Guests hovered over by handsome waiters were sipping \$13.00 martinis. Aaah, someday. But linger I could not.

The bathroom was spectacular, but I noticed the orchids on the marble counter were drooping. I got bonus points for letting the concierge know to call housekeeping and change them. I pocketed a few no-name brand wipes from the basket on the table for my granddaughter. They had the cutest picture of a crawling baby on them. I even left 50 cents in the gold seashell on the counter for the aproned maid that took the soft gold hand towel I used and tossed it into a real marble hamper.

Outside 6:00 became 7, with no cell call from Sylvanna. I learned quickly that limo driving was more like limo-waiting. I talked to a few other drivers, read two chapters in my textbook on *Service Learning and Social Diversity* and twiddled my thumbs people watching. I window-shopped. Within visible distance from my town car were \$175 golf shirts and \$350 shoes, sold next to Thomas Kincaid portraits of ‘light’ that looked like they were printed at Disneyland. There were no visible prices on the real fur vests and jackets that would have made animal rights activists ballistic. Another shop had sweaters and skirts imported from Scotland, the price each that could’ve fed a family of four for a week.

It seemed that everyone was in uniform even the customers. Both the men and women dropped at THE LODGE while I waited, who handed over

keys to valet parkers for their Porsche Carrera's or Cadillacs SUV's stepped out in quite similar black suits and shoes. Both genders wore crisply pleated gabardine pants, with a pale pastel turtleneck or open necked golf shirt. The only thing distinguishing sex was that the women's shoes had higher heels. An occasional long silk scarf decorated the women's suits; some of the men had tied a soft, most likely pale yellow cashmere sweater casually over their shoulders.

The valet parkers, all male (of course), were clean-shaven upwardly mobile Mexican Americans, sprinkled with a couple of preppy looking blonde student types. They all responded quickly to anything Captain Jason asked, and bowed in deference to this stocky maitre'd. I coveted the valet parker's uniforms. They wore beige satin vests over sharply pressed long sleeved white shirts and Pebble Beach emblazoned ties. Khaki's of course, and the cutest hats.

White electric carts kept dropping guards wearing brown Pacific Security uniforms and badges, whose skin matched their uniforms at every intersection. Each was strategically placed near the scintillating vintage vehicles being carefully downloaded from huge trucks to the practice hole across from the Lodge.

These security guards became my buddies in the boring waiting times. Some of them were from Oakland where they probably worked the night shift in factories or WalMarts. Their job here was to ask for 'credentials,' i.e. passes that let them know you weren't a terrorist or a second story art thief turned car robber, or at least had paid your \$150 to walk around and gawk at all the expensive automobiles.

At close to 7:00 *Sylvanna* finally stepped out of the umpteenth black limo I was perked up to be ready for. Four-vested bellman rolled up in

electric carts to help greet Mr. Banini and family, extending an arm to the Mrs. and two female children about eight and ten. I could hear the ‘Welcome back’s’ and see the smiles from across the way.

I too smiled as my client disappeared into the LODGE and returned quickly with good news: the Banini’s were very tired and didn’t need her any more that night. After I dropped her and Carlos at the Hyatt, I was free to go home. Day # 1 over without a squeak or a sweat. Thank you god!

Driving Day Two. No Sweat.

At the civilized hour of 9:30 Sylvanah read me her schedule from a crystal clear clipboard. First to THE LODGE to check on the Farini’s schedule, then to the site where the Concours d’Italiano would kick off the weekend for the public the next day. Bayonet and Black Horse golf courses were on Fort Ord, where once many a four star general from the five wars that military base had prepared enlisted men for, had plotted strategy as they drove their nine-arms overlooking all of Monterey Bay. Not this weekend however. The fairways were in the process of being transformed into a sea of shiny show vehicles and tents. Every inch of the seventeenth and eighteenth holes except for the greens, would become a sea of Ferrari’s, Lamborghini and Maserati’s in less than 24 hours.

Just before lunch at THE LODGE with the Banini’s, Sylvanna held up an inch wide black button. “I’m so glad I got a woman driver,” she said, “could you possibly find a department store and match this, or get me six black buttons this size for my other suit?”

“Of course,” I said smiling, remembering my first years as a Home Economics teacher, and the location of the only fabric store within a 30-mile

radius. I whizzed out the Pacific Grove gate down Lighthouse, chose two sets of buttons, one with a twist in the middle. After lunch I showed them to her.

“Bueno! Wonderful!” she said, “and so quickly.”

“If you bring the jacket back, I’ll sew them on during dinner,” I said thinking but not saying, this should help with a good tip. “I really don’t have much to do.”

“Are you sure?”

“Certain,” Patricia the limo-driver, former college professor said with an honest smile.

I had two hours while my charge rested at the Hyatt to run to my own health club and catch a refreshing swim to work off the stress. Carmel was the next stop, a cocktail party for the Italian sales reps at a Gallery on which of those tiny streets was it? I found it without showing her the map under my seat, whew. While she schmoozed and Carlos wandered the streets, I dropped in Cafe Napoli and discovered that in spite of the ‘we’re completely booked, I’d gotten when I called,’ that there was one tiny table left.

“If you get your client here in five minutes you can have it,” the receptionist said. It took a bit of sign language to round up monolingual Carlos, but I plucked them down. While they ate I found a bowl of cioppino at fourth rate Italian restaurant that I could afford that I’m glad I didn’t send them to. \$20 with salad and tip. No wine for me til I got home. With just enough daylight to see, I sewed on the buttons. Just as I finished a very happy couple came rushing up to the car “Bueno! BUENO! The food was ‘better than home!’”

When I showed Sylvanna her suit, “So quickly! You’re wonderful. I love you! Ciao!” and she reached to hug me and kissed both cheeks.

Friday. Driving Day #3. Much sweat.

At 7:15 a.m. the next day as I left my home on the former military base transformed into a college campus, cars were lined up half a mile from the main entrance of Fort Ord down Route One. I recognized several students and faculty I knew wearing bright orange vests, waving flashlights and checking tickets and passes. Things were moving smoothly but ve-ry slowly. Ten thousand spectators from out of town, many from out of the country, were eagerly piling into the golf course to pay \$150 for a few hours to walk and gape at Italian automobiles that few of them could afford.

That morning, after I took Sylvanna to THE LODGE to breakfast with the Banini 's, she decided (lucky for me) to ride with Mr. Banini ~~to the Italiano Concours where he was a judge~~ in the black sedan Charles was driving. We re-introduced ourselves as we waited standing in attention outside. In training I'd thought he was cool. That morning the red lines in his nose were a little more apparent, and his hand shook a little as I gave him directions for a short cut I suggested because of the traffic. He balked, saying he'd heard it would be closed.

Control issues aside, I left Ms. *Appendino* at the open door to Charles' black Lincoln, and proceeded to *try* to follow it directly, my walky-talky and cell phones ready. Charles of course, against my best of intentions, took the slow route. Luckily for me, several cars got between his limo and mine. When I was finally waved towards the VIP parking, it was not in the same location we'd been shown just yesterday. Go down that road to the left, an orange vested CSUMB student said.

What road? I thought. I could barely see a string of three-foot high green metal posts, that had some nearly invisible plastic cord running between them, lining a winding street-wide path down the 16th fairway.

Luckily my charge and the Farini's were now two cars ahead of me. Just after I turned into what I thought was this green yellow-brick road, I jumped startled, as the radio scratched out '*Priscilla.*' I grabbed the walky-talky, found and managed to push the return button, and said "Patricia here, not Priscilla," throwing it down on the seat. Even at five miles per hour I couldn't talk on a radio and drive at the same time, not yet. Not on the rolling fairway of a golf course. The Farini's black sedan was now gone from view.

'Priscilla, I need you' the radio barked again.

I reached for it, and suddenly realized I was no longer on the faintly visible 'road,' but headed sharply downhill in a soft slow skid on my way to a sand trap at thirteen miles per hour. Sweat breaking out on my forehead, the power steering responded to my touch, in a nanosecond with only a flick of my forefinger, I turned my Lincoln Executive Town car 180 degrees. Thank goodness only two tourist golfers with plastic bags full of souvenir car paraphernalia saw me. They were rubbing their foreheads in wonder. I rolled my window down and in my sweetest voice called, "Can you guys do this first time limo driver a favor, and lift that little ribbon for me? ... somehow I got off course."

"Sure honey, anything for you," they said coming up to the window and looking down at my breasts, "Can we have a ride?"

"Bella, Bella, Thank you. Ciao!" I wanted to kiss them. Somehow the gods had protected me. By the time I pulled into the VIP parking on fairway 16, the Banini's and Sylvanna were already walking towards the crowds and

the Concours, Now, all I had to do was wait. Whew. No visible scratch on the roof. Not caught. But now I needed to pee. Badly.

“Where are the bathrooms?” I asked a parking attendant who turned out to be the sailing coach. “Down there, behind the driving range.”

“Where?” I could barely see that far. I looking around for a tree, a bush, anything but a five-minute-minimum one-mile hike, but not finding one, I set off. Cold sweat # 2 broke out on my forehead, but it wasn’t because of the distance between the plastic green porta-potties and myself. My knees still shaking from what I’d just gotten away with; now I had to walk through a sea of my nemesis: red cars! Literally acres of knee-high, triple digit dollar vehicles stood between the bathroom and me. Well, a few of them were silver or black. These red cars looked like creeping lizards to me at the time. Many of them were hard-topped convertibles open from the top middle. They looked like they had wings, and were ready to fly off and attack me. I was afraid one might transform into a robot, find out what I’d done, and turn me into Universal Hosts. I would be relieved my license and driving career, not just my morning coffee.

Luckily the gods protected me as well as my new polyester pants. The stroll back was actually relaxing. The cars looked like cars again, though I couldn’t imagine anyone over 40 being able to get that low on the ground to get in and out of them. When I found my white chariot among the checkerboard of black and white sedans, I remembered to breathe, from the diaphragm. I sunk into the plush leather armchair of my drivers seat to read while I waited for *Sylvahanna* to return and give me something to do.

After this start, the rest of the day would be a breeze ... right? Until nightfall. After Georgio Benin gave his welcoming speech, he and his wife went back to rest. Savannah and Carlos took the afternoon to themselves at

their hotel. I had five hours off. Dutifully I stopped back in to Universal Hosts with Gary. He waved away my offer of help, and mouthed with his lips while talking on the phone and a radio at the same time: ‘they like you!’

Relieved I went directly to the pool my nearby health club to chill out on company time, Sylvannah still a cell phone call away. I checked out the employee’s cafeteria for dinner, but found the food and conversation with my security buddies behind the Maserati tent was better. I picked up Sylvanna and deposited her at a party in the Lodge at 8, and set to wait for her.

Captain Jason must’ve been at dinner. A pale skinny blonde Yaley sporting the earpiece and stood in clasped attention aside THE LODGE’s revolving front door. Most of the other guests were either at the Italiano dinner, shuffled to parties at Carmel mansions by the other drivers I’d met in training, or were sipping champagne and dancing to a live trio in the Maserati tent.

Against the rules, Wellford Graves the Yalie’s name badge read, let me wait in the circle by the shops which now held a Mercedes Benz sedan. Rumor had it Rupert Murdoch had just bought it. Ten o’clock became ten-thirty, then eleven, and eleven fifteen. Couples in black suits came stumbling down the stairs between the Peter Hay golf course and the darkened dimly lit shops I was parked in front of.

Tired of reading, almost nodding off, I desperately wanted to dial Sylvanna’s eleven digit Italian cell number. But just then, near midnight, I saw what looked like Jay Leno and a leggy blonde stumble past Wellford, and be assisted by him to the door of an ivy covered cottage with what must have been a spectacular moonlit view of Point Lobos from the other side of the LODGE.

Finally, after my fifth round of mental tai chi, at 11:45 Sylvannah emerged from the door and beckoned me. I started my white stallion, put a quiet smooth jazz CD on, but as I shifted into gear, an alarming bing-bing-pling, like a microwave going off and letting you know your food was sufficiently cooked rang in my ears. Yikes! After sixty seconds that seemed like a week, it stopped. But the light above the rear view mirror that I had so often had peered at as my client freshened her makeup, that warned of the oil change read in bright red letters: CHECK ENGINE NOW.

Sylvanna had stepped back inside for some reason, so as I pulled up to the door I called Gary on the radio.

“Fuck!” he said as I told him about the light that ‘our client’ couldn’t help but notice now.

“Don’t worry,” I told him, “the manual says it could be electronic, that I could safely drive (at low speed) ten to fifteen miles to the nearest service station, about just as far as Universal Hosts. But we’ll have to find her about a replacement car.”

“Replacement car? Caarr??!! Another Lincoln sedan the Farini ’s regulation American vehicle? Impossible. Wait she called and said you were cool. I think I’ve got something. Ford just turned in their demo. A souped up Mustang convertible do you think she’d go for that for the last two days?”

“What color is it?” I gulped knowing what I was about to hear.

“Red of course, is she in the car? Let me talk to her.”

“Sylvahanna ... so good to see you again,” I said as a short sexy dashing Italian man in guess what: a black suit, escorted a more tipsy passenger than I’d had earlier, into her seat in the back, kissing her hand.

“We’ve a slight problem with this limo,” I told her shrugging, “it’s

nothing serious, but my manager at Universal Hosts wants to propose a change if that's all right with you," handing her the phone.

"Ciao! C'este? Really? Oh OH! Fan-tas-tique! I've always wanted to ride a red Mustang. Bueno. No problem. Bueno. Ciao!" She handed me the phone and slumped into the white leather.

"The Hyatt. 9:30 tomorrow morning for breakfast with the Banini s, I need to get some sleep."

Blessedly the night kept her from seeing my forehead dripping with nightsweat ... number four. *I can do anything for five days. There are only two ... two more*, I told myself as I watched 69 mph translate into meters on the short freeway hop to the Hyatt. I let her out of my white Chariot that would soon to turn into a red bucking bronco as the digital clock turned 12:00.

Day 4. Saturday. Hardly any sweat.

The Banini's could relax now, their part in this big extravaganza over with. As it turned out, the Mrs. wanted to go shopping with her girls to FAO Schwartz in San Francisco. Somehow they'd scored tickets to *The Lion King* and would stay overnight in the St. Francis. Sylvanna was to go also. Charles would take them, and be put up in the Fisherman's Wharf Marriot, leaving Carlos who spoke not a word of English and I alone with her red convertible. He of course was not my client, and lucky for me Sylvanna arranged for him to take a taxi to the American sports car auction at the Doubletree. Sunday she said I could take her boyfriend or whatever he was, for a ride down to Big Sur with the top down while she attended the long and bor-ing auction. Was the weather going to be good? No fog?

“You never know around here,” I said still not relishing driving Hurricane Point in a red car.

Wondering what I would do all day with this r-e-d vehicle, perhaps go home and take a nap, I checked in with Gary.

“I’ve got till noon tomorrow with nothing to do,” I said as I pocketed some more bottled water and some granola bars.

“Come in my office Patricia,” a greyer Gary with deeper shadows under his eyes said. “Ferrari is still our client, and I have a special request that you must keep absolutely confidential, even from SylVAHnah.”

“I’m game ... I *guess*?” I said tentatively, too tired to break into a sweat this time. He closed the door and gave me my next assignment.

At ten o’clock, I pulled up to the zippered the back of the Maserati tent as appointed. As per instructions I put my Mustang’s top down and was handed several plush thick soft blankets. The caterers were just leaving having refrigerated the last of the champagne, turned off the coffee makers, boxed the brandy-filled chocolate kisses, sealed far too many leftover little lamb filets with tiny bones sticking out of them in saran.

It was an unusually warm fogless starlit night. Georgio got in with a wave of his hand, a shopping bag full of champagne in his hand.

“Pat-tree-cia,” he reached to kiss *me* on both cheeks, then introduced me to “Victor-eeey-a” and “El-aa-nn-a.” I’d seen these models draped over cars in skintight silver grey strapless dresses that matched the ties the Maserati salesmen were wearing.

My secret assignment? Assingation? I hoped not, was to take Georgio Banini for a private tryst. And where? None other than the green glass house that sat atop a big hill fourteen miles down the coast to Big Sur that I’d seen for years. I always wanted to go there. I was to watch the clock and make

sure they left before breakfast to return to the Lodge. I'd return the girls to the Victorian Bed and Breakfast in Pacific Grove they'd been staying in. I was to wait in the loft above the glass mansion's barn, callable by radio, but out of shouting and viewing distance of OZ. Darn!

On the way down the coast the ladies and my Italian Hugh Hefner wrapped themselves in the blankets in the backseat, swigging champagne, giggling and jabbering in Italian.

The place was beyond belief. It had a hot tub and an infinity pool on a deck that closed with sliding glass panels if it was windy, which it was not. The décor was minimalist modern. Low slung leather couches and a few choice modern paintings surrounded an in-ground gas fireplace. Just as I was headed to the loft over the barn for a nap, E-lenn-a grabbed my arm.

"Stay Pa-tree-cee-a," she said, handing me a glass of champagne.

"No, no," I said. "I must drive. Be safe for you," I replied blinking back fantasies of a ménage à quatre with these gorgeous models who already were disrobing and slipping into the hot tub with this Italian stud who was very very fit for his years. Well hung too.

"Do everything they ask," I remembered from training. But where were my boundaries? This wasn't a red car, but my forehead broke out in a sweat.

Sunday. Day 5. No sweat. Whew!

The final day of the Concours d'Elegance was a breeze, only slightly marred by the fog that had followed us up the coast at dawn. Thousands of spectators in guess what: gabardine and cashmere golf attire, wandered and gawked, as 1933 and 1945 Rolls, and 1929 Bugati's parked in front of the shops filled the fairway leading up to Pebble Beach's 18th hole outside the

louvered LODGE glass doors. A grandstand held seats for \$250. a pop spectators for the 'judging' of this years' competition.

I could hear Jay Lenno's voice as auctioneer on microphone as I hung out for my last day up road apiece behind the Maserati tent with my brown-skinned buddies. Pebble had put out barbequed chicken and ribs, burgers, hot dogs and corn for employees this last day. Electric carts kept driving back and forth shuttling a lot of very tired, but oh so respectful employees very ready to kiss this year's Concours goodbye.

Sylvanna, back from San Francisco, entered the grandstand with the full Banini family. The girls were wearing matching California Golden Gate bridge sweatshirts and jeans, in shocking comparison to other children in velvet dresses and black patent leather sandals. Charles who had hated his stay in San Francisco was grumbling about not seeing enough cars, swearing he'd retire completely after this.

While I waited, I finally had the nerve to sneak inside the big zipper of the Maserati tent. It looked like something from outer space. Video screens on poles at different angles faced an oak paneled oblong dance floor. Two low cars sat in the middle covered in the same see through silk 'the girls' had worn.

To my left was a curved oak rack with seven molded wooden hooks, each draped with a full skein of leather that one could smell, touch, virtually wrap oneself in, before deciding which to choose for their next year's model. The dance floor was empty, the sales people all gone, as I moved to sit on swiveling barstools with five slightly different seats, and try five different steering wheels. Another wall had eleven silver and platinum chrome wheel guards to choose from for my fantasy Ferrari.

So this was what it was all about? I pulled up the silk and looked at the vehicles. Nice. Okay. But too low to the ground. Believe it or not, I was kind of getting fond of my red Mustang convertible. Fears faced I actually looked forward to dropping Ms. *Appendino* and Mr. Carlos to San Francisco airport the next day. I would then put the top down, watch my speed, and driving down the coast with my own rock n' roll playing, with that \$100. tip shoved in my pocket.

But alas, the next morning instead of telling me her life story and inviting me to Torino for the winter, Sylvanna and Carlos slept the entire way to the airport. Even after giving her an inscribed *Monterey Shorts* with my story in it, she merely kissed me on both cheeks, and said “Ciao! Bueno! Please, please Pat-ric-ia, you be my driver next year. Okay? Ciao!”

Epilogue: Two weeks later when I picked up my paycheck, Marilyn the tour manager, called me in and thanked me for my performance. “Our client loved you,” she said.

“It must’ve been the buttons I sewed on for her,” I said thinking of that and more, “or that she thought the food at Cafe Napoli was as good or better than home.”

“Well, you certainly know what service means,” she said, “some of our drivers don’t ‘get it.’”

“Thank you,” I said, blushing as I reminded her of the Bob Dylan song I play for my students at the beginning of every semester: “You gotta serve some body!”

