

# Tanz Mephisto

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by Terri

## Chapter Sixty

*“‘Double Fantasy’ is for all of the people who grew up with me. I’m saying, ‘Here I am now, how are you? Weren’t the Seventies a drag? Here we are, well let’s try to make the Eighties good because it’s still up to us to make what we can of it....”*

John Lennon in an interview with RKO Radio, December 8, 1980

*“What I was really hanging around for, I was trying to feel some kind of a good-by. I mean I’ve left schools and places I didn’t even know I was leaving them. I hate that. I don’t care if it’s a sad good-by or a bad good-by, but when I leave a place I like to know I’m leaving it. If you don’t, you feel even worse.*

“The Catcher in the Rye” by J.D. Salinger

On the morning of December 8<sup>th</sup>, John and Yoko waited in their New York City home for the arrival of the photographer from *Rolling Stone* magazine. Across the Atlantic in England, it was already afternoon, and both Paul and George were at work in their respective studios, while, down in the Caribbean, Ringo was enjoying the sunny warmth of the Bahamas with Barbara Bach, his girlfriend of ten months. The Beatles, both personally and professionally, had moved on and were each well-ensconced in their individual careers and relationships. However, to the public, and especially to the press, in recent years, John’s career had appeared seemingly non-existent...until now. Once it had been announced that John and Yoko were recording again, the requests for interviews came pouring in. Not since the mid-seventies had John been so actively courted by the press, all of them anxious to hear about the release of his first album in five years. This time, however, it was a much gentler, much wiser, and a much more optimistic John Lennon who greeted them. Both the press and Beatles fans the world over anticipated the release of “*Double Fantasy*” with a great deal of excitement and more than just a bit of speculation as to just how it would measure up against his Beatles’ canon. The first single from the new album, “*Just Like Starting Over*,” released a little over a month prior, was already at number three on the US charts.

Not everyone was quite so thrilled to see John returning to the spotlight, however. Back in Tucson, Sam Hoffman read the article about John’s return to the music charts with increasing trepidation. John had been out of the limelight for five years, and it had been just about that long since Sam had last seen him. It was shortly after the birth of John and Yoko’s son, Sean. Sam had been invited to a symposium at NYU and used the occasion

to stop in at the Dakota to visit the small family. After all the usual pleasantries had been exchanged, John handed the baby over to his nanny, Yoko excused herself to attend to some business, and he and John adjourned to the living room. Left alone with the former Beatle, the conversation turned stilted and uncomfortable to the point where Sam felt prompted to ask, "Should I not have come, John?"

*At first, John's face registered genuine surprise at the question. Then, like a schoolboy caught doing something he knows he shouldn't, he averted his eyes and stammered in embarrassment, "Ah no, Sam! It-it's not that....don't think that...please! It's, er, it's just....well, you know...." The sentence left unfinished, John shrugged self-consciously.*

*"Nothing's happened, has it?" Sam asked in alarm.*

*"No! No, everything's fine, just fine." John replied quickly. As the two then lapsed into silence again, he picked at his nails, avoiding Sam's gaze. Finally, he gave a heavy sigh and came clean. "Look, Sam, that's just it, you know? Everything is fine, and I'd like to keep it that way. No offense, man, yer a nice enough bloke and all, and I'll always be grateful to you for all yer help, but...." He trailed off, unable to find the words he needed.*

*Catching on, Sam supplied them. "But....I'm a reminder of everything that's happened... everything to do with Phleiss. Is that it?"*

*Scratching the back of his neck, John peered sheepishly over the top of his round glasses. "Yeah, Sam, that's it," he replied quietly. Shaking his head sadly, he added, "There's been so many losses, you know? So many lives snuffed out. I find it hard to live with that some days."*

*"Aw, come on, John, it was never really your fault!"*

*"Wasn't it?" John gave a derisive laugh. "I used that bloody scarab, Sam. I did."*

*"Hey, you were forced to....you're forgetting that part."*

*"I'm not so sure." John countered. Turning pensive then, he went silent for several minutes before softly confessing, "I see them, Sam....their faces. At night, when I can't sleep, I lie in my bed and remember each one. It's really amazing, you know? Faces from years ago, and I can see them all in such detail. I feel like they're right there with me....accusing me. The sailor, the hooker, the fan, Brian...Alec. And that's only the ones I know about! Who knows who else the fucker used me to....get rid of?!"*

*Alec. Sam winced at the mention of the psychic's name. Throughout their ordeal, Sam had grown fond of the courageous young man. When Alec finally succumbed after nearly six months in a coma, Sam felt like he'd lost a younger brother. No one, however, had felt the loss – or the weight of guilt – as much as John had. "Why Alec, John?"*

*Rolling his eyes impatiently, John exclaimed, “You know why, Sam! He only did what he did to save me....and it cost him his life!”*

*Leaning forward for emphasis, Sam insisted, “He knew the risk he was taking when he accessed the Akasha. That wasn’t your doing. He wanted to help, and he did. That message he left, John, it made a difference.”*

*Cocking his head to the side, John regarded the astronomer quizzically. “How?”*

*Sam had forgotten that John hadn’t known...forgotten that, outside of himself, only Caleb and Paul knew the true meaning of the message Alec had left behind...forgotten that only they knew that to save John, Paul had announced he was leaving the group, effectively putting an end to the Beatles. Under the weight of John’s stare, Sam struggled and failed to come up with an answer. At last he offered cryptically, “It helped us figure out how to keep you safe.”*

*John was going to push it and ask for details, but, from the look on Sam’s face, he wasn’t sure he wanted to know the answer. For the first time in more than ten years, he was enjoying a life almost free from worry about Phleiss and Tavistock. If not for the occasional sleepless night, John might even say he was actually happy. He decided to let it go. “It is good to see you though, Sam,” he said sincerely.*

*“Yeah, you just don’t want to see me again!” Sam replied with a good-natured laugh.*

*John smiled indulgently. “Ah, it’s not that --”*

*“I get it, John,” Sam assured him kindly. “It’s okay. I do wish we could’ve gotten to know each other under better circumstances, but I understand, so don’t feel bad.” Growing thoughtful, he added, “Just promise me that if anything changes....if he shows up again – in any form – you won’t hesitate to contact me or Cal. Deal?”*

*Smiling warmly, John agreed, “Deal.”*

When Sam left the Dakota that evening, he found himself wondering if he would ever see John Lennon again. Virtually certain that, if he did, it would likely be because trouble had reared its head again, he rather hoped he wouldn’t. Now, five years later, it seemed rather imminent that he’d be returning to New York City again soon....to see John.

Going to the drawer in his desk, he combed through the mess of papers until he’d found the one he was searching for. Pulling out a small scrap of paper with several numbers scribbled in purple ink, he went to the phone and, dialing all ten digits, waited for the call to be answered on the other end.

On the fourth ring, he heard the familiar Cajun drawl. “Yallo!” Sam couldn’t help but smile.

“Hey, Cal...Sam Hoffman here.”

“Sam! You S.O.B.! How the hell are ya, friend?” the voice boomed gregariously through the receiver.

“I’m well, Cal, very well, thanks,” Sam laughed. “...you?”

“Ah, my friend, it’s all wine, women, and song for me!”

“Good to know some things never change!” Sam joked. Turning serious then, he toyed nervously with the coiled phone cord as he began haltingly, “Uh...listen, Cal, the reason I’m calling --”

“...is because John Lennon made a new album,” Cal finished for him.

“Yeah,” Sam answered with palpable relief.

“Yeah,” Cal echoed softly.

When Cal offered nothing further, Sam prompted, “So...?”

Cal answered his question with one of his own. “How soon can you be in New York?”

“Tomorrow...tonight, if need be.”

“Good!” Cal stated decisively. “The sooner, the better!”

“Cal...?”

“Yeah?”

Sam hesitated, wanting to ask the question that weighed on his mind, but afraid to hear the answer confirmed. “This is it...it’s beginning, isn’t it?”

He could hear Cal’s heavy sigh on the other end. “Yeah, Sam, I’m afraid it is.”

Though not really surprised, it pained Sam to hear his old friend validate his worst fear aloud. “Okay, call my service when you get to New York, okay?”

“Will do, Sam. See ya there.”

Hanging up the phone, Sam leaned back in his chair. Reaching out, he picked up the paper again, scanning the article announcing John’s return to the charts and shivered at the cold chill that ran down his spine.

More than five thousand miles away, Moephet Phleiss sat in Christian Spencer's office, reading a similar article. A smile gradually spread across his face. "It has begun!" he whispered to no one in particular.

Christian peered at the older man over the top of a file he was reading. "Sorry, sir, did you say something?"

Phleiss folded the paper and set it aside. "I did indeed, Christian. Our friend, John Lennon, has chosen to share his considerable talent with world again for the first time in five years!"

Christian's eyes widened at the implication of what Phleiss was saying. "The prophecy?"

"Indeed, Christian. It has begun."

"So, what do we do?" Christian asked in excitement.

"We? We do nothing at all!" Phleiss laughed. "All we need to do is watch and wait."

"Can you really be so certain that John will choose...correctly?"

"Oh, I should think so," Phleiss replied. "After all, John did not record this LP without a care for its success. He'll want to see it well-received...at least as well-received as the LP's of his old friend's."

"McCartney, you mean?"

The smile faded a bit, and Phleiss' voice acquired an edge to it. "Yes, McCartney...or whomever it is that has been posing as him for all these years."

Christian nodded knowingly. He understood that the ambiguity surrounding the ex-Beatles' alleged death in a car accident back in '66 still irked Phleiss. Was Paul McCartney still alive or did he actually die in that accident? Neither Christian nor Phleiss could say one way or another with any measure of certitude, and for someone like Phleiss, ambiguity – like failure – was not an option. Noting the foul mood descending upon his superior, Christian found it in his best interest to steer the conversation back to Lennon. "So, we watch and wait until when, sir?"

"We'll know when the time is right, Christian."

"I'm still not clear on exactly how John Lennon is still relevant tour program, Dr. Phleiss. Even you have to admit, it's a far different world from what it was in the '60's."

"Oh yes, most certainly it is, but, look at things this way...this generation - Lennon's generation - they are not at all what they used to be. 'Hippies' have evolved into

'yuppies' as they stood by and watched their idyllic and idealistic dreams of Utopia fade away in the stark face of reality....the assassinations of King and two Kennedy's....the US government murdering its children on the campuses of higher education....the riots in the streets of Chicago and Belfast....the debacle in Vietnam, *and...*," he paused and grinned facetiously, "...the break-up of the Beatles. No, Christian, these young people lost faith, and, instead of embracing peace and love, they've turned to embracing their Saabs and Mercedes, picture-perfect homes with perfectly manicured lawns....gone is the righteous indignation at the corruption of the state, the oppression of the poor, the racial inequality, and, in its place, they've put stock in an industry promising it will make them appear younger, thinner, sexier...*immortal!* The Beatles were instrumental in forging a new society. Now this society is growing older and more disillusioned. In the sober light of day when they've put away their scotch and pills and extra-marital affairs, they will be looking for an answer...a new path. We will provide that answer, that path, and we will once again use a Lennon as our harbinger."

"A Lennon....," Christian observed.

"Yes," Phleiss replied, smiling enigmatically.

"....Not *John* Lennon?"

Phleiss chuckled. "All good things in their time, Christian. Let's not get ahead of ourselves, hmmm?"

"But sir...?"

Rising from his chair, Phleiss ignored Christian's question. "Keep an eye on things, will you?" he instructed as he headed for the door. "I'd like to know how our old friend fares in his comeback."

Phleiss was gone before Christian Spencer could form a reply.

Annie Leibovitz had been contracted by *Rolling Stone* magazine to shoot the spread of John and Yoko precisely because of her cutting edge vision. Rather than produce mere pictures, her photos captured a bit of her subjects' essence, and, in so doing, the images transcended the moment when the shutter clicked....more than 'still life,' the end results were narratives...stories about those individuals in that place and time. In choosing Annie to document the end of John's self-imposed exile from public life, the powers-that-be at the magazine anticipated the genius in putting artists of their caliber together.

"*Naked?!*" John laughed.

"Yeah," Annie replied, smiling.

Laughing along as John joked about her suggestion, Annie nonetheless continued to try to coerce the couple into complying with her idea. “No, no...seriously now!” she pressed. “Think about it! You guys did that *‘Two Virgins’* cover naked and broke all sorts of taboos. I mean, it’s iconic! How great would it be if you posed naked again? Only this time, for the cover of ‘Rolling Stone,’ huh?”

“Oh! We’re to be on the *cover*, eh?” John teased wryly.

“Do this, and I *guarantee* you’ll get the cover!” she promised.

Suppressing a giggle, John looked to Yoko. “Well, what d’yer say, Mother?”

Yoko smiled at the suggestion, already knowing John was game for it. “I think you should, if you want, but I have no desire to go through all that again.”

“Ah, c’mon, Yoko! Besides, isn’t this exactly what the LP is about? Me and you...still together and happy, thank you very much...it’ll be a big ‘fuck you’ to all those cunts who crucified us back then!”

Although John was still smiling, Yoko knew he was serious. She also knew he was talking about more than just the backlash they endured in the aftermath of *‘Two Virgins’* release. “Mmmm...I don’t know, John.” Turning to Annie, Yoko said, “It’s not that I’m being prudish, you know, I just want this to be about the music, not ‘John and Yoko do it again’ sort of stuff.”

While the Lennon’s debated in the background, Annie considered a compromise. She knew, despite Yoko’s assertion to the contrary, that the artist felt too intimidated to strip down for the photo. After all, Yoko was now 47, and from the light application of make-up to the pearl studs in her pierced ears and her high heeled boots, it was clear that Yoko had started embracing her more feminine side. Put simply, Yoko felt too self-conscious to pose entirely in the nude. So, Annie tried to envision just how she could accommodate a clothed Yoko with a naked John while, at the same time, keeping the integrity of the image. In the midst of their continuing discussion, Annie was struck with a plausible compromise. “I’ve got it!” she cried.

The couple turned and looked at her. “This will be perfect!” she assured them excitedly. “Just bear with me, okay? I’ll set you up and snap a few test photos for you to take a look at. If you don’t like it, we’ll destroy the photos and negatives, but...,” she paused and grinned knowingly, “...I think you’re *both* gonna love it!”

Two hours later, Yoko escorted the photographer to the door, and John felt confident that Annie had been right on two accounts – he and Yoko *did* end up loving the image, and it most certainly *would* make the cover of Rolling Stone. Alone in the bedroom, he wrapped himself in the silk kimono and smiled at the thought of the public’s reaction

when the issue was published. “It’s good to be back,” he murmured to himself happily. Then, shaking a Gitane from the pack, he lit it as he moved to the window.

Looking out over Central Park, he drew deeply on the French cigarette as he watched the world going about its business below. He could lose himself for hours in the exercise, making up stories about the strangers who, oblivious of the ex-Beatle’s surveillance, lived far more exciting lives in John’s imagination than they likely did in reality. He chuckled softly to himself as he wondered just how they’d respond if they knew.

Checking the digital clock near the bed, John noticed that it was nearing the time for Sean’s nap. Turning his attention back toward the park, he squinted as he peered into the distance, hoping to catch a glimpse of Sean returning from the park with Helen, his nanny. He felt a pang of disappointment when he found no sign of either one of them, but, just as he was ready to turn away from the window, something – or rather, *someone* – caught his attention. His heart quickened at the sight, and, pressing his face so close to the window that his breath left a circle of condensation, he blinked repeatedly in an effort to clear his vision, certain that he couldn’t be seeing what he was seeing. No matter how he tried, though, the vision remained. “No...,” he whispered fearfully.

Across the street, standing on sidewalk just outside the stone wall surrounding the park, stood a familiar-looking man. John couldn’t say exactly what first drew his attention to him. It might have been because, despite the freezing temperature, the man wore only a dark suit and tie with no overcoat. Or perhaps it was the way the man stood so completely still with his arm extended, his finger pointing straight ahead, and his face seemingly raised and staring toward the seventh floor where John stood looking back. As mad as it seemed, John could swear that the man was looking straight at him. Or perhaps it was the way that not one of the pedestrians passing by appeared to take any notice of him. Considering the man’s dress and stance, the lack of any acknowledgment seemed unusual...even in New York City! It could have been for any of those reasons that John took notice initially, but there was no ambiguity about why the sight struck fear in John’s heart. As impossible as it was, the man staring up at him was Brian Epstein.

“John...?”

Startled by the voice, John jumped and turned to face Yoko. “W-What?”

Concern etched her brow as she moved closer. “Are you alright?”

Instinctively John crossed the room in two strides to stand before her. “Y-Yeah, I’m fine.”

She regarded him doubtfully. “What’s going on? What were you doing?”

John knew he had to assuage her suspicion and fast. If she had any notion that Phleiss was being drawn out by the release of the new album, she’d put an end to it all, and John was enjoying his resurrected career far too much to go back to playing house again.

Consciously calming himself, John answered quietly. "I wasn't doing anything, Yoko, as you know. You saw me at the window, yeah? I was just looking for Helen and Sean – it's past time for his nap. You just startled me is all."

With great effort, he forced himself to meet her eyes and not look away as if by sheer will he could make her believe him. At last, she shook her head slowly and said, "Fine. Okay, we have RKO coming shortly. If you were going to eat something, you'd better do it now."

Giving her a cheeky grin, he saluted her. Yoko rolled her eyes in response to his antics and headed back out of the bedroom. "Oh, and put some clothes on," she called over her shoulder.

Once John was certain she wouldn't return, he cautiously went back to the window. Brian – or whatever was appearing as Brian – was gone. Breathing a shaky sigh of relief, John thought, *Ah, perhaps I didn't see him at all...it may just be that I'm overtired. After all, it's been nothing but one interview and photo session after another since the LP was released, as well as recording the videos for the songs. I'm not used to that pace anymore. It's just probably my mind mixing things up...the start of my career with Brian and starting my career over with Yoko, plus the worry that all this will somehow cause Phleiss to show up. Yeah, I'd wager that's what it is....* Casting another glance over the park, he smiled when he spotted Sean and Helen walking toward the exit. Brian and Phleiss forgotten, he changed quickly into his jeans and a pullover and left the room to go greet his five year old at the door.

On the street, seven floors below, just outside the main entrance, a smaller than usual group of fans waited, hoping to get a glimpse of the former Beatle. It was extraordinarily cold for the early December morning, and, the low temperatures, coupled with the omnipresent winter winds funneling and weaving their way around the buildings and streets of upper Manhattan, made it feel even colder than it really was. As morning gave way to afternoon and then early evening, the small group thinned out even more.

A few stragglers took up the vigil abandoned for the time by their earlier predecessors, but one lone figure remained unmoved for hours on end. For the most part, he stood in a crevice of the gothic building, seeking what little respite he could from the cold, but, every now and then, he'd venture out long enough to pace the length of the entrance, stopping occasionally to converse with the doorman on duty. Beyond that, he kept to himself, patiently passing the hours, just as he had done for the previous two days. In his one hand, he held a copy of the new album; in the other, he held a well-worn paperback that he would crack open and read from time to time.

There was nothing to distinguish the young man from the other fans outside the Dakota except perhaps his unrelenting persistence. To look at him, no one would suspect that he had endured a lifelong struggle with mental illness. As a child, he was prone to living in a fantasy world he created, a world where he established himself as a God-like figure over a world of "little people," at once capable of benevolence or cruelty, creation or

destruction, life or death, as the whim struck him. Like many American youth, he'd been a fan of the Beatles growing up. Even as a child, he shaved off the guns from his miniature toy soldiers, fashioning instead, makeshift instruments out of cardboard. Attaching them to the dolls, he would stage a "Beatles concert" for his "kingdom."

As he grew older, the rift between fantasy and reality widened. Caught up in this macabre disassociation, he would alternately idolize and then vilify the group, the focus of his delusion eventually coming to settle on one Beatle in particular....John Lennon. Over the years, the young man vacillated between wanting to be John and wanting John dead. He'd come to New York City with a mission. The night before, he stood naked before a makeshift altar of the few personal items he carried with him and entreated the "devil" to give him the strength to murder the Beatle. Standing outside the Dakota for the third day in a row, he waited for the "devil" to answer.

John and Sean had just finished the lunch of grilled cheese sandwiches John had prepared for the two of them. As John stood to clear away their dishes, he told the boy, "Right, mate, finish yer milk, and I'll lay you down for yer nap, okay?"

"Okay, Daddy," the youngster agreed, lifting the glass and guzzling the remainder of the milk.

Giving a small laugh, John was just about to tell Sean to slow down when Yoko entered the kitchen. "You should eat something, Mother."

"I'm not hungry," Yoko answered shortly, affectionately running her hand through her son's hair as she passed him.

"Ah...but these are my special grilled cheese sarnies....Lennon cuisine at its finest!" he joked, pulling a face while Sean giggled in response.

"No....," Yoko replied distractedly before snapping, "You know, John, RKO will be here soon. If you're putting Sean down for his nap, you'd better do it now!" With that, she left the room.

Her tone had the effect of ice water on the mood in the kitchen. Abruptly, Sean stopped laughing, lowering his eyes to stare at the table in front of him. The child's expression angered John. *Christ, I wish she would just let up and relax a bit! Would it really be so terrible if fuckin' RKO had to wait a few minutes while we laid Sean down together?* Going to his son, he laid a hand on his back and said gently, "Here, luv, Mummy's just busy. She didn't mean to yell, okay? C'mon, Daddy will see you to bed."

Taking Sean's hand, his father led him to his bedroom. In the room, John picked up the few items of discarded clothing with one hand while he pointed to the bathroom with the other. "Here, Sean, go use the toilet then wash yer face and hands."

Aware that the child was still behind him, John turned, prepared to repeat the instruction, but, when he saw what Sean was playing with, he froze and his face went pale. He struggled to speak, but all that would come out was a single word....a sharp and panicked, "SEAN!"

Wide-eyed and frightened, Sean's head reared back. "W-What?"

John's eyes remained fixed on the scarab. His hands shook as he held them out to his son. "Sean, give Daddy that...*thing!* Give it over now, Sean!"

Sean looked from his father to the gift he held in his hands and back again. "But Daddy, the man said it was mine....he gave it to *me!*"

John cautiously inched his way toward his young son. Fighting to stay calm, John told him, "I'm sure, luv, but that's not something a kid can play with. It's-It's...dangerous. So, give it here."

As John went to reach for it, Sean made to clutch the item to his chest. "*NO!*" his father yelled, and, in one leap, John grabbed it out of Sean's hands.

Crumpled on the floor, John was only slightly aware of the sound of his son crying. Fear had taken his breath and set his heart pounding and the after-effect of the adrenaline surge left his muscles sore and burning. When he was finally capable of coherent thought, he turned to his child. "Sean," he croaked. "Sean, come here. Come to me."

Still sobbing, the five year old scooted across the floor and threw himself at his father. Putting his arms around the boy, John gently rocked back and forth in an effort to calm him. Kissing the mop of brown hair, he blinked back the tears that had welled in his eyes. "I'm sorry, luv. I didn't mean to scare you. Do you forgive me?" He lowered his head to see the child's face. "Eh? Are we still mates?"

Sniffing, the boy nodded his head, and John squeezed him tighter. After a minute, John asked, "Listen, Sean....you said that a man gave you this thing. Did he say who he was? Did he tell you his name?"

Sean shook his head.

"Okay....well, can you tell me what he looked like? Was he old, or was he young?"

"Old," the child whispered.

John thought for a moment before asking, "What did he say to you? Do you remember?"

"He-He said he was your old friend. He said that thing was yours and that you lost it a long time ago, but now it was mine."

“He told you that? He said that now it was yours?”

Again, the child nodded.

Though John was fairly certain that he knew who the man was, the message perplexed him. *Why would Phleiss tell Sean the scarab was now his?*

John looked up when he heard the bedroom door open to find a cross-looking Yoko standing there. “John, RKO is here. Hurry things up.” She turned to leave, but stopped and added, “Oh, and Fred asked me to tell you that you have a phone call. He said it’s important.”

Forcing a smile, John replied, “Okay, I’ll just be a moment.”

“Hurry,” Yoko ordered emphatically.

John stared at the place where Yoko had stood, wondering how he was going to keep this from her. An idea struck, and though it pained him to do it, he reasoned that he had no choice. “Sean...?”

Laying in his father’s arms, Sean looked up at John.

“Listen,” John began, “...Mummy will be terribly angry if she finds out that man spoke to you and gave you a gift. So, this is going to be our secret. I won’t tell Mummy and neither will you, okay? It’ll just be between me and you. Do you understand, Sean?”

Though John may have imagined it, it seemed as though relief crossed the youngster’s face. “Okay, Daddy.”

By the time John had his son tucked into bed for his nap, the child had seemed to totally put the incident out of his mind. As John closed the bedroom door, he couldn’t help but feel envious of his boy’s resiliency. *I’d like very much to forget all that’s happened myself!*

Passing by the closed living room door where Yoko had the RKO radio people set up, John instead went into the office. “Hey Fred, Yoko said there was an important phone call?”

Fred Seaman regarded his employer with a mixture of dread and curiosity. “Uh - yeah, John. It’s one of *them*,” the assistant informed him cryptically.

“One of *who*?” John demanded with impatience.

“One of those two names you told me to always put through.”

John felt his stomach flip. *Shit. Something's definitely happening!* "Which one?"

Fred checked the notepad. "Hoffman. Sam Hoffman."

At first, John just stared off into space. Then, he told his assistant, "I'll take it in the bedroom, Fred. I don't want to be interrupted. If Yoko comes looking for me, just tell her I'm on an important call. Got it?"

Now Fred was really curious. *What is he hiding from Yoko?* "Yeah, sure, John."

In the bedroom, John closed the door and locked it. He plopped on the edge of the bed and picked up the telephone receiver. Sighing deeply, he punched the "hold" button, and, before Sam could say anything, John said stoically, "Phleiss is back."