***Chapter 19***

**Gilbert Fabre! A reliable man; anyone who worked with him would tell you so. Although five months had passed since the deplorable events of Christmas Eve, 1980, he remained dependably himself, unchaging as bad Philadelphian weather in February ! From their initial contact in January, Fabre had brought boundless energy to the collaboration of the Department of Human Services with the FBI. Agents now visited the DHS on a regular basis. Local FBI supervisors were heartened to discover that one could still, even in the cynical niches of the municipal government, find an old-fashioned patriot. To them, it looked as if Fabre was willing to accept any demand on his time, so long as it be related in some way to the defense of America against its ever growing legions of enemies.**

**Despite his fluent command of Spanish, Gilbert Fabre had never engendered much affection in the hearts of the Hispanic community. Now, unremarkable attitudes of dislike and distrust had grown to gigantic proportions. Ever since his transformation into he’d become, more-and-more, to take on the invidious aura of THE MAN. On the foundation of this demonization if him they accumulated all the steaming hatreds of the uprooted, the dispossessed, exploited, poverty-ridden denizens of Philadelphia’s Hispanic community. Fabre proved himself a born witch-hunter; perhaps some traces of Torquemada’s blood coursed through his veins. Comparisons to Oedipus reveal that he had one advantage over the wretched king. He knew in advance that he was indeed the unclean thing he sought.**

**By capitalizing on his executive status within the DSS, Fabre was able, with the assistance and presence of agents from the FBI, to transform his offices in a kind of star chamber for the interrogation of ‘suspects’. Although he did not have the option of using the standard third degree methods, his tools were every bit as effective: termination of rental payments, threats of eviction, termination of food stamps, of payments of medical bills , heating supplements, child care, and the ultimate threat: a recommendation for deportation to the INS, never known for lethargy in taking action in these matters.**

**The sudden emergence of a new persona, from frustrated musician music to right-wing political fanatic, had not been preceded by any sort of rational planning. Fabre had already acquired an odious reputation for lording it over Philadelphia’s poor; yet this reputation had never been tied to any political agenda. Indeed, some welfare recipients had benefited from a measure of protection from Fabre’s over-scrupulous, methodical disposition. In his penchants for order and scrupulous attention to detail, Fabre demonstrated the capable musician he might have been.**

**That was before he’d converted his offices at the DHS into a haven of anti-communist, anti-nationalist, anti-Puerto Rican bigotry. In the barrios it was commonly believed that the Academy of Music catastrophe had twisted his mind (a good first-approximation to the truth). Everyone knew that one bar of a Beethoven symphony meant more to him than the possibility that an entire family in North Philadelphia might freeze to death. For some, this knowledge had been turned to good use: a welfare applicant who loved good music was far more likely to remain on the welfare rolls. Unfortunately there were very few in Philadelphia’s welfare-dependent community who’d graduated from a music conservatory. There were some: long before the Americans showed up, Puerto Rico had benefited from a rich tradition in music education**

**The Hispanic community therefore hated the *Jibaros de la Violenzia* every bit as much as Fabre claimed to, even more so as he was its’ inventor. It would have dearly loved to deliver up their heads on a silver platter to Gilbert the Grand Inquisitor. All that Fabre’s enthusiastic collaboration with the FBI, Philadelphia police and the CIA succeeded in doing was to create a sickening miasma of denunciation, suspicion and fear in the barrios, forcing several Puerto Rican political organizations to go underground, and a ever-renewed cycle of migrations, whether in the form of expulsions or spontaneous departures, back to the charm-laden Caribbean island of their birth.Yet no amount of effort could expect to uncover the secret headquarters and buried caches of weapons of a terrorist organization that existed in name only.**

**Fast forward to May, 1981. In the weeks past the middle of that month that Gilbert Fabre began take the threat to his own safety seriously. His habitual emotional cast of unassimilated bitterness had returned in full. Needless to say, his efforts at reconciliation with his ex-wife had come to naught. After an equivocal reply to his first two letters she simply didn’t bother to reply to them. Even his children found ways to avoid making the obligatory cross-country visit to him. They wrote to him that they were preparing for college. In their letters they thanked him for covering the costs of tuition, while apologizing for being unable to come to Philadelphia this year to thank him in person. Gilbert had no trouble reading between the lines: they had better things to do with their time than to come 1000 miles to hang out with a misanthropic father in a Northeastern city known for its dull monotony and bad weather; all of us who come from there know that it’s a great place to visit, as long as one doesn’t have to live there.**

**Not everything was negative; Gilbert’s life had improved in many respects. A vital musical life is often the complementary virtue to an otherwise dull town; since January Gilbert had begun participating actively in musical activities. His schedule filled up with performances with church choirs and amateur choruses. Because he’d kept up his vocal training over the decades, his voice had not lost its timbre. He frequently featured as the tenor soloist, sometimes as a paid performer.**

**Normally one might have expected that this would have brought relief to a constitutionally troubled spirit, perhaps a rare smile on his lips, or a decided lightness in his step. However, given Fabre’s mentality, the presence of new opportunities and avenues to fulfillment only increased the strength of his grounds for regret and self-pity. To his way of thinking, they demonstrated that he had always had the education, talent and experience to have forged a successful career, had this not been thwarted by “enemies”, specified and unspecified, at every turn.**

**And, damn it! : *There Were No Jibaros !* Nobody to frame, no-one to exploit as scapegoat. With a mounting sense of panic he’d watched his convenient subterfuge, the fabrication of the *Jibaros* , which he’d deemed even cleverer than the Academy bomb hoax itself, dissolve into a fine mist. 5 months into their collaboration with him, the FBI were beginning both to him and in public statements to journalists, to express doubts,. Even editorials in the newspapers were raising the possibility that there was not, and never had been, an organization named *Jibaros de la Violenzia* . Was it perhaps all a cover-up?**

**A new hypothesis was being tossed about in some quarters: that the motive for the hoax had not been political at all, but simply the anger of some demented soul - a ‘lone assassin’ - with a grudge against Puerto Rico, Casals, or the Philadelphia Orchestra. In that case, the press release could have been a stunt, a cleverly constructed cover-up.**

**What sorts of persons would threaten to plant bombs in the auditorium of some “long-haired” classical music concert? Some frustrated musician no doubt . We all know the stereotype: they hold down boring 9 to 5 jobs that involve little initiative or imagination , just so that they can cultivate their fantasy lives as great artists, or soloists or movie stars. The Secret Life of Walter Mitty! They’re everywhere. From the other end one hears of very active, even famous musicians who’ve gone on record for hating the entire profession!**

**Somebody with a grudge, a chip on his shoulder… Weren’t auditions held for the chorus? Some people were turned away; certainly some toes were stepped on …… Gilbert Fabre knew that he would have to strike again, and do it quickly, if he wanted to keep the pressure on the Hispanic community and away from himself. By the most extraordinary coincidence, the opportunity appeared within the week.**

**On the morning of the last Saturday in May , 1981, an astonished civil servant, music lover turned terrorist, received a phone call at his home. He was sitting in his living-room in the early morning, watching television, something he rarely did. Normally only televised concerts were received in this musty chapel. Yet, since January, the suddenly imposed necessity that required him to keep afloat of political events, had extended the range of his activities to include an obsessive perusal of the daily news, as it appeared print on television, with particular attention being paid to terrorist calamities around the world: hi-jackings, bombings, kidnapping, civil wars, coups. Developments in South and Central America and in the Caribbean, were given the closest attention, but Fabre also followed events happening everywhere. As for “explanations” of what was going on, his theories were comfortably at the level of *The National Review* .**

**A narrow-minded psychiatrist might have interpreted these symptoms as evidence of some improvement in his mental health. Ignoring for the moment his motives for projecting himself outside of his customary sphere of sterile musical preoccupations, Fabre was, for the first time, observing, with keen interest, things going on in the world around him. His interpretations were off-the-wall to say the least, and severely biased by fear and anger. At the same time the void between himself and others had perceptibly diminished. Using the lingo peculiar to social workers one could have said of him that he was : *”showing evidence of positive maturation through new outreach mechanisms oriented towards the larger society”* , or some such nonsense.**

**The news that morning contained several items guaranteed to make Fabre uncomfortable: a commission had been appointed, operating out of the state capital at Harrisburg , to study charges of corruption in the Office of Economic Opportunity. Such an investigation would have repercussions in the Department of Human Services. Fabre knew that they would not be interested in learning his opinions, no matter how anxious he was to share them. Yet he would have been happy to let them know that every employee in the Department of BHuman Services toiled like a slave, while at the same time the opportunists in the anti-poverty programs were raking in huge salaries for pushing programs around on paper.**

**3 indigent Puerto Rican families were squatting in condemned housing in Columbia Avenue. They had nowhere else to go. The police department had been waiting on the court order to evict them; Fabre, manifesting a humanity that took everyone by surprise , had advised a waiting period because of the “delicate nature of his own political investigations with the FBI”, now in a critical phase. The real reasons certainly had more to do with his own indecisiveness with respect to his possible options in the near future.**

**It was while he was watching the latest news on the reconstruction of the Academy of Music that the phone rang. Fabre left the TV on, went into the dining room to pick up the receiver. The caller was none other that Susan Spiegel! There exists a certain kind of dense, thoughtless person who remains forever oblivious of the resentments she causes and their eventual consequences. Susan Spiegel hadn’t a clue about Gilbert Fabre’s opinion of her, nor the slightest inkling that something she might have said or done could have led to the incidents at the Academy.**

**She was calling to ask him if he wanted to join the chorus for a new series of concerts that the Philadelphia Orchestra and Chorus were planning to give. The concert tour would extend outside the United States to take in South America and Europe; its purpose was to raise money for the families of the victims of the Academy disaster.**

**Susan Spiegel wasn’t certain of whom she was talking to. She was calling systematically from a list of names of those persons who’d been auditioned the previous September and been rated as highly qualified professional singers. No further audition was necessary.**

**So! Gilbert Fabre *had* passed the auditions after all! His application had simply gotten lost in the shuffle. A crude slight and a foolish misunderstanding had been at the basis of such an immense amount of suffering!**

**Not a single snowflake of the hostility in Fabre’s heart melted when she apologized for the mix-up . He wrote down the performance dates and rehearsal schedule. Then he thanked her with phrases whose exaggerated generosity were calculated to cover up their insincerity.**

**The receiver was replaced, delicately, in its cradle. Then Gilbert Fabre ran into the bathroom. With his fist clenched he smashed the mirror of the medicine cabinet. The violence was such that anyone who saw him would think him unhinged. His fury unspent he stove in the bathroom door with his foot, ran into his bedroom and began hurling about chairs, tables and other furnishings. Then he rolled himself up with a blanket and howled like a caged animal, banging his head against the foot of the bed until the blood ran.**

**Finally he stopped. Drained of energy, the crisis had past. He lay on the floor for half an hour, his body shaking with tremors, his lower lip clenched tightly in his teeth. He was sobbing, burning with fever and breathing heavily. Shortly afterwards he slipped into an anguished slumber.**

**A few weeks later he showed up at the Academy at 7 for the first rehearsal with the enlarged Philadelphia Orchestra Chorus. Neither guilt nor fear interfered with his poise, his simple unfeigned pleasure at being among them. As far as they were concerned he distinguished himself magnificently that night for his technical ability and profound musicality.**