Early proposal idea for Writ of Execution:
Obviously, many changes before this book finished. (Apologies for formatting. These were primitive times.)

POWER OF ATTORNEY

PROPOSAL FOR THE SEVENTH NINA REILLY NOVEL

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by

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BACKGROUND

It's April at Lake Tahoe, too warm for the skiers, too cold for the hikers but perfect for the gamblers. And the whole country has gambling frenzy this season. Everybody is gambling in some way. In Silicon Valley, a three-hour drive toward the coast, fortunes are being made and lost every ten seconds. All over the country, people are putting their retirement money into gambles that go by highfalutin' names like mutual funds and Green stock indexes.

Yeah, right. Here and there are a few elderly voices of reason, like Nina Reilly's father, Harlan, whose parents lost everything in the Depression, but these quavery doom sayers are drowned out by the lusty shouts of the baby boomers.

Yes, fish are jumpin' and the market is high, and the new money is burning a hole in some very expensive designer jeans. In the winter, there's Christmas shopping, and in the summer, there's that trip to the Greek Islands, but in April, these precarious new millionaires just want a weekend getaway, price no object.

Which is where Tahoe comes in, beckoning with its sleazy motels and the neon lights of the big gaming clubs on the Nevada side, Harrahs Caesars, the Horizon, and Prizes. They hop into their new Land Rovers and head up Highway 50 toward the high Sierra and adventure.

Tahoe's having a great year. First the snows arrived for once at the same time as the spandex, so Christmas was good, and the spring is mild and new construction is going on all over town. The Lakeside Inn has finally decided to dump its funky decor and go high-end rustic, Harvey's and Caesars have just been sold to international consortia with the money to spruce up their casinos.

And Global Gaming, Inc., has come up with some exciting new ways for people to lose their money. A whole new line of slot machines has just come into town for prominent placement at the Big Four clubs. Last year it was Slotopoly, Wheel of Fortune, Quartermania, Supermegaslots. This year it's the Greed Machine, a progressive slot linked to thirty -six other machines in Las Vegas and Reno.

The lowest possible payoff is fifteen million dollars, the hugest bottom-line jackpot in gaming history.
Blackjack tables and roulette wheels are being trundled into storage all over town, because the sign of the new millennium is slots.

Slots now generate two-thirds of casino income, and gaming income generates 40% of Nevada's general fund. This makes the Nevada Gaming Commission is, no matter what anybody says, the most important agency in Nevada. Players are pumping $50,000 a month into the average slot machine, which means the house takes $2500, and with 400 slots in even a modest-sized casino the house take on slots will be a cool twelve million per year.
Of course, the slots attract the other sort of customers, too; the losers, cheaters, six-time users, the desperate and the crazy...and the lawyers and the Indians...

CHARACTERS

NINA REILLY, sole practitioner at Lake Tahoe, 35ish, likes Italian heels and hard cases, and is developing a reputation as an erratically
brilliant local attorney who's had some very hard knocks recently. Nina's son, BOB REILLY, is 13 and playing drums in his first band. Nina's brother and sister in law, MATT and ANDREA REILLY, are her best friends.

SANDY WHITEFEATHER, Nina's sphinx-like Washoe Indian secretary, usually tries to keep Nina out of trouble but this time wants to hire her.

PAUL VAN WAGONER, Nina's friend and sometime lover, a detective working out of Carmel, California, is experienced and smart - and violent. You have to be careful with Paul.

MOLLY POTTER, a young AWOL Marine, is underground at Tahoe - until three Greedballs line up and everybody knows who she is.

ROGER HWANG, a Silicon Valley failure at 26, says he was about to kill himself until he mets Molly. He likes Molly - a lot, and hopes she ll give him a chance.

STAFF SGT. ERNEST BILLINGS, Molly's commanding officer, has come to Tahoe to take her back to Hawaii. But she’s afraid of him, and

won’t tell Nina why.

JOANNE ORTIZ, leaves the red vinyl seat at Prize's one minute too soon, threatens Molly, and ends up dead in a dumpster.

KEN OPPENHEIMER, Global Gaming's field supervisor at Tahoe, decides
not to pay out the Greedball jackpot. The chances were 8 million to one of a pay out, and he doubts Molly was the one.

WILBUR SMITH, head of the Washoe Tribal Council, isn' t sure he wants
the tribe to build a casino at Tahoe, but he wants Nina to find out if it's legally possible. He's also Molly's grandfather.

SAMUEL TURNING TREE, a Washoe ivy-leaguer with a chip on his shoulder,
wants that casino. He doesn' t want Nina handling Washoe business. He knows Molly too - better than she wants him to.

BARBARA BANNING, perfect Deputy D.A., handling her first prosecution against a client of Nina’s, hates Nina and really wants the conviction.

PROLOGUE

Meet Roger Hwang. He's twenty-six, a bespectacled graduate of the Wharton School, a recent offeror of stock in a new Internet company, a putative millionaire who thought he was rich until a few weeks ago, when his company went public at just the wrong moment. Roger left his parents garage and moved into a tenth-floor condo on San Francisco's Cathedral Hill last year with a balcony overlooking the whole downtown.

For a few months he felt like Andrew Carnegie as he talked endlessly on his cell phone, standing on that balcony, making deals that all fell through. Now he's going to lose it all.
And it never was his money. There was a venture capitalist behind it all. His parents.

Roger's parents came from Taiwan twenty years ago and put all they had into their only son. They 've been slaving away at the Taste of China in El Cerrito forever, living in the trailer in San Pablo where Roger was raised and did his homework.

Now he can t bear to tell them they re all bankrupt. The restaurant is finished. So’s the trailer.
Roger has $2000 left. He going up to Tahoe and blow it. He's got a huge score in mind. He knows it's a long shot.
The blackjack dealers are happy to oblige. By five in the afternoon

on Monday, Roger's down to his last $20 in quarters. Gloomy doesn’t begin to describe the mood he's in. He walks over to Prize's and takes a red-vinyl-covered stool in front of a Greed Machine, ready to get rid of it all.

He's still convinced that he's either going to make the biggest score of his whole life or he's going to commit suicide, it doesn’t matter which.

Next to him, propped on the stool, there's a middle-aged lady in a brown wool blazer, all made up, her hair stiff like cardboard, sweating like she's in the tropics, talking to herself under her breath. Roger can tell the new no-smoking rules are killing her.

She’s got two plastic buckets full of quarters and she keeps checking her watch.
She goes back to pressing the buttons and whispering to herself. She’s counting out numbers.

Roger runs through his first roll of quarters with only two hits, both cherries. At this rate he's got about five more minutes. He's numb, staring at the three rolls on the machine like his eyes could make them stop in the right place.

His arm is jostled violently, and the woman next to him growls, I have to hit the bathroom. I ll be right back. She heads for the bathrooms, carrying her jingling buckets.

Roger is busy sealing his fate with the last roll of quarters when a young woman slides onto the stool so recently vacated that it must still be warm. He looks at her from the corner of his eye.

She's his age, a little taller than he is, tall and brown-skinned and beautiful. She's already cracked her roll of quarters by the time he tells her that seat's taken.
But she doesn' t pay any attention. He tells her about the lady and
what she said and tries to get her to leave. He's nervous and insists. She laughs. What right does he have to evict her? The other woman is gone and who knows if she’s coming back?

This girl is unspoiled looking, her face strong, not like a Chinese
girl's, even more nervous than Roger, a little standoffish, but that's probably because - oh, frabjous joy! - she's alone!
And this is where one of Roger's other driving forces asserts itself.

He suddenly feels how very much he would like to have the love of a fine woman before he dies, someone who will appreciate the loss to the world which is about to occur - a hasty act of intercourse
would suffice, actually. Roger has always been as horny as he was ambitious.

So Roger makes a comment when she hits a $2.50 jackpot, and she smiles, sort of, and he asks where she's from, and even when she doesn' t answer he mentions his name and that he's from San Jose, he's into the Net and computers. She doesn' t react to this, but Roger's on patrol now, he's getting ravished by her pure strong neck and the glorious breasts begging for release under her sweater.

He tries a few more sallies, but things aren' t going well. He looks
down and sees to his horror that he only has six quarters left.

It really is the end. He puts 3 in and gives her a lame smile. She’s not looking. Something should have happened by now and it s not going to happen. Roger's screwed. He's familiar with that feeling.

Suddenly, she's staring at her machine and her eyes are bugging out of her head and she's gasping and clutching her throat like she's having a stroke or something. Roger leans over to have a look.

Holy shit! She's got three Greedballs lined up! She's hit the progressive
jackpot! A red light starts whizzing around in a circle and a loud ringing noise has erupted.

How-how much, her voiceless lips ask him. He looks up at the rules, does the computation in his head, looks at the machine again. She
had all the quarters in. She did it. She did it right. She - there’s no question, she won. He's nodding and she's squeezing her eyes shut and looking like she s going to faint, and Roger feels like he’s going to faint too. It’s a huge jackpot and she’s won it and he s screwed. He may as well slink away and become a ghost himself, but then she leans over and presses against him and says, Let me use your name.

Huh?

Your name. Please. I can’t use mine.

Roger stares at her stupidly. A group of screaming tourists have surrounded them and the noise is deafening, as if they were at a football game on the touchdown line. The Slots Manager rushed up and glares at the screen, stupefied with surprise. Security guards press the crowd back, but Roger manages to stay on his stool.

He pulls out his driver s license and hands it to the girl.

CHAPTER ONE

Six o'clock. Time to go home, but Nina Reilly isn' t going to be allowed to leave her office chair until Sandy Whitefeather has come out with whatever she's stewing about. Sandy's been absent-minded
lately, which is strange since she s normally as vigilant about her work as a terrier.

Turns out that Sandy has been elected to the Washoe Tribal Council - just in time to have to vote on the biggest project the Washoe have ever envisioned - a project to build a casino at Tahoe, on the California side, on the land the federal government has just turned over to the tribe. This will cause a furor at the Lake, where all the gaming takes place on the Nevada side. Meeks Bay land was supposed to be used by the Indians to camp and fish and hold low-tech powwows at Lake Tahoe like their forefathers. The Feds never dreamed the tribe might want to make some 21st-century money on it.

The Washoe need a Tahoe-based lawyer to pursue this idea, and Sandy's been deputized to retain The Law Offices of Nina F. Reilly, consisting of Nina and Sandy. At a reduced fee, of course. Sandy as a client in a legal case? It's enough to make Clarence Darrow's hair stand on end. And Sandy would be typing up the letters, taking the messages, and generally keeping tabs on Nina in a way that would make any lawyer say no.

But the idea's exciting. The little Washoe tribe, thumbing its collective nose at the United States! Daring to do something about the poverty and unemployment in the tribe! On the other hand, the Washoe are divided on the issue and probably don't have a prayer. The Meeks Bay land is on a long-term lease, and Uncle Sam is the lessor. They didn' t really think they were going to get CONTROL of their land, did they?

While Nina is arguing with Sandy about this, and thinking about how ready she is to go home and have a glass of chilled Clos Du Bois that is even now crying out to her from the refrigerator, two people walk into the office, a distraught young woman in the lead, with a confused-looking geeky Asian American guy trailing behind her.

Sandy's face slips into that infuriatingly impassive mode that Nina is so familiar with. She speaks no more, not even to tell them that the office is closed and they can make an appointment. Nina has to tell them herself.

But they won't listen. The girl blurts out her problem - she just won twenty million dollars at a slot machine. They want to give her a million right now. All she has to do is fill out a few IRS forms and produce her ID.

Wow!

She couldn' t do that, the girl says. She told a lie - said the guy standing there next to her was her husband, and said he had the only ID - which means she s now Mrs. - what? she grimaces - Mrs. Roger Hwang.

At which the young man offers a shaky smile. She offered to pay me a hundred thousand dollars he says.

Then, the girl goes on, she told them she felt faint and would be back in an hour. And here they are. How can she collect without having to tell them who she is? And by the way, she won t tell Nina who she is either.

Sandy looks at her oddly. Nina also notices a few things - the long black hair, the fabulous cheekbones, the strong frame - is she a Native American? Her name is Molly Potter.

CHAPTERS 2-29

Ah, Nina, as her friend Paul would, and will, say...Nina takes both new clients. She knows she shouldn't do this - she’s a sole practitioner, still fragile as she recovers from some bad blows over the past two years, like losing her husband and being shot, and these could turn into very big cases - but the lives of all good litigation lawyers are short and brutish because they can’t resist the adrenaline rush.

Nina goes back to the club with Molly and Roger and makes her pitch to the casino manager, the I.R.S. rep, and the Global Gaming field supervisor who will actually pay out the award, Ken Oppenheimer. Molly’s power of attorney in hand, she asks that the money be transferred to a trust account she’ll set up in the morning.

No dice, says the IRS man. Not without the SS number. One hell of an argument ensues, ending at about eight o clock with the IRS man stomping out and the Global Gaming guy shrugging his shoulders.

Lawyers will be consulted all around. Meantime, the money stays in Global Gaming s hands.

They call it a day. Roger borrows enough from Nina to stay at the Motel 6 on Lake Tahoe Blvd. Nina goes home to her cranky son, Bob, and slobbery dog, Hitchcock.

Molly’s staying at a “rustic” place on the west shore, not that she told anyone her temporary address. She drives there in the rental car, makes sure the doors and windows are locked,

and crawls into bed, thinking about the money and the trouble she's in, wondering if Staff Sergeant Billings has followed her from the Kaneohe Marine Base to Tahoe.

There's a pounding at the door. Molly's not about to open up to this frazzled strange
lady who's shouting about how Molly stole her seat and has no right to the money. She starts making threats, so Molly calls the motel manager who manages to shoo the woman away.

Next morning more pounding on the door, this time, the police. They want to talk to Molly about a body - a middle-aged woman named Joanne Ortiz found behind the motel in a dumpster. The woman was strangled with a bungie cord and shrouded in a tall-size kitchen trash bag.

The motel manager remembers that they were acquainted. A slip of paper in the dead woman s purse says Mrs. Hwang.
Molly can't produce ID. She refers the cops to her lawyer,
who is just now trying to get Bob out of bed and off to school.

The police arrest Molly for murder. The theory is that this woman was going to make some sort of claim on the Greedball jackpot and came back to Molly's room. Molly killed her in a struggle. An enterprising reporter puts her face on the evening news.

Meantime, the fallout from the win and the murder continues. Suspicious about the win, Ken
Oppenheimer of Global Gaming drops by Nina s office. He can't prove that the Greed Machine was fixed somehow,
but his bosses agree with him,it just shouldn't have disgorged its winning this soon, not with odds of eight million to one.

Then Nina is visited by Staff Sgt. Ernest Billings, a scary dude if she ever met one (and she has) who tells her that Molly is a Marine corporal AWOL from her base at Kaneohe in Hawaii. She's being investigated there for the murder of her boyfriend, John Talking Hawk. He needs to talk to Molly - where is she?

Nina kicks him out and looks at Sandy. You know something, she says to Sandy.

Roger thinks about the hundred grand Also, he's developed
a powerful sexual interest in Molly. He visits her in jail regularly.

The money, of course, hasn't been paid out. Nina goes to court to get it released, but having the client in jail on a murder charge doesn't help. Molly doesn't want bail. Sgt. Billings seems to be the reason why, and Nina realizes Molly may be shipped back to the brig on Sand Island in Honolulu if she's released.

The Washoe Tribal Council holds a closed meeting in Gardnerville

to discuss the casino proposal. Nina attends with Sandy. There she meets the elders of the Washoe tribe and a couple of younger Washoe with high-tech educations and bad attitudes. There's Wilbur Smith, head of the Council, a white-haired old man, who s against the casino idea, and there's Samuel Turning Tree, an angry young graduate of Princeton who really wants this casino to go up and is sick of the cautious - read chickenshit - ways of the elders.

Nina suggests that the tribe, which has already sent a letter to Washington and received a flat no to their idea, go to Judge Milne for a determinations of their rights to the Tahoe land. This type of lawsuit - for declaratory relief - takes precedence on the court calendar. Samuel says, Let's start building and let them file their own lawsuit. Tempers run hot. Somehow the casino idea has pushed all sorts of Washoe buttons - they're sick of being pushed around by the white man. His gifts are always conditional. This is their first and only big chance to make major changes.

They see the wealth all around them and it feels, to Samuel at least, like a conspiracy to keep them poor.

All Wilbur wants is to see Molly. Why not? He s her grandfather! Samuel knows Molly too. He's the reason she left her home in Minden to join the Marines. She a full-blood Washoe. In high school they were inseparable. Sandy knew all this the moment Molly walked through the office door. But she didn't say a word, she tells Nina, Because it's the way of our people. Nina hates that line, which she has heard before.

Nina needs a strategy to handle the whole Washoe situation. She's running too many cases right now, all connected with the Tribe - Molly's defense in People v. Potter, an extradition request by the Marine Corps to have Molly returned to Hawaii to face a court-martial and murder inquiry, a suit against Global Gaming to force them to pay out Molly's winnings, and a suit for Declaratory Relief filed by the Washoe Tribe asking for judicial recognition of the tribe's right to build a casino. Her picture's in the paper every day and she's neglecting her other cases.

She knows many people are angry at her. The sins of the clients often get visited on the lawyers. Sgt. Billings seems to have taken
a leave of absence and he's haunting her like a rotten molar. Global
Gaming's supervisor, Ken Oppenheimer, won't let the win go through.
Samuel Turning Tree accosts her at work and Sandy just barely manages
to get him out the door. It's obvious that he's in love with Molly,
and he's got something against Nina.

Not to mention Barbara Banning, Tahoe's hot new Deputy District

Attorney. She really hates Nina and this is her first case prosecuting a client of Nina's.

Nina's feeling the pressure. Usually, she just responds by working harder, but lately she's been spending more time in the casinos, the only place where she can go to relax in the whole town. She plays a few slots, the roulette wheel, blackjack - and she keeps staying longer and dropping more money than she intended. But she keeps going back.

Finally one Saturday night she catches herself at 2 a.m. Bob's asleep at home, alone. She's down eight hundred dollars. She's broke, in fact.

She calls Paul van Wagoner in Carmel and asks him to come up and help her unravel the strands that are strangling her client as surely
as Joanne Ortiz was strangled. She needs help and she’s not too far gone to know it.

Paul's first assignment is Hawaii. He flies there and looks into the murder investigation.

The dead Marine, John Talking Hawk, was living with Molly off-base and keeping it a secret. He drowned while skin-diving near Kaneohe Bay. Molly, who was with him, told a cock-and-bull story about a mystery boat and another diver. No one believes her. The JAG officer
in charge of the investigation says Billings isn' t in Tahoe in any
assigned capacity - he's surprised about it. Paul gets drunk with a woman named Sherry, a civilian payroll clerk who knew both Molly and John, and learns that Billings had been harassing Molly. He also learns that a civilian named Samuel something had shown up to talk to Molly, and that the next morning Molly went AWOL.

Judge Milne holds a major hearing on the Washoe Tribe petition.

The government lawyers have a point - the land was leased, not given, to the tribe. The transfer papers make it clear that the tribe can only use the land for an approved purpose. Gambling isn’t
approved. But Nina has her own arguments. Milne agrees to announce his decision in ten days.

After the hearing Nina doesn' t make it back to the office. She's playing craps, doggedly, losing money again.

Molly and Roger have dinner at a Jack in the Box. Roger tries to kiss her. Molly pushes him away.

Paul, back in Tahoe, tangles with Billings, who is a big, dangerous,
angry man. He looks into Billing's past and learns that Billings was accused, and acquitted, of an assault on a man in Oklahoma before
he joined the Marines. Paul learns that the victim in Oklahoma was Billings ex-wife's lover. The victim lost an eye. But nothing could be proven.

Paul turns his attention to Samuel Turning Tree. Samuel tells him that he went to Hawaii to give John some moral support. He says John Talking Hawk was his brother. According to Samuel, John didn't
love Molly and wanted to leave her. He denies being out on a boat that day. Samuel seems to think that Molly killed John.

Nina talks to Sandy about the Washoe casino proposal. is this really what the tribe wants?

Paul tries to find out more about Joanne Ortiz. She was a down-at-the-heels
divorcee working as a change person at Harvey's and a longtime local. She certainly would have been pissed that a minute after leaving that slot machine it hit a huge jackpot. Anyone would be.

But why was she murdered?

Paul talks to Joanne's live-in boyfriend. She had told him that she was going to make it big and leave town soon. How? Could the machine have been fixed as Ken Oppenheimer claims?

The preliminary hearing in Molly's case comes up. There really isn' t enough evidence to hold Molly. The motel manager has split and Barbara Banning's up a creek. Molly's released.

Trouble is, she has nowhere safe to go. She's very afraid of Billings.
She tells Nina that she thinks Billings may have killed John and is now stalking her. Wilbur's sick and she can't stay with him. Sandy says, Okay, stay with me.

Molly agrees that Nina can use her real name and ID to get at the jackpot money at this point. She's ready to turn herself in and fight the military murder charge in Hawaii. Nina accompanies her to a hastily-called meeting with Prize's casino, the IRS, and Global
Gaming. Ken Oppenheimer still won t release the money, though Molly's
provided the needed information. Nina, furious, says she'll see

him in court. He just shrugs.

Molly says that she s going to spend the night at Sandy's, then see Grandpa Wilbur in Minden the next day, and then fly back to Hawaii to turn herself in.

Molly takes off with Sandy and Roger. Roger's staying for dinner at Sandy's house. It’s pretty obvious how he feels about Molly.

Nina’s awakened at five a.m. by a call from Sandy. Molly has disappeared from Sandy s house. A window has been left open. She didn' t take her wallet or car or clothes. She has been kidnapped. Roger, too, is gone. He called Sandy to say he thought he saw Molly driving away but lost the car.

After telling the local cops everything he knows, then Paul searches for Billings. He isn't too hard to find - he s been shot in the eye with a small-caliber pistol in his hotel room. He s been dead for at least a day.

If he didn't kidnap Molly, who did? Paul tells Nina to watch her back. Someone out there is more dangerous than Billings ever was.

Molly’s in the cabin of a boat, tied to the bed, a paper bag over her head. Her captor isn't there all the time. He or she speaks to her, just gets her up to go to the head or brings sandwiches in and nudges her to eat. Molly has screamed herself hoarse but they must be somewhere very remote on the lake...it s Billings, she s sure. He had harassed her for almost a year to go out with him, then he d turned on her. It had to be him in that boat that came up alongside while they were diving, had to be he who drowned John.

Nina gets an e-mail. The kidnapper wants all the money, in cash. The kidnapper somehow knows Nina still has the Power of Attorney and can do this.

Paul’s following up on some idea he has. Nina has to think, hold it together. Should she just pay it? She doesn't tell anyone about the ransom demand yet.

Who killed John Talking Tree? Who killed Joanne Ortiz? Who killed Billings? How are these three murders connected?

Paul’s talking to Wilbur Smith, the tribal elder, at the Carson Valley hospital. Wilbur suffers from diabetes. He’s not doing too well. Could Samuel be behind all this? Paul asks him. Could he have killed John Talking Tree? Billings was in Hawaii - maybe he

figured out that Samuel killed John, so Samuel killed him too - and Joanne, has Wilbur ever heard of her?

No. Wilbur gets up on one elbow and tells Paul - it wasn't Samuel. He's known Samuel too long to believe that. Samuel was John's brother. He would never kill his brother. Wilbur calls Samuel and Samuel comes to the hospital. Wilbur has him solemnly swear that he didn't hurt his brother. Then what were you doing there? Paul asks, and Samuel says, he tried to talk John out of leaving Molly. John was seeing someone else, a white girl, and the family was trying to mend the rift between John and Molly.

At Prize's, Nina plays craps. She'll go back to the office where it's quiet in the evening to think. Soon. She can't seem to stop. She feels the excitement, the fever, at the table and she thinks, no, it's not the Washoe. This has to do with gambling...it s just a feeling, but she wants to talk to Oppenheimer, the Global Gaming guy, again.

Paul calls Nina from Oklahoma where he's dug deep into Billing's past. Nina tells him her idea, but he stubbornly insists that he's got to talk to the man Billings injured five years before. Nina tells him about the ransom note. Paul demands that she call the police.

Paul finds Frank Simpson in Tulsa, Oklahoma. He's now a disability counselor and he wears a patch on his right eye. Startled to see Paul, he says he left Billing's wife after the shooting. He fell into a deep depression and just couldn' t cope with the aftermath. He hasn' t seen her for years. Her maiden name was Joanne Ortiz. He heard she left town and went west.

Paul thinks about that. Joanne Ortiz, murdered behind Molly s motel room at Tahoe.

Paul starts to pull it together: Joanne Ortiz, whose lover Frank was injured so badly by her ex-husband that it killed his love for her.

She and Billings were after Molly Potter for different reasons. Check. They ran into each other for the first time since the shooting five years before. Check. There must have been a struggle. Billings must have won.

But then who killed Billings two days later?

Molly frees herself and rolsl off the bed, listening. No sound. The door to the cabin is fastened on the other side. The porthole's too small. She decides to break the door down.

But she hears the sound of oars. Someone's approaching. She finds a way to bar the door so that bastard can't get in even with an ax...

Someone climbs into the boat. She hears the steps coming down into the fore-cabin, past the galley, to her door. The handle turns...He can t get in. A shoulder hits the door. Molly tells him to fuck off.

Molly? Says an aggrieved voice. It s Roger! I'm here to rescue you.

Molly throws open the door and falls into his arms. But Roger's face is all funny. He pushes her back and slams the door, facing her. You had to get loose, he says. He's got a gun, a little lady's gun.

Nina speaks with Oppenheimer. Could the jackpot have been contrived?

Oppenheimer tells her that has happened before, though you won't hear about it in the newspaper. Nina asks, What if Joanne Ortiz was supposed to win the money? What if she had a confederate who killed her for getting off that red vinyl stool and going to the bathroom just when the machine hit? Oppenheimer says, the problem is, there s no way to prove it.

Roger tells Molly that he's mad he has to kill her. If she'd only let him get close - they could have gotten married and shared the money. Everything would have worked out. But now she's seen him.

He really needed the money. The next company would have made him a millionaire, but he wasn t going to have that chance. He had a business associate, who had been interested in one last-ditch business venture with him. Roger had learned how the machine worked from him and taken beating that machine as a personal challenge. He figured out the way to do it. Because the dirty little secret of the big progressives is that they aren't random - the sequence is very long, but it s predetermined, and he, Roger, had figured it out, and then he d found this invisible woman, Joanne Ortiz, to be the proxy winner. She was going to make big bucks, but she couldn't handle the pressure. She told him she was sick and headed toward the bathroom. Then Molly stole the goddamn seat! And hit!

Billings had followed Molly to the motel that night. He saw Roger there but didn' t see the murder of Joanne Ortiz. But two days later he found Roger and said what he thought.

Joanne was Billings ex-wife, and he had taken her murder personally - said he'd been looking for her for five years. And Roger said something wrong, and Billings went for him. There was a struggle. Billings almost won, but Roger had the gun.

As for Joanne - she had gone completely out of control, talking

to Molly and almost ruining everything - he had to get rid of her...

This is the end, Roger says, sounding as if he can't believe it. No, he says, changing his mind. It's not over. It's just another long shot, another bad bet, he says. Wild-eyed, Roger works himself up - Molly struggles, but can t get loose -

Paul lands at the Tahoe airport and calls Nina at Oppenheimer's office at Prize's. She admits she didn't call the police. She's going to pay the ransom. Time's running out.

Explaining what has happened, Nina asks Oppenheimer to cosign the papers to allow the money to
be taken out. Concerned, he agrees. They go to the bank. At the window, Nina tries to
stay calm. The manager comes over and is very reluctant to release the money, but Nina s got her Power of Attorney - he has to.

They leave with a cashier s check for one million dollars. Oppenheimer's right by her side. They get into Nina s Bronco and start driving down Highway 50 to the drop-off point...

Nina leaves the money at the drop-off point. No one molests them. She drops Oppenheimer at his digs at Caesar s and turns the Bronco around. She's exhausted. She wants Paul, wants his arms around her... he's waiting at the office, strong. Sandy makes coffee and they wait for the phone call which may or may not come. Nina's afraid that Molly is dead.

The call comes. The voice is angry. The money wasn't there. They'll never see Molly again.

Nina protests and said they did leave the money, she and Oppenheimer.

The phone goes dead. Paul and Nina look at each other. She's in tears. I paid him, she says.

Oppenheimer could have taken the money, Paul says.

They go to Caesars, to Oppenheimer's room. The door's locked and no one answers. Paul motions for silence.

He picks the lock. They go in. Roger's in the bathroom, dead, shot numerous times. The money
isn' t there. Neither is Oppenheimer.

Paul and Nina back out. Molly, Nina says. Roger must have known something, been trying to save her. But where is she?
They head downstairs and Paul questions the parking valets. They know Oppenheimer. He just left. Asked one of them where the Homewood Marina was.

The police? Nina says. No time, Paul says.

Roger didn't kill her, just gagged her and tied her to the bed again. Molly was sick through the gag and felt like she was suffocating, but she's alert again and afraid he's coming back.

She hears the oars. She's sure it s the last time she'll ever hear them. Steps creak the deck. Down they come.

It's not Roger. It's a man she s never met, holding Roger's gun. He shakes his head - Sorry, nothing personal, it s a matter of money, and you re a loose cannon. He raises the gun - But this time, Molly s ready. She's a freaking Marine, trained to fight. She's up and at him before he has any idea who's has taken control of his throat. He's suffocating, whoever he is, under her hands. He can't talk. Loosening her grip around his neck, she breaks his leg so he can't leave. Holding the gun tightly in her hand, she he watches him recover.

And that s where Paul and Nina find her.

EPILOGUE

It was Roger who talked Oppenheimer into the jackpot scam, and Oppenheimer who recruited Joanna Ortiz. When Molly won, Oppenheimer told Roger he would think of something, but Roger needed that money, he deserved it. He went after Molly. When Joanne turned into a threat he killed her and when Billings objected he killed him too.

Then Molly refused to fall in love with him, which would have solved all his problems at once. He kidnapped her to get the money, and Oppenheimer stole it. Roger went to Oppenheimer s room to get it, but Oppenheimer got the gun away from him and shot and killed him.

Oppenheimer goes to jail, charged with Roger's homicide. Molly goes free and Nina s about to turn over her Power of Attorney to her.

But who killed John Turning Tree in Hawaii, Molly asks?

Nina says, I don t know. Molly?

Not me, Molly said. Samuel came to talk to us and I thought John might come back to me -

So John was seeing someone else? Nina asks.

Some civilian who worked on the Base named Sherry, Molly says. Paul grunts. Shit, he says. Sherry.

Judge Milne s finest hour occurs. He tells the Washoe they can reform the lease and build their casino. The government vows to appeal.

The tribe meets again. Wilbur speaks. He talks about money and greed and how the Washoe can live all right without the casino. Samuel talks about the future, and how it belongs to those who can handle things just like the white man.

The tribe looks solemn. Then Sandy speaks up. She talks about what will happen to the land they have just been granted if they build a casino. They will despoil a place sacred to their people.

The tribe votes to drop the idea. Deeply disappointed, Samuel goes out to the hall. Nina tells him he has a phone call from Hawaii.

It’s Molly, fighting the charge against her there. She misses him. A lot.

Nina goes over to Prize’s to gamble. Paul joins her.
He watches her lose money and tries to get her to leave, but she won’t or can’t. Finally he asks her the question on his mind - Does she want to lose it all?

It’s already lost, she says. I've lost too much and I can’t come back. No, Paul says. No. Come back with me and let me take care of you.

But she shakes her head. Paul goes. His last vision of Nina is her perched on a red vinyl stool, feeding quarters to the maw of the slot machine.

THE END