

CHAPTER 5

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Scars That Never Heal

"A man who doesn't spend time with his family can never be a real man."

—Marlon Brando, as Vito Corleone in *The Godfather*

"There are dysfunctional families. There are the hard cases who hurl insults at each other on daytime talk shows, and then there are the Brandos—a true house of pain."

—*People Magazine*

I have been involved in many gut-wrenching divorce cases over the years, and there's one question I always ask: Is there any thing I can do to help give the kids a chance at a decent life?

I have no sympathy for parents who use their children as pawns and instruments of revenge. Let's face it: There would be a lot less pain in this world if people like that remained childless. Which brings me to a man who has proven to be one of the greatest actors—and worst parents—of his time.

I first went to work for Marlon Brando in 1965, when his first-born son Christian was six. I soon became embroiled in one of the most violent and contentious custody battles in Hollywood history.

In my business, you're hired to act on behalf of the client. If it's war you're helping that person wage, you hope it's a righteous one. These days, I'm in a position to pick the people I work for. But back then I couldn't always afford to be choosy. Fortunately, Marlon Brando was the more sympathetic of Christian's parents. He may have been a notorious womanizer and a neglectful father, but at least he didn't carry on in front of his children. Nor did he ever force drugs down his kids' throats.

When Christian killed his half-sister's boyfriend in 1990 and was incarcerated for manslaughter, I was sad, but not surprised. This kid had been pulled back and forth between his mother and father until he was eighteen. No wonder things turned out rotten for him.

I've always believed in personal responsibility. If Christian Brando took a life, he should be punished. Still, in some ways, I feel that the boy's father and especially his mother, the actress Anna Kashfi, deserved to go to prison in Christian's place. That kid

suffered severe neglect from Marlon Brando, and outright abuse from Kashfi.

The tragedies that have befallen Brando's children have left him a broken man. Yet there's no doubt in my mind that, given the chance, he'd keep on siring more children. The guy has no fewer than eleven kids: five by his three wives (Anna Kashfi, Movita Castenada, and Tarita Teriipia, all former actresses), three by his Guatemalan housekeeper, Christina Ruiz, and another three from various affairs.

You can make a fortune in show business, but big bucks can't buy your kids the love and attention they need. That's something guys like Marlon Brando don't want to face. Not that the man doesn't love his children.

Marlon would fly in thousands of miles from wherever he happened to be making a film just to be with Christian. He fought hard to keep his son out of prison, and was a frequent visitor during Christian's incarceration. When Marlon's daughter Cheyenne attempted suicide—which she did at least a half dozen times before finally succeeding in April 1995, Marlon always tried to help her pick up the pieces. He spent a fortune on psychiatrists and exclusive sanitariums. This is one father who is always there in times of crisis, but he never could be bothered with the day-to-day hands-on grunt work.

Who's got time for raising kids when you can be on location, raking in outrageous sums of money? Who wants to sit home with a bunch of demanding little brats when you can be out there partying with your choice of beautiful women? Come to think of it, why bother staying married to one woman when there's always someone more enticing—or at least new—to marry?

All you have to do is divorce your current wife or pretend she doesn't exist. Then sire another child or two with some new squeeze. Who's to stop you? There's no law against it, and you've got more than enough bread to cover your tracks. Still, if you're going to have children and tune out their needs, don't be surprised by the human wreckage left behind.

Brando claims to love all his children, though he never treated them equally. There were legitimate and illegitimate children, American and Tahitian children. Brando's progeny span the generations.

You've got baby boomers, Generation Xers, and preschoolers—all products of the same indiscriminate organ. Even though Christian was always one of Marlon's favorites, the boy never felt secure about his place in the pecking order.

"The family kept changing shape," Christian once remarked. "I'd sit down at the breakfast table and say, 'Who are *you*?' " In the wake of such confusion, does it really come as a surprise that this family has produced so many emotional basket cases?

It's hard to look at the 1990s version of Marlon Brando and connect this person to the earlier mythology surrounding the guy. He's fat and feeble now, but when I met him in the mid-1960s, Marlon was still a major-league sex symbol. And while he often professed his love for beautiful women of all types, he had a special thing for dark, exotic women.

When he married Anna Kashfi in 1957, she was pregnant with Christian. Marlon believed she was East Indian. In fact, his first wife had lied to him. Kashfi may have looked exotic, but her father was a black-Irishman who named his daughter Joanne O'Callohan.

Marlon claimed that this deceit was an important factor in destroying the relationship. But let's face it, Anna Kashfi could have been a full-blooded East Indian. She could have had the moral fiber of Mother Teresa. Marlon would have eventually dumped her for someone else.

Brando's marriage to Anna Kashfi was short-lived, even by his fickle standards. "Living with Marlon is like an afternoon at the races," Kashfi told a reporter only a few months after the wedding. "[There are] short periods of orgiastic activity followed by long periods of boredom and anticipation."

Kashfi and Brando divorced after being married for less than a year. What followed was one of the ugliest custody battles this town has ever seen.

By the time I started working for him, Brando was remarried to Movita Castenada—who'd played Clark Gable's wife in the original 1935 version of *Mutiny on the Bounty*. Movita was a good ten years older than Marlon, and she had a son by him while he was still married to Kashfi.

Marlon set Movita up in a nice house a couple of canyons over from where he lived. He saw her every two weeks, at which time he would take his son out for a ride. Meanwhile, he slept with any number of other women. This was Marlon Brando's idea of being a husband and father.

After I got to know him, I said: "Marlon, that's not really being married. All you're doing is visiting every now and then."

And he'd answer, "Well, I pay all her charge cards and provide her with a wonderful lifestyle."

"Maybe so," I said. "But it's still not right."

Around that time, I told Brando that I was thinking about getting married. To which he remarked, "Don't get married in California, whatever you do."

"Why not?"

"You know, when you get a divorce in this state, they really stick it to you."

"Marlon," I said. "I don't have it in mind to get married and then divorced. When I get married, I plan to stay married—kind of like Van Johnson and June Allison running through a field of tulips."

Marlon cracked up at that, and I laughed too. But I was as serious about my old-fashioned ideas of a real marriage as he was about keeping his assorted wives at arm's length. In the case of Anna Kashfi, though, we were dealing with someone who wasn't fit to be too close to anyone—most especially her young son.

When Marlon and Anna were divorced, she got custody of Christian. In those days, the mother was almost always awarded custody. She could even be a drug addict or a nymphomaniac—just so long as she didn't carry on in the house.

A former employee testified that Anna was indeed performing sordid acts in front of her son, but she was still granted custody. Marlon wasn't really interested in gaining custody. All he wanted was for Anna to honor his visitation rights.

I never saw anything that made me think Anna genuinely loved her son. She did desperately want to get back with Marlon, though, and she would use anything or anyone to manipulate him. Christian's health and welfare were way down on her priority list.

At times, Anna would be nice to Marlon when he came to pick up Christian. Then she'd read in one of the gossip columns how her ex had been seen with some starlet. This would drive her off her rocker, and she wouldn't let Marlon see the kid at all. Anna's erratic behavior was fueled by drug abuse, and it was making Marlon crazy. He had no idea what he was going to run into on his visitation days.

Once, after Marlon flew in from Tahiti—where he was filming a remake of *Mutiny on the Bounty*—to see Christian, Anna chased him down the driveway with a butcher knife. This was far from an isolated incident.

We had testimony from various nurses, nannies, and maids that Anna was a heavy drug user. Not only that, but she was having sex with strange men while the boy was around. Christian regularly saw his mother and her lover of the moment walking around the house loaded and buck-naked. We were also told that, when Christian started crying, Anna would give him various barbiturates to shut him up.

One night, Anna took an overdose of sleeping pills. I still don't know if she was trying to commit suicide or if she simply overestimated her tolerance. In any case, she collapsed on the floor in a heap. Christian—who had not been sedated that night—picked up the phone and managed to tell the operator that his mommy was sick.

Moments later, police and paramedics arrived at Anna's house on Tigertail Road in Brentwood. The cops called Marlon Brando, who rushed over and took Christian to his home on Mulholland Drive.

At that time, Marlon was making a movie called *Moratori* with Yul Brenner and Wally Cox, and he had to go to the studio the next morning. So he left the boy in the care of his secretary, Alice, and his maid, Blanche, two trustworthy employees who'd been with Brando for years. Marlon rightfully felt that Christian was in good hands, but he underestimated his ex-wife's pathological persistence.

Anna had been taken to the UCLA Medical Center, where the pills were pumped out of her stomach. The doctors held her overnight, but allowed her to check out the next morning. There was a line of taxis parked in front of the hospital. Anna got into the closest

cab and directed the driver to her estranged husband's house. A few minutes later she was standing in front of Marlon Brando's Mullholland estate.

Anna stared at the electronic gate, designed to prevent strangers, curiosity seekers, and other undesirables from walking onto the property. That gate could be triggered only by a card key or from a remote switch inside the house, but Anna was thin enough to squeeze between the posts without setting off the alarm.

As far as I was concerned, Marlon's house wasn't nearly as secure as it should have been. He had very few locks on the outside of the house and absolutely no locks on the inside. His house had been the site of numerous suicide attempts, including a highly publicized drug overdose by the actress Rita Moreno. That's why Marlon wanted quick access to every room. While I understood his anxiety, it played right into the hands of obsessed fans, overzealous reporters, and crazy ex-wives.

At one point later on, while I was living at Brando's, there was an obsessed fan who would sneak in and walk around the house nude. She was a married woman in her thirties who meant no harm, but the situation got out of control. We'd all be sitting around having dinner, and this naked woman would come streaking by. Marlon didn't want to have her arrested, and we always treated her with kid gloves. But the lack of security in the house made me jumpy.

It took Anna only a few minutes to execute her break-in. Once she entered the front door, Marlon Brando's ex announced her presence by slugging his secretary, Alice. Then she picked up an end table and threw it through a plate-glass window. In the resulting confusion, Anna encountered no resistance when she grabbed Christian and lit out of the house.

Marlon still wouldn't beef up security, but this violent episode convinced him that something needed to be done. This was also my point of entry into the case.

Marlon was represented by two powerful attorneys, Alan Sussman and Norman Gary. The investigators were Jim Briscoe and myself. Jim was a senior investigator, while I was in my early twenties and relatively new to the business. I was really pumped up about being assigned to one of my all-time favorite movie heroes. My

instructions were to go over to Anna Kashfi's house on Tigertail, where Jim and I would serve a court order giving Marlon Brando temporary custody of Christian.

Attorneys Sussman and Gary had persuaded a judge to issue the order at 8 P.M. By 9:00, we were ready to serve the papers on Kashfi and take possession of Christian. When I got to Tigertail, Jim Brisco was already there—along with Marlon Brando, his two attorneys and a Sergeant Hall from the West LA police department.

Also present at Kashfi's doorstep was a battalion of reporters and TV cameras. It looked like the whole world was there—everybody except Anna, Christian, and the maid. Apparently, Anna had been tipped off about the custody order, just as the press was tipped off. I never did find out the source of that leak. All I knew was that we were standing there like a bunch of fools. Meanwhile, our subject had grabbed the child and taken off.

In those days, there was one place where everyone in Hollywood went to hide out: the Bel Air Sands Hotel, located on the corner of Sunset and Sepulveda. The place had a number of unattached bungalows, which made it an ideal hideout. High-profile personalities could come and go without being spotted by someone at the front desk.

On various occasions, I've had as many as three people hiding out at the Bel Air Sands at the same time. I've actually hid out there myself. I knew the room clerks and exactly how much money to give them when we needed information or the key to a particular room or bungalow. At this point, we simply wanted the key to the room in which Anna Kashfi was staying.

"There's nobody here under that name," the desk clerk said. "But I might know who you're talking about."

"Can we please just cut to the chase?" I snapped. "Here's twenty bucks; let me have the key." We went up to Anna's third-floor room. I was just about to open the door when Sergeant Hall made an announcement:

"I'm not going to enter that room, because it's private property. If you want to go in, fine. But I'm going to stand out here in the hall."

That was okay by me—although, as it turned out, I could have done with a little police protection. From a legal standpoint, we were

on solid ground. We had the court order giving custody to the father, and we had Marlon Brando with us ready to take possession of his son.

When we opened the door, Christian was standing there. I picked the boy up, handed him to Marlon and said, "Go home. Just take your son and get the hell out of here." Brando was gone in a flash, but we still hadn't seen Anna, much less served her with the custody order.

I conducted a quick survey of the room. There on the dressing table was a pile of amphetamines and barbiturates—the very substances Anna had used in her suicide attempt. I later learned that as soon as Anna checked out of the hospital, she called a doctor who was always glad to prescribe whatever drugs she wanted.

This doctor was a professional pusher with a degree. For my money, guys like this are far more detestable than street dealers, since they are sworn to heal and cause no harm. I thought about how sweet it would be to nail that sleazy charlatan MD, but I had a more pressing matters on my hands.

When Anna Kashfi, dressed in a flimsy negligee, emerged from the bathroom, she discovered her son was gone. Anna came after me with murder in her eyes. All I saw were teeth and fingernails and feet, as she tried to kick me in the nuts. It wasn't the last time I would tangle with Kashfi. After all these years, I still have physical and emotional scars from my battles with her.

There was no question in my mind that Anna had consumed a large quantity of uppers and downers. This was her nightly regimen, one that she generally topped off with a half bottle of vodka. Somehow I managed to deflect her blows, and she turned her rage on Jim Briscoe.

Anna grabbed Briscoe by the tie, hoping to choke him, but nothing happened. Jim always wore a trick tie, the kind that comes right off when you pull on it. When Anna saw me laughing at her useless aggression, she aimed another kick at my balls, which I barely managed to deflect.

Anna was small, but as ferocious as a rabid wildcat. We didn't want to hurt her, though, or even lay hands on her. The last thing we wanted to do was bruise her, so we just kind of fended her off and blocked her punches. Jim and I got scratched some, but that's part

of the job. The main thing was, we had wrested the boy from an unstable parent's control. Thankfully, Christian was spared from seeing his mother carrying on like a crazed animal.

Anna Kashfi made a big mistake that night. After she finished venting on Jim and me, she ran out into the hallway where Sergeant Hall was standing. Then she reached over and punched him in the mouth.

Attacking private detectives is one thing, but striking a police officer is a far more serious matter. Sergeant Hall wasted no time. He cuffed Anna and called for a paddy wagon to transport her to jail. The sergeant offered to help Anna put on her robe, but she refused.

"I'm going out of this world the same way I came in," she said. Funny, but I can't ever recall seeing a newborn baby in a negligee. Anyhow, Anna was put in the paddy wagon in this flimsy, torn-up nightgown, cursing us with every breath.

I don't consider myself a vengeful person. I can even take pity on a crazed creature who claws my face and tries to kick me where I live.

"Why don't we prove what nice guys we are?" I proposed, "Let's collect Anna's clothes and take them down to the West LA jail." Jim Briscoe agreed to show her this undeserved kindness. We also decided to call Anna's attorney—which was done more in consideration for Marlon and Christian Brando than for Anna.

"For God's sake," I pleaded with Anna's lame excuse for a lawyer, "let her sit in jail for the rest of the night. She's wasted behind all these pills and booze, after having tried to commit suicide the night before."

"Why should I?" he asked. "Just so you can have things your own way?"

Kashfi knew how to pick real winners to assist her with her medical and legal problems.

"I know she's your client," I answered. "But if she's released tonight, she's going to head straight to Marlon Brando's house. Then she's going to try to bust through the gate and get violent. Only this time I'm going to arrest her on the spot, and she'll go right back to jail.

"I've tried to be gentle up to now, but I've reached my limit. I

know that your client carries a gun. I have it on good authority that she's discharged that weapon when she's stoned. If she crosses Marlon Brando's property line, I'm going to be armed and extremely dangerous. So it's in your client's best interest if you keep her in jail until she sobers up."

The lawyer was silent on the other end, so I just kept on talking. "Marlon has custody of the boy for now, and we won't stand for any more violent episodes from your client. If there are differences, we can deal with them in court."

This legal genius finally spoke. He thanked me kindly, and then proceeded to bail out his client. I spent the rest of that night at Marlon's house, but, surprisingly, Anna never did show up. Around seven the next morning, I looked out the window that faced the front gate. What I discovered was a full-scale media blitz of maybe fifty reporters and photographers from TV stations, newspapers, and magazines.

The events of the previous night had received headline coverage, complete with pictures of Anna getting out of the paddy wagon in handcuffs and negligee. Now everyone was trying to grab the inside scoop on any further craziness.

Over the years, I've developed good relationships with people in the media. But on that particular morning I had no interest in making friends. I walked the hundred yards from Marlon's house to the gate, where I greeted the assembled throng with a twelve-gauge shotgun in my hand.

"Hi guys," I said. "How's everyone feeling? You've really got a hell of a scene going here, and it's making me real nervous. See, I'm thinking that somebody might want a story bad enough to jump this fence. And when I get nervous, I don't know what could happen. If somebody does climb over this fence, I'm liable to blow their head off."

One of the reporters took his pencil out and asked, "What's your name?"

"I'm the guy with the fucking shotgun," I answered. "That's all you have to know." I used those words intentionally because I knew they wouldn't run that on TV or in the papers. This was my final comment on the matter.

I had no intention of shooting anybody or getting physical in any way. It was simply a matter of gaining control over a bunch of people who've been known to do crazy things to get a story. I wanted to help them understand that they were dealing with somebody who was *really* crazy. That would make them think twice before they crossed me. The strategy was successful. None of those reporters or photographers tried to force their way onto the property.

In light of the events that had taken place over the previous twenty-four hours, it was decided that Christian needed full-time protection to make sure Anna didn't snatch him away. I proceeded to take up fulltime residence in the Brando house. In addition to conducting much of the investigation for the permanent custody case, I was asked to bodyguard both Marlon and Christian. As events unfolded, however, I found myself becoming a surrogate father to a kid who effectively had no parents.

Let me be more precise: The boy had a mother who was certifiable and a father who was almost always somewhere else—whether physically or emotionally. I wasn't getting paid for parenting, but you just couldn't help feeling for this emotionally wounded kid.

So there I was, living in Marlon Brando's house, with complete charge of his son. Weekdays I took Christian to the Montessori School in Santa Monica. It seemed a little weird for a six-year-old to go to school with a bodyguard, but there was no way around it. We knew that Anna would have no compunction about grabbing the boy in front of his classmates and teachers, and I wanted to prevent that.

As it turned out, the receptionist at that school was Gerri Plank, a former high school classmate of mine. Gerri's desk faced right out on the front of the school, allowing her to see anybody who came to the door. Gerri agreed to let me know if Anna ever showed up. Christian's classroom was in the rear of the school, and I parked my car at the back entrance to the building.

I sat right outside of that classroom, dressed in a suit and tie. I always carried a gun, because I knew that Anna would probably be packing. Every now and then I'd stand up and peek into Christian's classroom to make sure the boy was safe. That precaution was probably unnecessary. I knew that nobody could get past me as long as I stayed in front of that room.

My plan in case Anna did show up was to rush Christian out of the classroom, put him in my car, and drive away. I did not want him to see his mother in a confrontation with me. This kid had already witnessed too much violence in his short life, and his welfare was my main concern. I also had some personal considerations, because the scars from my recent encounter with Anna still hadn't healed. The last thing I wanted to do was hurt her.

Christian's school had lots of celebrities' kids, a number of whom I knew from various divorces that I'd worked on. Many of these kids were spoiled brats, and I felt this Montessori school gave them too much freedom. Most of these kids showed no respect for adults. If you weren't a celebrity or a multimillionaire, they looked at you as if you were "the help." Those little rug-rats used to crawl all over me like I was a piece of furniture.

Christian Brando was as difficult and spoiled as they come—even by Hollywood standards. Marlon loved the boy dearly, but his upbringing had been handled very poorly.

Marlon freely admitted that he was not cut out to be a parent. Obviously, Anna was too drugged out and unstable to set a proper example for the boy. She had hired a whole series of nannies, but none of them could stand working for such an abusive boss. When Anna got mad, she'd hit them on the head with an ashtray or threaten them with her gun—so they'd quit.

The revolving door of caretakers only fueled Christian's insecurity and made him more difficult. The kid was a sly little devil who tested everybody to the limit. He was smart as a whip, though he'd already been labeled a poor student. But Christian had great street smarts—as well as a mean streak. His game was to see how much you'd let him get away with. Then he'd try to push you one step further.

I always told Christian that, no matter where he went, I was to go with him. If he had to go to the school bathroom, I'd either stand outside the door or go into the head with him. If he needed a drink of water, I'd accompany him to the fountain, then escort him back to the classroom.

There was good reason for insisting on such tight security. All the press coverage had made Christian a prime target for kidnap-

pers. There was no question in my mind that Marlon would have paid millions in ransom to recover his firstborn, and others had undoubtedly come to the same conclusion. But the most immediate danger was from Anna. There was no telling what she might pull next, and this uncertainty kept me constantly on edge.

One day, when I was with Christian at school, I got up and walked over to take a drink of water. Then I returned to my seat. I was about to sit down, but instead decided to doublecheck the classroom.

Christian was gone. Oh shit!

My mind started racing. Had I forgotten to check the window? Maybe someone had slipped into the building while Gerri was on a break or momentarily called away from her desk.

I made a mad dash for the front door. I was still in motion when I spotted a strange man walking up the staircase. I freaked. I threw a cross-body block and knocked him down a flight of stairs. I was ready to kill the SOB, because I thought he was there to grab Christian. As it turned out, he was a cab driver, there to pick up one of the other kids. I apologized profusely to the poor guy and tried to dust him off. Then I returned to Christian's classroom, but he was still nowhere to be found.

A few minutes later, I spotted Christian playing in a sandbox. He'd slipped out while I was at the water fountain. Christian saw my brief absence as an opportunity to sneak away; this, in spite of all our talks about the dangers of running off.

I was pretty well disgusted. Christian was too out of control. I'd seen him spit on a kid just to be nasty. He looked around and waited until he thought nobody would see him, but I caught him in the act. I had better things to do than spend my days being tested by a six-year-old. So when we got home from school, I told Marlon: "Look, you've got the wrong guy here. I don't think I can handle this job."

And he said, "Don, what do you mean? You're part of our family. How can you just up and leave? We depend on you. We trust you."

These were more than just words. Marlon always treated me with courtesy and consideration. We had become very close. In fact, when Marlon had a party, he'd always ask me to join in. I appreciated his kindness, but I had a job to do. I wasn't there to party. I was there to protect the family, and I was very good at my job.

But Marlon would say, "What are you doing, Don?"

"Taking care of business," I would answer.

And he'd say, "Well, you're a horse's ass. Get in here and join the party."

I have fond memories of hanging out with Marlon and Wally Cox—Marlon's best friend and trusted confidant. Wally was an extremely funny guy, who loved wolfing down double shots of Bacardi with Coors chasers. He and Marlon had known each other since childhood.

At one point in the 1950s Wally was living in Marlon's New York apartment. Marlon always liked exotic pets, and he had a raccoon at the time. That animal used to drive Wally completely nuts, to the point that he gave Marlon an ultimatum: "It's either me or that raccoon." To which Brando replied: "Goodbye, Wally. See you around."

Wally Cox died in 1973, but I'm told that Marlon still carries his ashes around in an urn and carries on conversations with him.

Looking back, it was pretty heady stuff to be included in that select inner circle at that point in my life. I remember sitting in Marlon Brando's front room on Mulholland Drive, looking over the San Fernando valley. It was a crystal clear winter night. The fireplace was roaring, and there I was—sharing drinks and trading jokes with Marlon Brando and Wally Cox. Still, as much as I enjoyed hanging out with Brando and living in his house, I had to maintain my professional standards.

"Marlon, I don't think I can continue working for you under these conditions," I said. "Christian has pulled some shit on me, and he's pulled some things on other people that I don't approve of. If this was my kid, I'd put him over my knee and spank his behind. But that's probably not what you want done."

"I lost control today and damn near killed some innocent cab driver. Christian knows better than to run off on me, and he did it just to be mean. If you want me to stay, I need control. I've got to have some threat over the boy, or he's going to keep doing exactly as he pleases."

"Let me go talk to Christian a minute," Marlon said. And the two of them walked into the bedroom for a heart-to-heart. A few minutes later, father and son came out.

"Any time you feel like whacking his butt," Marlon said, "please feel free to do so."

I picked up Christian so we could get eyeball to eyeball and said, "You understand that, pal. Next time you pull that crap, I'm gonna whip your behind. You'd better believe it."

From that point on, Christian and I got along great. He started behaving better in school and concentrating on his homework. After school, we'd go out in the back and play ball. Sometimes I'd take him to play with other kids, but I tended to be overprotective.

The last thing I needed was for Christian to get hurt on my watch. At the same time, I didn't want to coddle him to the point where he'd feel different from other kids his age. This was a boy whose shot at growing up normal wasn't very good. If there was anything I could do to improve his chances, I surely wanted to try.

After a few months, Christian's outlook on life took a radical turn for the better. People who saw him for the first time pegged him as a happy kid. In fact, a psychiatrist who'd seen Christian over the years remarked, "What a wonderful change has come over this boy."

I'd like to think that some of those improvements had to do with me. I did show the boy a good deal of love and affection—which wasn't all that hard to do. I don't think he'd ever had somebody to count on, and I was happy to be there for him. Still, I never had any illusions about replacing his father.

I knew my time with Christian would soon come to an end. What the boy really needed was at least one stable, full-time parent. Unfortunately, Brando didn't fit the bill. And Kashfi was one of the most unstable people I've ever come across. Nobody could ever predict what she might do next.

One Tuesday night I was sitting around with Marlon and Wally Cox when the phone rang. It was Mercedes, Anna's Peruvian maid, telling us that a stoned and belligerent Anna was on her way over. According to Mercedes, Anna was flashing a gun. She was apparently ready to use it, if that's what it took to get her son back. As soon as I heard that, I knew exactly how I wanted the situation handled.

"Here's the plan," I said, "Marlon, I'm going to put you and

Christian in Wally's car, and I want you to stay away until this blows over."

Wally Cox lived over in the next canyon, less than ten minutes away. He would consume large quantities of alcohol at Brando's house and then try to drive home. More often than not, Wally would run his car into a tree or a telephone pole. Wally drove this old, beat-up Pontiac Tempest, which was all he really needed. Marlon often made fun of that car, and the last thing he wanted was to be seen in it. I decided that Wally's Tempest was the best cover available.

"Nobody's gonna believe you'd be driving that," I said.

"You're right," Marlon said, "That car is a piece of crap. Nobody would believe I'd be driving it, and I don't intend to drive it."

"Listen, my only concern is for your safety," I insisted. "I couldn't care less about appearances. Everybody knows what your Lincoln looks like, but nobody expects to see you driving this beat-up junkpile.

"Here's how it's going to be. You're going to put Christian in Wally's car right now, and you guys are gonna leave. And you're not gonna come back until I say so. I'm going to be laying in the bushes, waiting for Anna. And when she comes through here with a gun, I'm going to arrest her for trespassing—which will completely blow her case when the permanent custody hearing comes up."

Before Marlon and Christian were out the gate, I called the West LA police station and got the watch commander on the line. I reminded him of all the recent violence Anna had perpetrated—including the assault on one of his sergeants.

"Anna Kashfi is on her way up here," I said. "I don't want her arrested, and I don't want her stopped. What I want is a unit in the area. It's my understanding that she's armed. If she crosses the property line, I'm going to make a citizen's arrest for trespassing. I want somebody there to transport her to jail, and I will sign the complaint."

"Okay, fine," said the watch commander. A police unit was dispatched, but when Anna showed up, they stopped her at the gate and called me on the intercom.

"We have Anna Kashfi here," an officer said. "Do you want us to let her in?"

"No, I don't."

Anna Kashfi didn't know my name, but she called me Roger Smith, an actor who played one of the detectives on a popular TV show called *77 Sunset Strip*. Anna got on the intercom and said, "Roger Smith, you son of a bitch. You're gonna get yours one of these days."

Right after I called the cops, I contacted Christian's psychiatrist and asked him to hurry over so that he could witness Anna's actions. He said that, based on hearing her speech, it was obvious she was under sedation or on some kind of narcotic.

I communicated this to the police officer and asked him to conduct a search.

"If you'll search her car, you're gonna find narcotics. You're also gonna find a gun."

"I ain't searching nothing," the officer shouted. "I ain't doing nothing. If you want to let her in, we'll get out of the way. If you want her to leave, we'll make her leave. But we're not getting involved in this anymore. And we're not gonna have no more bullshit with the press. In or out. You decide."

"In that case, why don't you make her leave?" I said.

The policeman agreed to see her off the property. But first, Anna managed to grab the intercom and curse me out some more. I just laughed, and she finally split.

A half hour later, Marlon called. "The coast is clear," I told him. "You and the boy can come back now."

Later that year, we went to court to decide the permanent custody arrangement. In those days, it wasn't easy to wrest custody from the mother. But we had done our homework. By the time the case went to court, we had collected a mountain of evidence proving that Anna was an unfit parent. As a result, the judge ruled that she be denied unsupervised visitation.

At this point, Marlon probably could have received permanent custody, but he appeared to be intent on blowing it.

Marlon testified that he'd married Anna "with the primary purpose of getting divorced within a year." He admitted that he was far from an ideal parent. He essentially said, "I just want to see Anna get some psychiatric help and clean up her act. I have no desire to take the boy away from his mother. He belongs with her. But I want

her to straighten up. That's all I ask. I will pay or do anything to see that happen."

I never could get a handle on what Marlon was trying to accomplish. I guess he was just stressed out and confused by the whole thing. But the guy wasn't vindictive—despite Anna's allegations to the contrary. He continued to send her child support—even after he received custody. Not only that, but he tried to revive her faltering career as an actress.

Anna often claimed that Marlon had her blackballed from Hollywood, but the opposite was true. On several occasions, he went to production companies and said, "I'll pay her way. Hire her, but don't let anybody know about our arrangement."

Anna still couldn't cut it, despite Marlon's help. She'd show up late and high as a kite, or she wouldn't show up at all. It reached the point that the production company couldn't carry her, even with Marlon footing the bill.

Marlon's mixed emotions and complicated motives didn't make my job easy. We had enough on Anna to get her totally out of Christian's life, which probably would have been the best thing for all concerned. Our case was so strong that we actually had to back off a little. In the first place, Marlon did not want to see Christian's mother totally discredited. Also, as much as we disliked Anna, we didn't want to keep kicking someone who was so far down.

The judge granted custody to Marlon, but with a stipulation: For the next six months, Christian would live on his aunt's farm in Illinois. After that cooling-off period, the parties would return to court for a final ruling. Frances Loving, Marlon's older sister, and her husband, Dick, had agreed to let the boy live on their farm. The couple had three young daughters.

As far as I was concerned, sending Christian to his aunt's farm was his best and last chance to grow up normal. At the very least, the boy would be away from Anna for a while. Marlon would be visiting whenever his schedule allowed him to get away—which turned out to be not very often. When Marlon did get to the farm, he displayed the kind of cavalier bad judgment that typified his career as a parent.

One time Marlon showed up with his common-law wife, Tarita,

and deposited her at the Loving's farm. Meanwhile, Marlon and one of his drinking buddies drove to Chicago for a night on the town. This couldn't have done much to improve Christian's sense of security.

Christian's aunt found the boy to be testy and mean-spirited. "[Christian] has been subjected to a great deal of arbitrariness and whim," Fran Loving wrote to the judge, "probably an inevitable result of constantly changing hired help." He would sometimes physically attack his girl cousins and classmates for no apparent reason.

That was the Christian I knew all right. Evidently, all the progress he'd made with me was reversed by yet one more upheaval in his life. Still, by the end of his six-month stay on the farm, Christian was showing improvement. But that too was short-lived.

I had told attorneys Sussman and Gary that we'd better stay on top of Anna during the six-month period and not take anything for granted.

"We need to keep her under surveillance from time to time to find out if she's still using drugs and sleeping around," I said. "If that kind of thing is still going on, we'll be able to nail her in court." Unfortunately the attorneys didn't heed my advice. Meanwhile, Anna pulled off a major surprise.

Anna Kashfi had a knack for hiring incompetent lawyers. These guys would ask questions they didn't know the answers to, and they were invariably made to look stupid. This time around, she retained a former superior court judge. He immediately got the venue changed from Santa Monica to LA, where his buddy would be presiding over the case. The very scenario I'd feared most came to pass almost exactly as I had envisioned it.

The presiding judge essentially asked Anna, "Have you been a good girl for the past six months?"

"Yes, I have," she answered sweetly.

"Then the boy is yours, forthwith."

Our legal team started to go nuts, shouting: "Wait, Your Honor, please hear us out." But the judge essentially said, "Don't bother confusing me with facts. I have already made my decision."

A furious Marlon Brando called the ruling "barbarous," and it was. Still, even a fair-minded judge might have cast a skeptical glance

at Marlon. During this cooling-off period, Marlon was still married to Movita, and living with his common-law wife, Tarita. Not exactly the kind of parental profile the court likes to see.

I felt that Christian's only chance was to remain on his aunt's farm. Had Marlon received custody, I'm pretty sure that's what he would have wanted. By giving the boy back to Anna, this judge had ensured Christian's ultimate destruction.

The whole scene had really gotten to me, but I had to bite my tongue at this judge's bogus decision. Many's the time that the fix was in for our side in court, so I was hardly in a position to complain.

Eventually, Marlon received joint custody of Christian, but that didn't improve the situation. The boy continued to be used as an emotional hostage. Anna was still as screwed up as ever—as was Marlon in his way. And Christian was a helpless pawn in their dirty little war.

Once, when Christian was thirteen years old, Marlon petitioned the court for permission to take him to Paris during summer vacation. When the judge approved the request, Anna went completely bananas and had Christian kidnapped. She proceeded to hand him over to a bunch of hippies, who hid him out in a primitive town near Mexicali.

Jim Briscoe was one of the detectives who retrieved Christian and drove him home from Mexico. The boy wasn't in very good shape when he was found. He had lost a lot of weight and was terrified. This wasn't the kind of kidnapping where a gun was held to his head. But how would you feel if your kid was forcibly placed in the hands of some longhaired dopers?

Christian has never found himself. He dropped out of school in the eleventh grade, and has worked as a tree-trimmer, a welder, and a construction worker. Christian was married for six years, but wound up in a bitter divorce battle. He was reputed to be a heavy drug user and gun collector.

Christian hated being Marlon Brando's son. His father's fame and fortune brought him only pain. Friends say that he was most comfortable in the woods, far from the harsh lights of Babylon.



I was on a cruise when I heard about Christian shooting his half-sister's lover. I really couldn't imagine Christian intentionally murdering someone, but I certainly could picture him in a drunken rage, pointing a gun in someone's face and making threats. When that gun went off and killed a man, I'll bet Christian was in a state of shock. The kid always did have a dark side and a hot temper, but I don't believe he had it in him to kill.

I hadn't seen Marlon Brando for a number of years, and I wasn't asked to work on Christian's defense team. Marlon had retained Robert Shapiro, who had his own investigators. Still, I felt the need to let Marlon know I was there if he needed me, so I called him. Marlon sounded sedated over the phone—kind of like the Godfather after he'd been shot. We had a nice conversation, and Marlon thanked me for my kind words. A few days later, I wrote him a letter which read in part:

. . . When I worked for you, I was in my twenties and just starting out. You always treated me as a friend. I want you to know that in your time of need I am your friend and always will be. I've been fortunate enough to achieve success as a private investigator. In the process, I have established many valuable resources. These are now at your disposal. If I can be of any assistance now or in the future, please don't hesitate to call on me.

I haven't heard from Marlon Brando, but I continue to keep tabs on him and his family. In January, 1996 Christian was released from prison. At last report, he was living in New Hampshire and working as a welder. Maybe Christian can get his life in order far from the glaring lights of Babylon, where he was forced to carry the burden of being Marlon Brando's son.

I'd heard that Christian really got himself together during his prison stay. I certainly hope so—but think of the irony! Here is a child of privilege—a son of one of the most renowned actors in the world—and he needs a stint of hard time to turn his life around.

The sad truth is, prison may have actually provided more of a reality check than Christian ever received from his parents—

however grim that reality might be. In a way, I'm amazed that Christian made it into his thirties. If ever there was a child programmed for an early suicide, it had to be him. Maybe now Christian can finally get a handle on his life.

And what of my old friend Anna Kashfi? I've been on a number of TV programs, talking about my experiences with the Brando family. On one show, they had Anna listening to me talk about some of her sordid escapades. Her responses were predictable. "Drugs? No, never! Carrying a gun? The man is making up stories. Running around with strange men in the presence of a young son? Absurd!" Oh well, what else can you expect?

Anna and I weren't in the same studio when that TV show was being taped, though I have run into her a few times over the years. On one occasion in the late 1960s, when she was straight and sober, I spotted Kashfi walking toward me. Naturally, I clenched my fist and was prepared to take a fighting stance. But she just offered her hand and said, "Hi, my name is Anna Kashfi. I don't believe we've ever met."

I stepped back, looked at her and said, "You're right. You and I never have met before. I may have once met somebody that looks like you, but I've never met you before."

We then proceeded to make small talk. But I was on my guard every second. Who can tell when a psycho like that is going to turn into Ms. Hyde?

Anna Kashfi received lots of publicity when she was awarded one of the largest divorce settlements in California history. She must have had one hell of a drug habit, because she apparently spent all her money.

I recently found the former Mrs. Marlon Brando working as a chambermaid in a Chula Vista trailer park. I didn't want to laugh at her misfortune and could only shake my head in dismay. Here was a woman who spent years fighting to gain custody of the son she professed to love, yet she never once showed up at Christian's trial or visited him in prison.

Maybe Christian Brando is better off without his mother's pathological attention. He sure could have done with less of it while he was growing up.