

The Gypsies' story continues in:

## *Gypsy Road—New Adventures.*

Here's a sneak preview:

### Chapter 1

Hooray for Hollywood!

“Damn, look at this frigging crowd! Every out-of-work dancer on the west coast has to be here,” shouted Margie Nash, tugging on her buddy Patrick Dorsey’s sleeve. “Stop it, Margaret,” he snapped, determined to proceed with steady nerves, ignoring the butterflies flying loosely in his gut. He didn’t need a reminder that he and Margie were just two in a bunch of cattle, corralled for slaughter or in this case, being cut! “I can’t believe we put ourselves through this auditioning shit,” she grouched. “What? And give up show biz?” Patrick, always acerbic and clever in his responses was feigning nonchalance, but in truth he was terrified. Lines upon lines of hopefuls, dancers of every demographic; age, gender, race; some attractive, many worn, but all relentless in pursuit of employment.

The gathering at the entrance of sound stage one, Universal Studios, June 1, 1966, would be a day of reckoning for most. Dance jobs were few and far between in Los Angeles. Movie musicals were a rarity these days, so an opportunity like this was golden! The call had brought throngs of dancers from the length and breadth of California and Nevada. Those who could afford the cost and time made the trip from New York to try their hand at being hired. The competition was fierce and frightening. Being hired for this film in particular was a long shot, given the numbers hoping for a crack at the upcoming movie version of Owen Matthews’ Tony Award-winning hit, *Bravo Business*. Those holding SAG cards, members of Screen Actors Guild, would be seen first. Non union dancers would be allowed to audition following. If a non union dancer was hired, it was with the understanding he or she would have to join the union.

Margie and Patrick stood in line moving slowly forward. Just ahead, they could see dancers being put through their paces. The sound of a piano, shouts, shuffling feet and low ebb conversations bounced and ricocheted around the huge abyss. “I hate this, I fucking hate this,” mumbled Patrick as he found a corner and removed his outerwear. He had underdressed a tank top, jazz pants and shoes. His slender form was already wet from the warmth of the typical June morning in Southern California, nerves adding sweat to his body. Margie was caught up in the excitement of the occasion, eyes darting all over the swarm as she slipped out of her jeans and blouse. Wearing a high cut pair of trunks and a sleeveless top that came to mid torso, she was minus a few pounds in recent months. She hadn’t worked lately, although her agent had submitted her for extra work in a couple of national commercials and a pilot for a proposed series, nothing had materialized. Her first love was dancing and she hoped to impress the studio powers.

As the dancers filed through, they were required to show SAG cards, proving current and paid-up status. Once noted, they completed audition cards, the numbers on them noting the order in which they would dance. Those ready were placed in groups of 12, men and women separate. Two extremely attractive men were leading the group. Whispers indicated they were assistants to the director. Jonas Martin was lean, angular and breathtaking to watch. His every move was supremely clean and streamlined. His associate, Phillippe Danier was earthly, sensuous, spot on accurate to Martin's every dictate. They were an unbeatable team. From the sidelines, Patrick gazed longingly at both men. "Jesus, I'm moving to New York if the men out east are this attractive," he whispered to Margie. But she wasn't listening or watching them. Her eyes fixed on the man standing by, making notes with his eyes. "Patrick, it's him! It's Owen Matthews! Oh my God, can you believe it?" Patrick shifted his gaze, taking in the famed choreographer-director. His reputation made him an icon, his work revered even to those on the west coast. Dressed all in black, wearing boots and sporting a nub of cigarette in the corner of his mouth, he stood motionless, surveying the groups of whirling bodies, aiming to please. He was a lean, graceful cat; compelling and mysterious.

"Let's try the combination from the top. Ladies and gentleman, I want more precision in head accents and perfectly timed finger snaps. No spaghetti limbs or sloppy feet! I want 150% effort! Anything less is unacceptable! Okay Jonas, run them again!" The two groups on the floor repeated the combination until Owen had seen enough. "Thank you! Please wait a moment!" Owen, Jonas and Phillippe huddled, locked in a confab. An occasional glance at the waiting dancers produced extreme nerves. Following a lengthy discussion, Matthews began cutting. "Oh, oh, the cattle slaughter is starting," whispered Patrick, carefully. Most of the group was let go, with two exceptions; a tall blonde with legs up to her earlobes and a hunky, muscular wonder, whose look would attract any camera lens. Pete Norcross, the audition production assistant kept cards of those called back separate from those eliminated right away. Those not cut were asked to report back the following day at 10:00.

Meanwhile Margie and Patrick inched along in line, waiting to be called. One could hardly see over tops of heads, to get a take on what was being taught, what would be expected of them. The thicket of humanity was overwhelming, the numbers of hopefuls, mind blowing. Patrick sighed. "Maybe I should have accepted that stupid restaurant job. This is impossible, Margaret!" "Stop it, Pat! You have as good a chance as anyone here. You're technically one of the best dancers in L.A.!" He leaned in and gave her a hug. "Could you repeat that to Matthews' gorgeous assistant? I'll owe you for life!" Nudging him, Margie whispered, "I don't believe my endorsement will work at the moment. Perhaps you'd consider the casting couch," she said with a wink. Patrick shrugged and grinned. "Too true, Margaret, in a heartbeat!" Within moments they were moved to the front of the line. Jonas moved forward greeting them.

"Good morning, I'm Jonas Martin, Mr. Matthews' assistant and this is my associate, Phillippe Danier. Welcome! If you will place your dance bags to the side, we'll begin with the first combination. I would like six and six, please." The group was counted out until there were six men and six women ready to start. "Please spread out so that you each have a window through which I can see you work. Margie, Patrick and the others took their spots and waited for the next phase. As she glanced around she noticed women of every description. The showgirl types, via Las Vegas, were tall, stacked in skimpy attire, wearing too much make-up and attitude. The All-American looking women were definitely white bread and tidy. Some were ethnic; mostly Hispanic, Asian and some blacks. She wasn't quite sure what group she fit, but plain Jane came instantly to mind. Margie never

considered herself a looker; attractive, maybe on a good day, but never beautiful. On occasion she wished she could have some work done if she could afford it. However, temp work, dog walking and house sitting or the occasional retail job wouldn't cover the cost, not by a long shot. No, Miss Margaret Nash would have to rely on personality and skill to get by. The sound of Jonas' voice cut through her fog.

"All right, let's begin. The combination I'm giving you is from the original Broadway production of *Bravo Business*. The movements are a combination of Marcel Marceau mime, ballet and soft shoe. I'm looking for those who can capture Mr. Matthews' style, which is paramount for this film. Starting facing forward in parallel first position, hands in the small of the back, turn your right foot in ballet turn out from the hip and close back to parallel. Repeat with the left foot. As the foot moves open, the head snaps in the direction of the foot, same foot as shoulder. Return to parallel, head is front. Ladies and gentlemen, the movements are sharp, snappy. The whole thing repeats a second time, so two counts of 8. On the third eight, you bend at the waist, toward your right foot, pointed and turned out at the hip. Lock into that left hip and draw three little circles with your toes going clockwise toward your body. On the 4th count, cross over the supporting leg's ankle, step out on five, cross back on six, step on the right foot on seven turn your left shoulder to the audience coming into a slight sit in profile by count 8. Step on right, brush hop left with a slightly straightened leg, step on left brush hop with right leg, repeat on left and sit, still in profile. Hand jive moves are on counts of five and a six and a seven. Straighten, lock into right hip, cross left foot over ankle of supporting leg, lean out with left arm extended from the downstage shoulder and snap on 8. Are there any questions?" A hand sprang up. "Yes, girl in the hot pink leotard." "Those four counts of eight have a mechanical quality. Is that what Mr. Matthews wants?" Jonas and Phillippe exchanged looks. "Yes, the feet should be very sharp, staccato, but overall the movements must be fluid as well. The movements should transition seamlessly through each count of 8." Another hand went up.

"How can I become fluid and staccato all at the same time?" Owen, who had stepped out for a moment, had returned and overheard the question. Singling out the bodacious blonde he walked to her. "What's your name?" The group was still. "I'm Bernice, but my friends call me Bernie," she said with a wink. "Well, Bernice, watch this. Nodding at the accompanist, he shouted "A five, six, seven, and eight," performing the combination himself; a breathtaking display of perfection. His attention to style nuances and his fluidity throughout kept the mass of want-to-be-hired dancers riveted. Finishing the four sets of 8, he stopped on a dime to wild applause. Owen broke out of the last pose and turned to the young lady. "That's how I do it. That's how I want it. Jonas, let's go." Bernie, embarrassed, stepped back to her spot. 'What a showboat,' she thought, refocusing her intention. 'I can nail this, sucker! Just watch me!'

As Jonas explained the rest of the combination, his movements matched Owen's to perfection. After running over each portion of the combination he stepped out, allowing Phillippe to take over, while he watched the current 12 on the floor closely. West Coast dancers had a different vibe, bodies, looks and technique from their New York counterparts. Maybe their collective vibe was due to living year 'round, all the sunshine and ocean air. The huge numbers of unemployed indicated fewer opportunities to perform save for TV work. Maybe it was the style and training of west coast teachers, producing a different kind of dancer than he was used to seeing back east.

Originally from California, Jonas, became a professional dancer quite late, having been a superb soccer player in high school. Hiding his sexual orientation became impossible in that sporting life, so

he turned instead to the dance world; a milieu where he would be accepted and safe! With agility, strength and timing, he trained vigorously in ballet, modern and jazz. After dancing on network TV, specifically Los Angeles-based variety shows, he was drawn to New York, where his dance career really took off. Spotted at an open call by Owen Matthews, he worked tirelessly to gain opportunity and his trust. Eventually his considerable drive and talent brought him the opportunity to assist the director, becoming his right hand. One day, he would become a choreographer-director himself, sharing his acumen and a tradition set by his boss and mentor.

Margie and Patrick danced the combination repeatedly. Jonas approached them with constructive notes, enlisting them to improve their performances. Margie's technique was exceptionally good, her ability to ape the combination shown her plus her bright, perky personality made her a keeper! She was called back the next day. Patrick, too, learned his fate when Jonas stopped by, complimenting his work. "What's your name?" He looked surprised at being singled out. "Pat, Pat Dorsey," he stammered. "Nice work. I like the way you move. You fill the space extremely well." "Thank you," he said, turning beet red. "Please come back tomorrow at 10:00." "I will! Thanks!" "Next group, please!"

As the morning wound down, group after group of SAG members and non-union dancers passed through the cattle drive. By 1:00, Owen had kept 30 union and 10 non-union dancers for the callback; different types and levels of talent. He had to look for an ensemble of would-be office workers of various demographics for the cast of *Bravo Business*. California offered a wide range of ethnicity and talent. Following the dance call and subsequent casting, there would be a call for principals, submitted through agents and managers only. There would be the inevitable crop of unknowns to Owen and his team, but so much the better. Perhaps through the Hollywood process they would acquire some new and unique actors. Following the morning cattle drive, Owen, Jonas, Phillippe and Pete Norcross, production assistant met to discuss the field of finalists. Lunch was brought in for their convenience. "Wow, this is no noon rush at the Greeks," said Jonas with enthusiasm, glancing over the impressive repast. The Greeks, a nickname referred to by neighborhood locals, was a popular but small diner next door to Dance Arts in the heart of the theatre district. Principally a one-counter wonder, folks would stop in, grab beverages and sandwiches made-to-order in a jiffy by owners, Nikko and Peter Drakos. The two brothers had thrived for decades on daily business brought by show biz types and others in the neighborhood.

"Let have lunch and then discuss," said Owen, lighting the familiar cigarette. The buffet had been catered by the studio kitchen on the lot. "I could get used to this treatment," sighed Jonas, scrutinizing the sumptuous array of sandwiches, sides and desserts. "Thank God I'm not hoofing this afternoon!" "No, but I need your brain in high gear, so easy on food," ordered Owen with a chuckle. "Please help yourselves!" Pete Norcross, production assistant, had come highly recommended by Universal. Shel Friedman, vice president of project development had chosen him personally. Friedman was the most influential and touted executive in movie town. A positive nod from him and there was no turning back! Waiting while Jonas and Phillippe helped themselves, he was more pleased than hungry to be working on *Bravo Business*. The opportunity to work on a musical was rare in Hollywood now. The days of making high caliber movie musicals, like those of Metro Goldwyn Mayer in the 40's and 50's, were long gone. This film was potential gold for the studio and Pete wanted in. A credit like this would open doors and he was more than ready!

Following lunch, Owen began the meeting. "Pete, hand me the audition cards, will you?"

“Certainly, Sir!” “I prefer Owen, Pete.” “Certainly, Owen.” “This guy’s a brown nosing snake,” Jonas thought, scrutinizing him. Owen took the cards and began looking over names and comments about each. “It looks like we have an interesting assortment, Jonas. What’s your take on these west coast kids?” “They have a different vibe from New York dancers, Boss.” “How so?” “I think it’s obvious in their experience level. The training out here is less intense than back east. Fewer opportunities to work makes for lack of edge. They don’t appear as polished or quite as facile in technique. I’m just prejudiced, I guess.” “Nothing wrong with your demand for excellence, my friend. This film has to be nothing short of spectacular and we need a topnotch cast to make it happen.” Pete hung on Owen’s every word. He also found himself attracted to the director. He liked older men, especially the powerful and rich. “Well, we’ll have them back tomorrow and choose the best of the lot.” “How many are you thinking, Boss? It looks like we’ve called 40 back.” “I’m aiming for an ensemble of 28. I’m sure we can find that many in this bunch. What we lack here we’ll scour New York for. New York dancers currently out-of-work would jump at three months in the sun and a major film credit.” He turned to his newly-assigned assistant.

“Pete, in the morning, please handle the flow of finalists same as today, moving them along as quickly as you can. I’d like this wrapped as soon as possible.” “Okay, Owen. I’ll take care of it,” he soothed. Jonas and Phillipe exchanged glances. “Jonas, let’s give them a stronger combination. The Buccaneer is a good choice to see their stamina and performance value. Please teach them the final breakout, no holds barred. Got it?” “Ok, Boss.” “Good job today. I’m lucky to have you guys here.” “Thanks, Owen, we appreciate this,” said Phillipe. “Take the rest of the day. Get some sun, check out the area. Pete jumped in. “Universal is providing your staff cars. Just check with Trish in Shel’s office. She’ll assign a vehicle for your use.” “Thanks, Pete. We appreciate your help.” “Glad to help, Sir.” “Pete, forget the Sir. Owen is sufficient!” The meeting broke up.

Patricia and Blaine Courtman arrived in L.A. and quickly settled at the Beverly Wilshire. Pat was about to start her new job, that of production coordinator and casting consultant on behalf of her husband Blaine, his business partner, Greg Morgan, the sole investors and Shel Friedman. She was a bit nervous, given her ill-fated history with Owen Matthews. He had been obvious in his dislike of the decision to hire the former Pat Byrne. Here would be his former lover, muse and star now his superior and watchdog on the project. She would be around the shoot, breathing down his neck at callbacks to insure the right selection of ensemble people. Beyond that, she’d advise and assist in principal casting. During the shoot she would throw her weight around advising artistically, making Owen’s blood boil. The pain in his ass was growing more intolerable as time grew closer and they would meet.

Pete Norcross was crazy for Owen Matthews. He wondered how to get to first base. After all, he was working for him. He liked everything about the director, especially his track record of success. He was another powerful man, one who could boost his career. But he’d bide his time, be cautious and not appear too obvious. A rumor of Owen’s flagrant womanizing was all over the studio. Was Matthews straight or bi? Perhaps he’d give him a tumble! These and other thoughts collided as he hurried out of the building. He didn’t see Jonas and Phillipe stop to observe him as he headed to his car behind the soundstage. Throwing his belongings in the backseat of the silver gray Porsche convertible, he climbed in, straightened the rear view mirror and ran his hands through his hair. He primped and preened, wiping his teeth with his fingers and admiring his face. Pete Norcross

apparently had a hot date. He sped off, never noticing the New York gypsies watching his every move. “That brownnose could be trouble,” muttered Jonas, searching the lot for slot number 16. “Cheri, don’t take on. He’s enthused, that’s all.” “We’ll see, Babe. He has the smell of over-amped ambition all over him!”

The boys discovered their assigned car in slot 16. “This is the best,” crooned Jonas, checking out the brand new wheels; a shiny turquoise blue Buick convertible, with crème leather interior. “Cheri, are you sure this is ours?” “Well, Trish said to look for parking spot 16, so voila my love! The keys are supposed to be under the mat on the driver’s side.” Jonas opened the door and slipped a hand under the mat. Feeling for and finding a key set he slid into the driver’s seat. “Get in, handsome! I’m going to take you for a major spin in this baby!” “Are you sure, Cheri? How long has it been since you’ve driven?” “Lover, I’m a native Californian, remember? I was driving while teething,” he chuckled. Phillippe settled, put his seat belt on and waited. Jonas put the key in the ignition and heard the smooth turnover instantly. “Let’s go, Babe!” They pulled out of the parking space, drove the narrow streets of the back lot until they arrived at the main gate. Harvey Smith, the daytime security man, stepped out of the booth and approached. “Good afternoon, gentlemen. May I see your passes?” “Yes of course, we’re here with the *Bravo Business* production.” “Mr. Martin, Mr. Danier?” “Yes, how did you know?” “I cross checked the production list and license plates of assigned vehicles. It takes a while to familiarize with new personnel. Welcome to Universal. Be sure and keep your I.D. badges with you at all times whether coming to or going from the lot and during working hours.” “Thanks so much!” “Have a good afternoon, gentlemen.” Jonas pulled away as Phillippe glanced back at Harvey. “These Universal people are pleasant.” “I agree, Babe! This place is classy, real classy!” I may go Hollywood,” he said, driving through the gate. “Let’s go to the ocean,” he shouted driving off in the direction of Venice Beach. “This movie business is not hard to take,” he shouted gleefully. “I like this job already!”

## Chapter 2

### Survival of the Fittest.

Patricia Courtman arrived at Universal fresh and ready to work. After a breakfast meeting with Shel Friedman and staff, she was escorted to callbacks by Pete Norcross, who oozed compliments to hopefully impress her. Her reputation as one of Broadway’s finest dancers preceded her through the studio gate and Pete was going to make sure she took notice of him. “Miss Byrne, it is such a pleasure to meet you. I saw *Centipede* last year and your work put shine on the entire production.” “Thank you so much!” “How exciting that you and Owen Matthews are teaming up again!” “Yes, isn’t it?” Pat’s acting skill kicked in as she worked with Pete’s repartee. His behavior was a perfect example of Hollywood bullshit and nicety. ‘I think Pete’s Peter needs stroking,’ she thought, stifling a giggle. “Right in here, Ms. Byrne,” said Pete, leading the way.

The impressive size and cavernous feel of soundstage one was so different from a typical Broadway theater. As they strolled over to the production desk, Pat could see Jonas and Phillippe warming up. Jonas spotted his best gal pal first! “Irish, I can’t believe you’re here,” he cried, picking her up and swinging her around. “Hi, my darling hunks!” Phillippe was next, taking her in his arms,