

AND AFTER ELECTING THE ANTI-CHRIST...

By

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CHAPTER 1

It was one of those committees that answered to no one except itself. There was no need for anyone to wear ties, clean shirts or even underwear. Indeed, none of the members made adjustments in their behavior, deportment or daily activities save for two Masters. The first was the legacy they valued with respect to the continent, and world, they all mutually controlled. The second was to make their lives intellectually interesting. Being of so much power and so little humanity, there was nothing else that gave their lives purpose or pleasure.

The committee allowed Mother Nature to have her way for the earlier part of the year, putting the climate altering devices on hold after the spring thaw. Such provided the members and their subjects with a wet, cool July and an unusually hot, dry August. But late September came around and as Daniel Horowitz enjoyed the change of seasons, the weather-making machines were pre-programmed to create a milieu which would permit the leaves to change their colors as they did when he was a mortal lad. Fall would be colder and moister than usual so Klause deVries-Schultz would have real snow to ski on at the highland lodge where he was the silent owner of every building in site, as well as all mountains one could see from them. Lawrence Wentworth preferred to linger indoors year round, not caring too much for what the climate was outside the doors of the various mansions, castles and high-rise towers his once-mortal father had willed to him, though his collection of landscape paintings rivaled any Art Museum on the Continent.

But even gods whose real identity was known to no Church, Legend or Newspaper had to do *some* work to maintain their position in the universe. That work involved re-strategizing the activities of the mortals on their continent every four years. It was a tradition passed on to them by their forefathers, perhaps based in some kind of rule about basic humanoid biology, or perhaps not. Or maybe these men who had been invested with godlike powers really did have a conscience. Such was the subject of this meeting in late September.

“So, democracy,” Wentworth said as he stroked his beard, gazing at the latest issue of The Main Street Journal. “My ancestors experimented with that. Distributing power from kings to nobles did advance human consciousness and the spirit of individual endeavor. Those countries where the peasants eventually joined in did make gains in monetary wealth and territory relative to their neighbors.”

“Point taken,” DeVries-Schultz conceded. He took a sip of ale from a thousand year old mug that he insisted still contained remnants of herbs that had made his ancestors powerful, and on occasion, wise. “But there is that matter of initiative,” he continued. “And sloth.”

“Quite,” Wentworth said in agreement of such.

“Yes, we know, Lord Wentworth,” Horowitz pointed out. “We all know how hard you

worked to earn that over-sized belly of yours,” he chuckled.

“Which is proportioned to my body, that I *choose* not to change,” Wentworth affirmed, slamming his technologically-altered unbreakable mug on the table. “But with freedom comes responsibility to be more hard working, and diligent. After all, is that not how our ancestors came to power? How *my* family did anyway.”

“As did mine,” DeVries-Schultz replied. “Though unification of the kingdoms on their portion of the continent took a bit longer than yours, Lawrence.”

“More like homogenization, Klaus,” Wentworth chuckled. “At least during those periods when you let the Fascists take over. One of whom was elected by democratic rule. Then---“

“---He destroyed democracy, and thinking, I know,” Klaus replied.

“And my people in the process,” Horowitz interjected. “Who funded your Empire building scheme.”

“Profiting from both sides of those three most horrible wars, I may and will add, Lord Horowitz,” Wentworth said. “After all, your people were always so good at managing money.”

“And us, Lord Horowitz!” Klaus asserted. “It nearly destroyed the game that our ancestors *worked* so hard to set up. For the benefit of the lesser beings it is our pleasure, and duty to serve.”

“Yes, humanity,” Horowitz said. “Who thankfully are still ruled by us, who are *men* rather than women. I think we can ALL agree that our gender is the superior one. Even the inferiors in what had been my tribe had a prayer saying ‘I thank God I was born a man and not a women.’”

“You would have to bring up ‘God’ again, Daniel,” Wentworth said. He sipped his tea and looked out the window of the mountain castle at the forest below. “It would be interesting, fun and perhaps one day essential to prove whether such a construct really exists. But in the meantime...” he continued, pulling out the summary report containing the bottom line findings from the overtitled underlings working for the committee, who knew virtually nothing about its real operations and origins. “The figures for the last four years.”

Horowitz and DeVries-Schultz were indeed shocked by the figures as well as the projected findings.

“The mathematics of it all says it all,” Wentworth pointed out. “Inefficiency indices indicate a breakdown in the quality of caring, dedication to commitment, equitable distribution of wealth, lawfully administered equality of legal rights, and the most

important indicator of human activity...”

“...the dull out index, which is on the rise,” DeVries-Schultz gasped. He looked at his mug, a masterpiece of art as well as engineering. “The civilization we have allowed to exist, and propagate, has become lazy, complacent.”

“Boring, lifeless, procedural, and simplistic,” Horowitz noted regarding the mathematical findings that calculated the number and extent of truly novel advances in the arts, and sciences.

“Such keeps the masses happy, and obedient, as we all know, gentlemen,” Wentworth pointed out. “But if we are to make this experiment in Democracy work, we have to make those who live under it work harder.”

“By changing the structure of democracy again?” DeVries-Schultz offered. “Doing our usual maneuvers to influence the democratic process?”

“Or challenging its existence,” Horowitz proposed, something in him activated by the turning of the leaves outside the window. He stood up, then moved closer to the window to access something from one of the older trees that seemed liberated after letting go of a large bolus of leaves in the wake of an oncoming wind. “You remember one of the founders of the current democracy the people on this continent think still rule them. The one who wrote the first draft for their Affirmation of Independence,” he chuckled. “But Jonas Emerson, the naive wet-behind-the-ears ‘scholar’ does deserve honorable mention in the history books his ancestors wrote on his behalf. As I recall, he wrote that ‘an old tree has to give way to the younger ones so the forest does not become petrified.’”

“An insight MY ancestors suggested to Jonas through a well placed, undercover tutor,” Wentworth said with a reminiscent smile.

“And mine infused into ‘Doctor Emerson’ through the books he read by those who came before him,” DeVries-Schultz boasted, leaning back in his chair and basking in the glory of eons past. “With images in pictures, paintings, music and---”

“---It is time to get to the business at hand, my good, trusted and endangered friends,” Horowitz interjected with a sense of urgency.

“Endangered how?” Wentworth inquired.

“I think you are talking legendary non-sense again, Daniel. Or worse, idealism. Which has no place in the business we are all in.” DeVries said, pushing outrage as well as fellowship through his lips. “In a global business in which your family became very wealthy, I may and will add, respectfully of course.”

“Yes, I know,” Horowitz conceded, feeling shame as well as regret. “But I propose, for all our varying yet integrated agendas, that we give democracy a challenge. So it can

redefine, strengthen and advance itself.”

“Yes, but towards what end?” Wentworth inquired, retrieving from his pocket a hand-carved 200 year old pipe. He pushed a generous pinch of high quality tobacco into it, then struck a match.

“Because our survival here depends on the survival of all those pathetic souls who know nothing about our existence!” Horowitz affirmed. “Including those who grow that tobacco outside so you can smoke it inside,” he continued, grabbing hold of Wentworth’s pipe.

“Quite,” the pale-skinned Lord who prided himself in having pictures of nature in every dwelling he owned, and being outdoors only while entering and exiting cars and planes that transported him to such.

“Daniel has a point, Lawrence,” DeVries-Schultz said. “Challenging democracy’s existence would be...hmmm...interesting,” he continued. “And needed, so that the souls put under our charge by our forefathers do not die of boredom, or terror.”

“Quite,” Wentworth agreed.

“So it’s settled then?” Horowitz said, feeling renewed for the first time in years. Indeed, he felt as exhilarated as his father and grandfather had in their heyday. The sixty year old mogul felt, for the first time, worthy of this highest station as Lord and Commander of the continent. “We challenge the existence of democracy. By putting it to a vote?”

“A unanimous vote,” DeVries-Schultz interjected. “Which is how we conduct business here, anyway,” he continued in the manner more of a king than a colleague.

Wentworth raised his right hand. “Aye” he stated in the manner and voice required of his station.

“Me too,” King DeVries-Schultz smiled, having become a Comrade Lord again. “And the one who proposed this agenda, with no doubt some kind of plan in mind to how to execute it?” he said, turning to Horowitz.

Lord Horowitz found himself thinking long and deep about the provisional plan he had been incubating for the last four years, or perhaps longer. Indeed, the man who had been given everything by his father and, albeit not all blood related, forefathers found himself in NEED of doing something eventful in his life. Something that innovated humanity somehow, so he could go to whatever lay behind his last breath with a sense of accomplishment.

“And what say ye?” Wentworth interjected into Horowitz’s ponderous self-induced spell. “Your silence says that you still have doubts about what you want us to be so

certain about?" he challenged.

"Aye!" Horowitz released abruptly from his gut and soul. That latter entity felt alive for the first time. It was as scary a proposition as an enlivening one. But it was one that had to be carried out. The old tree outside and the wind which seemed to carry Daniel's departed father's spirit seemed to agree.

CHAPTER 2

Sam Stark's name was as plain as the uni-colored shirts he always wore, and the very regular working man's haircut he got every thirty days, without fail. In temperament, the fifty-year-old cowboy was as rock solid as the mountains in the rural community where he had been elected him as sheriff for the last fifteen years. If anyone was born to be a protector of the weak, and an encourager of the strong, it was Sam. His discharge from nearly a decade of service in the military won him a chest full of metals to pin on his chest, along with a fistful of shratnel which was too close to his heart and spinal cord to remove. Yet he still remained as active as he could, according to his ancestors' tradition.

Every Stark going back five generations had made his own way, one way another, and paid the price for such a noble aspiration. After his discharge from the service, Sam was put in charge of the family farm, which he was able to expand into a ranch. To populate the ranch, he hooked up with a spry, religiously devout and beautiful woman who was not very much different than his mother, that mother having stayed with his father till well into their eighties. The result for Sam was four children. Two of left to live with their mother after she left him while he was on undercover assignment protecting his family, and community, from vicious mobsters who would have turned the former into sex-slaves and the latter into a company-owned town. Still, Sam still considered Will and Janette his family, and hoped that when they grew up, or got grandchildren of their own, they would believe stories Sam told about himself more than those his manipulative ex-wife Rachel related to them.

Sam's current familial situation centered around son Rob, daughter Emily and almost-wife Pagan-Buddhist Uma, who brought two of her own offspring into the union, Louise and Larry by name. Everything Sam did was to keep his family fed, watered and fulfilled. The economic dip hitting his community, and country, five years previously was hard on Sam's family. They were harder on his horses. Sam never forgave the Administrative Powers in the Capital for creating the depression that forced him to sell three of his favorite old timer equine companions for meat before their time so that everyone else on the spread could eat. But he was able to forgive the young gelding who bucked him off that morning, which landed him in the emergency ward by noon.

Taking care of Sam's busted up leg, and very bruised ego, was Doctor Achmed Prasuhn, a dark skinned physician from another continent valued for his skill in the medical arts as well as his ability to cure, or at least remedy, diseases of the human spirit. "So, you are sure you don't want me to give you a general anesthetic while I sew up this wound, Sheriff Sam?" the good doctor asked the hurting horseman.

"Your droning, philosophical discussion will put me to sleep soon enough, Doctor Achmed," the rough and tumble cowboy replied as the first injection of lidocaine went into his leg. It smarted more than the pain he felt when driving himself in to the back door of the emergency room. "I need to be back at work in two hours. So—"

“---- 'sew it up tight Doc, I have a war to fight',” Achmed interjected, imitating the movie cowboy Sam aspired to be in real life. “But as for that war, which is it this time?” he continued, as his true and often painfully honest self. “The war with your estranged kids? The war with your ex-wife? The war with the City Council over the new mine that everything still thinks may be coming in? Or the war with Uma over who you and the rest of the family will vote for in the upcoming election?”

“Everyone’s got a right to vote with their conscience,” Sam replied, in succinct ‘cowboyese’.

“With one of the candidates having NO conscience, or intelligence,” Achmed said, after which he made a wide stitch that caused Sam to scream as well as wince.

“OK, I get it,” Sam replied. “You’re afraid of what Paul Devon is gonna do once if takes power.”

“*When* he takes power, I am afraid,” Achmed replied of the dark horse candidate who no pole in the last three months said had a chance of getting elected.

“Devon’s a patriot! Who, if this country has the good sense to elect him will put our country first!” Sam affirmed, more out of hope than.

“A patriate for people like you. Putting all other countries dead last, in the process of putting this one first,” Achmed proposed with tired eyes yet still vibrant surgical hands. “Paul Devon is a master manipulator, addicted to the thrill of competitive conflict, who champions selective compassion rather than universal caring.”

“He’s a family man, who looks after and cares about his family,” Sam retorted.

“As was every soldier in ever War who used that noble justification for killing someone who had other families,” Achmed asserted. The aggression in his voice found its way to his hands, said extensions of his Soul forcing the tissue in Sam's leg to come together on his terms rather than Nature’s. “Until we have the same compassion for a stranger from a foreign land as we do for a family member of our own, or a fellow countryman, wounds far worse than this will be inflicted on many innocent people. And not by proud cut horses who decided they wanted to master their rider.”

Sam held his tongue, painfully aware of the pain inflicted on everyone by telling, and re-living, War stories. Achmed’s arrival in Sam’s country was as a result of a War that Sam’s country had started, and one which Sam participated in. Had Sam and his countrymen not come to the aid of the rebels in Achmed’s homeland, the dictator there would have massacred everyone opposing him. So Sam believed at the time and still believed now. What Achmed did and who he lost during that Police Action was something he didn’t talk about much. Indeed, Achmed didn’t talk very much about his past activities or official affiliations. Nowhere in the hospital nor in his office was

there anything except a copy of his license to practice medicine. Where he got the training to do so, Sam didn't know, and didn't question. But Sam *did* know that had Achmed not immigrated to his country, he would have two less children and one less ex-wife. He thanked Achmed in many ways for his medical skill in saving the former, and silently cursed him for not letting the latter die on the operating table after the car accident.

"There, all done," Achmed said with a satisfied grin on his olive-brown face. He put away his surgical supplies neatly in his tray, whispering a prayer of thanks to his God for allowing him to be a healing instrument of his will, then continued to speak to Sam about more earthly matters. "Uma says that you would be a better horseman if you attended my yoga meditation class. As we both know, unless you can hear the Silence, you are deaf to what any man or beasts whose voice breaks into it."

"Not before you put some recliner chairs in there first," Sam replied. He put part of his weight then all of it on his repaired hindlimb, finding it more strong than painless. "You know how much I hate to sit cross-legged. And I'm not religious."

"My yoga class is about healing the spirit, not making the mind believe in any religious doctrine," Achmed assured his potential new mature student.

"But it's not devoid of religious suggestions," Sam countered. "The kind of books that you're convincing Uma to buy, and got half of my kids reading---."

"---are merely suggestions," Achmed shot back. "It's not that your faith can explain the reason for the hardships we all experience in life, or provide a 100% effective solution for our collective souls."

"I know," Sam replied, assessing how his own belief in what he couldn't see but needed to feel had disappointed or confounded him on more than one occasion.

"Yes, religion and politics," Achmed said, finally calming down. "Something that should not be discussed between friends."

"Along with legalities," Sheriff Sam replied as he put on the shirt that bore his badge by necessity, his country's flag by choice. "You have yourself a fulfilling day there, Doc."

"You too , Sheriff," Achmed offered, with a humble yet self-confident bow.

CHAPTER 3

Uma Petrovitch-Almost-Stark never intended to be a teacher. She recalled the line from one of the films she saw during her formative years where the main character said that “Those who can’t do, teach. And those who can’t teach, teach history”. Apparently that quip took hold in many 40’somethings who grew up with Uma, as the school system who hired her as a part time Fine Arts teacher hadn’t had history or civics in the curriculum for the last two decades.

But, to be fair, the school curriculum did include history, sort of. It was detailed, vivid and professionally-presented in the textbook the kids read and did their homework from, but there were three problems with it. First, it was the history of Uma’s home country, barely recognizing the existence of others, and when it did, such nations were demonized or considered as well intentioned washouts. Second, most of the history about Uma’s country being taught to the kids was wrong, at least according to the books Uma’s father and mother made her read after memorizing what she had to in order to get her High School and College diploma. Thirdly, there was little or no mention of how the Constitution of Uma’s beloved nation worked in theory or in practice in the course outlines.

As Mister Linquist was still sick in the hospital, or perhaps on extended stay in drug rehab (courtesy of the dope he got from his students of late), it fell to Uma to take over his class. “*My job description here is to be a music teacher!*” Uma said to herself as she sat behind the desk of the classroom waiting for the students to all gather before the late bell. “My calling, my dharma, is to be a musician!” she growled at herself after seeing a student with long, red hair and alive eyes dance-strole through the door and into her seat while listening to something otherworldly on her phone. “*My karma is to teach these kids to not make the same mistakes I did, so they’ll make their own someday,*” Uma silently lamented.

Those mistakes quick-flashed through Uma’s mind yet again. One of them was deciding to stay in the Education Program in College so she could become a music teacher some day, instead of becoming a musician out in the real world. A second was getting too involved with one of her professors, then forming emotional attachments to her 2 month old embryo which in her mind was still not a real life, but in her heart always had been. There were other compromises and missed opportunities as well, most of them dealing with men who stole her heart but never really understood her mind.

Sam Stark could fit into that category, but at least he tried to understand what Uma was about between the ears. It was her hope, and prayer, that if she stuck with him long enough, he could reveal to her what she should be doing with her life, as well as where she went wrong. But as for now, the next small right thing to do was to try to open up some minds, and hearts, in the thirty young souls in front of her, as they seemed to so

undervalue the opportunity for greatness awaiting the country in 72 hours.

Seeing that the clock on the wall was ten seconds away from announcing 'it's time to get heavy and serious' to teacher and student alike, Uma began lowering the music she had put on as background to the clamor of their normal entry. It was a piece from an insightful, intelligent and Alive composer who had dropped the body 197 years ago. The music was as fresh, soul awakening and humorous as it was at the time of its composition. Of course it was composed on another continent, the history of such was unknown to most of these students, and forgotten by nearly all of their parents. Still, Uma hoped that the symphony whose name loosely translated into 'Ode to Passionate Bliss and Global Harmony' would awaken consciousness, or perhaps past life time memories, in at least some of the students.

"People! Comrades! Patriots!" Uma proclaimed with the accent of her ancestors across the sea, amidst the banter between students that accompanied every substitute. She put her hands behind her back in the manner of military aristocrats who hated women even more than they feared free thinking, strolling behind the desk like a Commandress of Old. "Some of you may recognize me as not being Mister Linquist, or the other three substitute teachers who took on the job of indoctrinating you with historical fairy tales so you will grow up to be obedient, happy worker slaves."

"Huh!" most of the kids said with their eyes, and quickly-silenced mouths.

"That's right!" Uma continued, as the revolutionary-musician she always wanted and deserved to be. "Today we start to write in our minds our own interpretation of history. And a real knowledge of history prevents us from doing what?"

"Failing the bullshit exams we have to take to graduate," Uma heard from a short student in the back of the room whose identity was hidden by taller, and perhaps dumber ones in front of him. The class clown proved his worth by giving his colleagues a much needed laugh. Maybe it was his timing, delivery or the fact that he called it as it is for the predominant majority of humanoid life forms his age. Indeed, Uma found herself chuckling as well.

"Well and accurately put, Mister whistle blower," she conceded. "But the answer I was looking for is connected to the credo that 'those who do not understand history are doomed to repeat it'."

"A so, like, yesterday and yester-year slogan," continued the runty lad who was the envy well built dude in the room, and no doubt the first in line to get laid under the bleachers by any of the dudettes. "A hoaky, old, bumper sticker logo that's---

"---something you can prove or disprove for real!" Uma blasted out. That fire of defiance and Purpose came from the same place from which she delivered anti-Establishment chants to Establishment moguls when she was the class clown's age. She walked over to him. "Yeah, those who don't understand history are doomed to

repeat it is an oldie,” she said to the kid she wished she had been, face to face. “But it’s a, yeah...I’ll say it because it rhymes...’oldie but a goodie’. But I can see that you’re a thinking dude who, unlike so many idiots your age and my age, doesn’t believe something just because it’s on the internet or it’s integrated into the lyrics of a hip, cool song that makes you bob your head, tap your feet, or go marching off a cliff with a happy face like the rest of the lemmings.”

Maybe it was what Uma said, or how she said it, or the commitment she put into it, but the kids turned quiet, then attentive. “*Maybe I out-clowned the class clown,*” Uma silently considered, and secretly hoped. “*Or maybe this lost generation is savable, or even better, can save my generation from itself,*” she pondered. “I can elaborate on what I’m offering you, for the exam of real life, which my colleagues don’t know much more about than any of you do, if you want,” Uma dared to put into spoken words.

“I’d like that,” the class clown said. “And so would everyone else, right?” he said to everyone around him.

Better than fifty percent of the kids nodded their heads ‘yes’, defining it as a democratic vote, democracy of course being the most ideal system by which people can be governed.

“But one question first, ‘Little Hummer Girl’,” the no-doubt next ensemble player on Friday Night Live said, evoking a wave of laughter from his buds, and most importantly, their girlfriends.

“Ask, please. I am at your service, Sir Tyler Jackson,” Uma said, the name of the lad on the class photo sheet finally connecting with his name. She sat down on an empty chair in front of the clown, honoring his request with a courtly bow. He replayed on his pocket computer Uma saying ‘marching off the cliff with happy faces like the rest of the lemmings.’

“Some of the people here don’t know what a lemming is?” Tyler said.

Uma dismissed for the moment that he was the one who wanted and needed to know the meaning of that word most. Not passing up this opportunity to speak openly to these kids, and finding out what the world they came from was really thinking, Uma got to the matter at hand. “A lemming is a follower,” she said, addressing those who laughed most at the clown’s jokes as well as him. “Someone who lets someone else do the thinking for him, or her. Someone who reads what’s in this book,” she said holding up the text that the curriculum required. “And considers what popular people say as fact without thinking first. And they think that memorizing bullshit as facts so you can pass a standardized test that lets them keep their meaningless jobs makes you smart.”

This time, Uma had the kids in the palm of her hand. Even Tyler seemed humbled by her knowledge, flair and commitment. It was one of those opportunities she could not pass up, as she, and even almost-hubby Sam, would never forgive her for it. “So, in three days we all have the chance to vote for Olivia Nelson. An experienced and worldly

woman who knows the responsibility of being Chancellor. Her platform is the keep this country free, make it kinder and encourage it to become more tolerant and intelligent, and the candidate who is being actively supported by Bernard Pappas, who supports free education for all of you, and free health care if you get sick while getting it. Raise your left hand if you would vote for Olivia, your right if your parents are planning to do so.”

Four out of five kids raised their left hand. The predominant majority of them raised their right as well. Such was in keeping with everything knew and smelled about the upcoming election.

“Now, who would vote for, or are related to parental units who are voting for, the shithead, asshole, opportunist who’s never held political office in his money grubbing, pussy-grabbing life?” Uma challenged. “Right hand up, boldly, if you would vote for Paul Devon, which is your right of course. Left hand up if your parental units are Devon supporters.”

Five of the thirty kids slowly raised their left arm. “*There ya go, Sam,*” Uma said to herself regarding the husband-to-be who she still somehow loved more than her own political convictions. “*From the mouth of babes comes the truth, and the potential to make us know and serve it also,*” she told herself. With that, Uma commenced a history lesson going back nearly a century, demonstrating clearly, factually and colorfully the reasons why Olivia Nelson should be elected Chancellor, and newcomer populist Paul Devon should be demoted back to becoming the well-deserving butt of every up and coming class clown’s jokes.

CHAPTER 4

The Heavens could not have created a better day for the mortals below on Election Day. The sun shone brightly in the sky, conferring warm on whoever's face it touched. For those wanting a comfortable nip in the air, a cool but certainly not cold wind blew out of the West. Humidity was perfect, affording comfort to those preferring deserts as well as those who thrived best in tropical climates. Local and National authorities gave all but essential workers the day off, by tradition and as well as recently-legistated law. Still, voter turn out was low at the Town Hall where Pastor John Smith sat behind the first line of registration desks outside the front door.

"Maybe there really are better bargains at the Election Day sales at the Shopping Mall than the candidates on the ticket here," the mild-mannered, forty-five years faithful blonde, blue-eyed, always-dressed-for Sunday services servant of the Lord muttered to himself. He looked at the road sign promising drivers only 20 more miles till they got to a town that had enough people and commercial prospects to dare to call itself a city. Yet another stream of cars and trucks zoomed past that sign, this bunch carrying even more of his Parishioners.

"Jack Ulsterich, Bill and Bobbie Kenmore and the whole Brady family said that I could vote for them, Pastor John," the first voter in his line of one said. "And to make it legal, I can give you a note from them," he continued, placing several pages of documentation on the good Pastor's table.

"Which is as legal as riding in on your skateboard on town property, and the other three pieces of ID that you tried to pass off with you as different names and different ages, Tyler Jackson," Pastor John smiled back at the class clown who made everyone laugh and, according to what he had heard about his private on line internet comedy show, was making his viewers think as well. "Rules are rules, and without rules, you have---"

"---Enlightenment, vitality and a country where compassion is valued over profit, caring beats competition, and everyone gets an equal share of the pie, cake, and toke of the reefer that gets passed around the circle," Tyler replied.

"*This comes from your mouth or Uma Petrovitich's?*" Pastor John thought, but didn't say regarding the substitute history instructor who was now more popular with the students than everyone else in the teacher's room, though she was hated by half of her colleagues now.

"Come on, Pastor John," Tyler said. "If you give me just one of those ballots, I'll come to Church on Sunday. And for every extra ballot, I'll bring in a guest."

How tempted Pastor John was to take up young Tyler's offer! There had not been more

than five faces under thirty in the pews for the last six months. As the earth was the Lord's Temple, John had to say something to the enthusiastic youth who would probably become the leader of his generation, for better or worse. The coach who encouraged every kid on every team he played or managed to do his best, despite what the scoreboard said, asked the Divinity inside of him to speak the words that would serve his Will. As usual, the world the Lord created, or allowed to decay, interrupted him.

"Who did you vote for, Pastor John?" Tyler inquired as he got on his skateboard, after which he set about doing whirlies in the parking lot that displayed a 24 hour ban on that Calling.

"Whoever Jesus would have voted for, I hope," Pastor asserted as gently as he could.

"Or maybe you could put in a write in vote for Jesus?" Tyler suggested while doing a flip and jump that caused Pastor John to envy his skill. John was jealous of the lad who he always wanted to be, on the skateboard, in the bedroom or on the stage. "It is legal to write in 'Jesus' for Chancellor," Tyler continued.

"Yes, it is," Pastor John conceded, considering for the first time the candidate who he really wanted to get into the highest office in the land. Such was particularly his deepest wish given the shortcomings of those who were the final nominees of the two major parties, the only ones that ever had any real control of the country despite allowing others to exist. "But, Jesus would have a conflict of interest. Separation of Church and State, and all that," Pastor John replied, feeling the strange rush of something he envied but seldom was able to express---humor.

Tyler didn't laugh. Neither did two carloads of valid voters who had overheard the pun. With anger at himself, and frustration with the limitation that 'goodness' conferred upon him, Pastor John took in a deep breath and got back to the business of doing his civic duty. "And you are?" he asked the next citizens in line.

Tyler went on his way. The citizens behind him gave their names in a dull, lifeless, procedural manner. Pastor John logged them in, in the same manner. He had no idea whether they were Paul Devon fans or Olivia Nelson supporters. Even amongst themselves they seemed to hold back conversation about anything that really mattered. "*But, that's a good thing,*" the patron Saint of niceness and nerdism thought to himself. "*The best thinking is done with a minimum of talking, or pontificating,*" he considered.

He tried to recall some saying from the Holy Book he considered the only real Word of God, but was at a loss for doing such. Something about this election worried him more than he thought it would, despite the fact that all of his Sermons were about Spiritual Matters that transcended politics. Indeed, his wish was for Olivia and Paul to stop their bickering and make up. "*The Lord created both the lamb and the lion, the sage and the trickster, the horse and the cougar, and works His miracle through them both,*" he recalled from the notes he would put into a sermon once the count for the election was in. But a whiff of animals and products produced by such pulled Pastor John out of his head.

He looked up and addressed the two next voters.

“So, Sam, Uma,” he said to the two riders atop the horses that both decided to fumigate the air with a flatulent fragrance, as well laying brown paddies on the concrete. “Come to make a political statement via your livestock?”

“I came to vote, for the *sane, intelligent* candidate,” Uma asserted.

“And I came to vote for the patriotic realist,” Sam added.

“On horseback?” Pastor John asserted, as some citizens went on their way, and others decided to pet the Quarterhorse paint and the Arab gray. “You do know that there is an official law on the books disallowing horses to be ridden in town. Which you are honor bound to enforce, Sheriff Stark.”

“We tried to tell that to the horses, but they wouldn’t listen,” Uma replied with a playful smile, the sun making her Flower Power wardrobe even more radiant.

“Yep, they just kinda took us for a ride on their own, wouldn’t let us off, till they stopped here,” the Cowboy Sheriff yammered out with a big, fat country grin.

“These criminal beasts need to be punished, with house arrest,” Fred Elmwood, owner of the hardware store that could barely afford to pay for its own security locks said, while feeding the Quaterhouse a chunk of his afternoon apple.

“At *my* house,” asserted Mary McGilvry, head librarian who doubled as a sales clerk at the grocery store and a teller at the bank so she could not be prosecutably behind on the mortgage payments for her 5 acre ‘acreage’ and twenty-year old house-trailer.

“We can work out the logistics of that later,” Sam said as he dismounted his horse, then helped Uma off her saddle.

“At *my* courthouse, I would remind you,” Pastor John politely said to the cowboy and the flower child as they walked arm in arm into the voting hall, about to effectively neutralize each other on most every Federal issue they were about to vote on. “I am the mayor after all.”

“*For now*,” Pastor John could read in the eyes of the citizens who were about to go into the booths inside to decide, amongst other things, who would be Mayor of the town. He also saw that being said through the eyes of the two horses as they were being tended to by Mary and Fred.

“All God’s Creatures, Pastor John,” Mary reminded the part time Mayor and full time man of the cloth.

“Which is why I pushed that law through, to protect them from being hit by traffic,”

Pastor John explained.

Fred seemed to consider the argument valid. Mary seemed to suspect John of having secret, sinister agendas. But to be fair, there was no shortage of the latter in the town that had to find a way to come up with some money quick, or be blown away by the next burst of wind.

Perhaps it was an omen, or perhaps just more 'great weather'. The gentle autumn breeze coming out of the West changed direction and character. It turned into a cold North Wind by late afternoon. Such forced John to move his table inside. But before doing so, a Green Van pulled into the parking lot. A gentleman with a large nose, thick black framed glasses and Semetic facial structure emerged from it.

"If you want to wait a moment, I can log you in when we get inside," Pastor John said to the citizen whose face nor animus he didn't recognize.

"That's okay," he said. "I'm just looking for directions. Me and my friends got sort of lost and found ourselves here."

"Which explains why most of the people in this community, and my Parish, wound up here," John replied, with a self-effacing chuckle.

"Maybe the same way in all small towns these days," the visitor noted with a somber chuckle as he assisted the Pastor-Mayor in relocating his table to warmer and non-windy surroundings. "Kids leaving, parents not able to give them good reasons to stay, the worse kind of weather hitting you at the most vulnerable times. "

"Times that we can control, in some ways anyway," Pastor John said as he looked proudly at the voting hall, his eyes fixated on the flag displayed. "I have a son overseas who is fighting for our right to vote our conscience. But, in the end it is God's Will that decides the outcome of all of this."

"Indeed yes," the visitor replied, though not quite believing what he said.

Still, Pastor John felt a connection to the visitor from out of town who looked, and even smelled, different than anyone who lived here. "Where are you headed to?" he asked, inviting him to help himself to the plate of cookies, cakes and sandwiches which was still more than half-filled.

The visitor took a large gingerbread cookie, and endeavored a test bite. He enjoyed it enough to take a larger one, then another cookie for the road. As for where he was going on the road, he gave Pastor John a piece of paper with an address on it.

"I can get you here, a lot more reliably than the GPS that decided to become a prankster rather than a servant," Pastor John continued, while writing out directions on the back of one of the many unused ballots laying on the table next to him. He noted the visitor

smiling at his GPS joke. That acceptance allowed him to dive down deeper into his hopefully Alive soul. “I’m no conspiracy fanatic, but I am convinced that someone out there may one day make all GPSs band together and make us blindly drive to a big computer store where the machines will declare themselves as our masters.” John handed the directions to the visitor.

“An interesting idea, which I hope is made into a movie before it becomes a reality” the visitor noted, as if he had thought of it already. “But in the meantime, plan A before plan B, C or the rest of them,” he continued as he was buzzed by his cell. He read the message, wincing at whatever it was. “My colleagues in the van. Who thank you for your great work here, as well as your directions, and...if I may, a few more of these gingerbread cookies for my two travel companions, Mister....”

“...Pastor John Smith, and for the moment, Mayor of this town that I won’t let die, even if it wants to,” John said by way of introduction with an extended hand.

“Daniel. Daniel Horowitz,” the visitor replied. John felt the hand of a grateful soul, but also a fearful one. Then again, it was a tense day for everyone. “I wish you a good day, and productive life,” he said.

“Shalom to you too,” John said, noting a Jewish medallion hanging around his neck, feeling the need to pity this apparently intelligent man his theological ignorance. Still, Pastor John ceremonially handed him three of the largest cookies on the tray, silently lamenting that he would have liked to take them home himself.

With that, the visitor went on his way, and John went on his.

CHAPTER 5

Lords Lawrence, Klause and Daniel sat in the all night Independence Cafe in Loopskam sipping their coffee, picking on their fries and licking their buffalo wings. Little did the packed house watching the big screen tv know that the trio owned not only the Independence, but controlled the income of everyone in it, one way or another.

“An interesting football game,” Lawrence commented at the commentators who had shifted their projections between being a sure fire Olivia Nelson landslide victory to merely a functional majority over underdog newcomer Paul Devon. “Half of the room is cheering, half is in shock,” he noted, as the pendulum went again towards a ‘most likely’ Olivia victory.

“Very few of these fans are wearing sweatshirts or hats bearing their team’s name,” Klause noted.

“At the manager’s request, thankfully,” Daniel interjected.

“Yes, it is bad business to have clientel fighting each other instead of ordering more of this...whatever it is they have on the menu,” Klause sneered, smelling the most recent version of the special sauce on the fries.

“There is sufficient nutrition in this to keep these people fed. And not enough chemicals to make them overtly ill,” Lawrence commented.

“And when they do get sick, we can make money with the drugs we’ve develop to counteract those chemicals,” Klause said.

“You mean antidotes to the toxins we’ve sold them as preservatives and 'natural' flavors,” Daniel interjected. “I wonder when someone will cue into that. Other than the writer who wrote that futuristic comedic film about it.”

“Who we have appropriately discredited. For his good, ours and the people he thinks he is serving,” Lord Lawrence commented. He looked at his watch, then the crowd, then the projection on the screen indicating that three districts reported an ‘overwhelming majority’ of 53 percent for five term left of center Senator Olivia Nelson vs. 47 for entrapenuer right wing outsider Paul Devon.

Daniel looked at the result of that step in his experiment to test democracy. “Most of these people will go home in ten minutes thinking that their government will be business as usual,” he noted. “The others will order another drink, then curse Olivia as a bitch all the way home.”

“After of course they ram into every car in the parking lot disrespecting Mr. Devon or praising Ms. Nelson,” Lawrence chuckled.

“And call up their hunting buddies to organize militias, so they can play Revolutionaries and get sexual gratification from their adoring girlfriends, mistresses, wives or some combination of such,” Klause added with a belly laugh.

“This is not funny,” Daniel asserted.

“Neither is what is about to happen in...another three minutes,” Lawrence added, looking at his watch. “Or sooner,” he said as he noted results coming in from four more districts.

Though newscaster Harry Engles was the most stoic and unreadable of all the commentators on any of the television stations that thought they were independently run, his non-emotional mug was overcome with shock as he looked at the camera.

“Come on, read the teleprompter, you half-breed, over-educated, idealist pansy” Klause said of the light brown skinned commentator.

“It’s as real as the warmed over quiche that your male lover is gonna throw into your lap after you come home even later than he expected,” Lawrence added.

“Come on,” Daniel muttered to himself. “Say the words, Harry. No pain, no gain.”

Pain it was for Engles when he read the announcement. “An unexpected development. Which was verified. Paul Devon has just won four of the most populated districts in the country.”

Engles related the details in the manner of father informing his wife that the never-failing crackerjack Chief Attending surgeon he hired just lost their son on the operating table. The young woman next to him, who looked more like a supermodel than a newscaster, could not resist cracking a smile when her senior co-anchor revealed yet more Devon victories in the Western districts.

“And that’s only the beginning,” Daniel noted.

“Of an experiment we all know is necessary,” Lawrence reminded him.

“And can control at any time, of course,” Klause noted, after which he gulped down the rest of his beer. He then picked up the check. “So, which one of us is paying for this?”

“All of us, in the end, I fear,” Daniel said as he noted the wise-assed smile on Paul Devon getting the news of his now confirmed victory.

“Relax, Daniel,” Lawrence said. He picked up the check, then a wad of money and some loose change from his pocket which was of course as valuable or valueless as the

committee of three determined. “We’ll have the talk with Mister Devon, put him in his place. We made him, we can break him, and we will of course mold him.”

“In the image of which one of us?” Daniel asked.

“A very interesting, and intriguing question,” Lawrence said, stroking his always well trimmed beard.

“Whose turn is it?” Klause said, picking up one of the coins bearing the images of other Chancellors the Committee of Three had controlled over the last three centuries. He flipped it into the air. “Right wing head, left wing tails,” he said with a pleasant smile.

The coin landed in the special sauce covering the fries that still remained uneaten. Seeing that his colleagues didn’t want to dirty their hands to retrieve it, Daniel did the honors. After cleaning off the aromatic, acerbic, chemically preserved gunk, Daniel noted that the images on the coin were indiscernable.

CHAPTER 6

The barbeque at the Stark spread was open for everyone who wanted to attend. The event was advertised for free in the always-read High Country Herald, and for a substantial fee in the always displayed Mountain Mirror. The photographer from the latter had the two stars of the event in center frame, requiring an adjustment to their presentation to such. “We need, a big smile from ALL of you! For the Mirror and posterity.”

Sam Stark retained his big, wide happy smile. Uma Petrovich-Stark, by common law definition anyway, forced the edges of her lips to turn upwards. Rob and Emily, who had voted as their father did, retained their ‘proud to be a patriot’ Paul Devon shit eating grins. Musically-gifted underacheiver Goth Louise, sporting a black armband around her shoulder muttered “Fuck posterity,” to the reporter of the pro-Devon overpriced rag.

“It’s already fucked,” added her 16 going on 60 computer bookworm twin brother, Larry.

“But we still have to make the best of life, and each other,” Uma reminded her two biological offspring. “Let’s at least TRY to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the marriage between our two families,” Uma informed her two step children.

“The merging of our herds,” Sam added, with a warm, happy glow in his eyes like it was Christmas, Thanksgiving, and National Independence Day all at the same time. “That survived an administration I hated for the last eight years. And is gonna do even better by us all in the next four or, God willing, eight years to come!”

“Not as long as your two kids, and you, Sam, keep those ‘winner take all’ victory smiles on your faces,” Doctor Achmed Prasuhn muttered to himself from a prominent position in the crowd of valued family well-wishers. Half of them wished that all days could be as glorious for the country as this, as someone completely outside the system was now put in the most powerful office in that corrupt and stagnant system.. The other half of the attendees would give everything they had to turn back the clock and cajol Paul Devon into being content to be a shock-jock reality show host, or to remain in his golddigger Mama’s womb.

On the count of three, the Petrovitchs all put on forced family smiles, for the sake of each other and the best parts of their step family. The Starks hugged them. The camera caught that moment of family bonding, capturing forever the model of trans-cultural Union, big U. The crowd clapped as Uma and Sam kissed each other, affording the photographer of the Mirror as well as others who would place the picture in special places in the heart another photo op. The deafening applause drowned out political arguments, rants, boasts and laments. It was followed by the band playing the song that brought Uma and Sam together in the first place, at the cross-genre music festival that

took the town by storm over a decade ago, two political administrations if one was taking count using that yardstick. Sam asked Uma to dance. She begrudgingly accepted. Though her face looked happy when she gazed at his eyes, they said 'helpless' when they caught Achmed's.

"I wish I could fix it, Uma," Achmed said to her with his eyes. "With God's help, I am able to work miracles with flesh and bone, but with people....especially the half of these people who soon want me out of *our* precious, pretentious and soon to be aggressively arrogant country, I'm as clueless as you are, Faruk," he continued in his native tongue to the 10 year old Laborator Retriever the community have given to him as a pup gift so he would be less lonely. "And as speaking any language other than the national tongue of this country will probably be outlawed by the new Chancellor Devon, I promise you, Faruk, that I will speak it to you, and anyone who will listen till your dying day, or mine."

The doctor who had seen so much death, despite his supernatural powers to put it off for his patients, considered his own demise, particularly as he felt the lump behind Faruk's lower jaw. "I know, the cancer is growing, but slowly, for now," he assured the dog, considering the further application of that remark. Though Achmed should have thought about Faruk's current biological condition, he found himself recalling the news events from the last three days since the election.

Paul Devon's grand money making scheme that would make his country the richest in the world, and therefore the greatest in the world, had been sketched out very clearly and loudly by the Chancellor elect. Gone would be charity for the poor, taxing the very rich so they would pay their fair share, treating foreign nations with respect, respect for mother earth, freedom of the press, protection of the poor from the greedy rich, tolerance of religions and sexual preference other than those of traditional old time Christianity, education for those who could do the most with it, racial equality, respect for women, and health care provided on the basis of need rather than how much money the patient had in his or her pocket. Yes, those were the rants from Olivia Nelson supporters and others on the 'left', whatever that was these days. But given the mostly male and White assholes Devon had chosen for his provisional cabinet, such was closer to an apocalyptic reality. The ranting of a Chancellor Elect who thrived on creating high drama around him, while he held the fate of the terrified players in such in his paternalistic and, to him anyway, protective hands, was soon to become very real. But for today, Achmed decided it was best to consider the barbeque. Such made his fears of what was to come even worse

The dancing done with, the eating began. Achmed was not sure who put the 'Please do not talk about religion and politics today' sign on the barn. Maybe it was a Nelson supporter or other 'lefty' who would not trust themselves to blast out at friends and lovers who had supported Devon, or who were still in shock as to how and why the unthinkable happened during election day. Or perhaps it was an enlightened Devon enthusiast who took mercy on the opponents who had suffered enough, or thought they were suffering anyway. Or maybe the author of the sign was Pastor John, who knew all too well that bringing up politics in Church was the easiest way to keep everyone away from services

on Sunday. His attempts to bring a common morality and compassion to all of this were clearly demonstrated now as well, as the Pastor was given the esteemed honor to be Master Griller at the barbeque.

Achmed observed Paster John distributing food to the long line of hungry guests, a new 'Servant of the God, Servant of the People' apron covering his cleanly-pressed overalls. "Yeah," Achmed said to Faruk. "He's caught in the middle of this political madness as much as anyone else. Got fifty percent of the vote to remain as Mayor, the other fifty percent going to a write in candidate who said he never wanted the job."

The doctor-scholar who always claimed that the most intelligent souls talk about ideas and ideals, those with utilizing less cerebral capacity concerning themselves with events, such as sport and politics, gazed over to that write in candidate. At the insistence of their guests, Sheriff Sam Stark and Uma helped themselves to the cornucopia of casseroles, salads, vegetable dishes and thick sauces that covered every inch of the buffet table. Being one who studied people more than he dared to fully examine himself, Achmed took note of not so much what Sam, Uma and the rest of the parties were putting on their plates, but how much they were partaking for themselves. Their hands revealed what was in their heads, and, by posted law, forbidden to say by mouth.

Those who Achmed knew were Devon supporters wielded the serving spoons and spatulas with gusto, plopping generous portions on their plate. With regard to the three pots of stew, they took more meat than vegetables, irrespective of gender or body build. Those who Achmed knew were mourning the results of the election took small portions of food, just enough to be polite to the proud prepares of those dishes, offering far more literary and kind commentary regarding the taste and aroma of the dishes. The correlation between these two types of people and their culinary behaviors was tighter than any scientific study Achmed had ever read in this country, and performed in his own. But there was something about the number of n values in both of these groups that said something sustaining to Achmed.

"The majority of these people, be it small, are not happy about Devon's being elected. A very large minority are, Faruk," the doctor shared with his faithful canine companion as he fed him another stick of beef jerky from his pocket, the dog's favorite food yet still on the over-trained, and under-experienced veterinarian's 'no no' list. "Just as the popular vote, be it small, went for Olivia Nelson, and the electoral district vote, be it small, went to Paul Devon,." Something flashed into the former Professor Achmed's head. "One could not better design an election to split people apart rather than to bring them together. And the silent Monarchs who designed this 'democratic' election still need peasants who will remain consumers. Starving, jailing or killing consumers is bad for business, and these Monarchs, whoever they are, are smart businessmen, Faruk." he said. "They will have a talk with Paul Devon, and put him in his place, so that everything else can remain in place. After all, nothing else logically explains why we humans, a far less compassionate and intelligent species than yours, haven't blown ourselves into oblivion yet."

Faruk barked his approval, or so Achmed believed. Then again, Faruk knowledge of human vocabulary was far more extensive than the learned doc was in Dog Talk. Achmed recalled the saying that God spelt backwards is Dog, and vice versa. Perhaps that what was going on here, at least in the country which spelt those words in that way. It was enough for Achmed to justify allowing himself to be more hopeful about the future of the country he had truly loved far more than most of the people who acquired citizenship by merely being born in it.

Faruk, the Dog, agreed to Achmed's new positive affirmation. As did God, when Achmed asked that Inner Presence about this newest opportunity to make the country Great again, though clearly not in the image of the Chancellor-elect's construct of such.

CHAPTER 7

The meeting place was where it always had been every four years for the last forty years. As was the table at the Olympia Island Oasis, and the food served to the only three customers allowed into it on that day, while they expected a fourth to join them.

“So,” Lord Lawrence said to Lords Klause and Daniel, checking his watch for the fourth time. He sampled another piece of spanikopita on the hor d’heuve plate left by the chef himself. “Where is Mister Devon?”

“Perhaps he didn’t get the memo,” Klause commented, after which took a healthy bite of baklava, made exactly the way his third mistress’ Cretan grandmother did. “Or Paul Devon decided to declare himself master of the time as well as everyone who punches a time clock in this country.”

“Maybe he doesn’t like Greek food,” Daniel suggested as he tried yet again to force his palate to enjoy domathes, the flakey covered cheese-enriched pastry that no man born of woman, or woman born from transplanted laboratory sperm hated. Just as the pasty met his disagreeable tongue, Daniel swallowed it whole, deciding it was unnecessary to endure the endeavor or chewing. “If anyone asks, tell Yannis that I appreciate all the time he put into making this lunch for us,” he continued, discretely dumping the rest of the contents on his plate onto Klause’s and Lawrence’s. “Where is a dog when you need one,” he said, in the High Tongue of his and Klause’s ancestry.

Lawrence and Klause shared a good laugh. They lapses into happy and mildly challenging tales about themselves as lads learning the ropes about how to climb the ladders of power, then pull them up to their high station when no one else was looking. Meanwhile, Daniel patched in another call to his most trusted assistant, who personally had delivered the particulars about the lunch date to Paul Devon. “No answer from Mr. Gronki regarding Devon’s whereabouts,” he related to his fellow Lords by way of result of such, his impatience escalating into fear.

“Traffic, perhaps,” Lawrence suggested.

“Or someone put a bullet through Mister Devon’s swelled head?” Klause mused. “It is a target big enough for anyone to hit it.”

“With a skull thick enough to prevent new ideas, common sense or metallic bullets from getting though to the brain inside,” Lawrence added.

“A primitive reptilian brain programmed for fighting, fucking and enjoying the kind of food that we know he likes after the blood and pussy fest,” Klause offered with a grubby smile. “But Devon does have a strong survival instinct. It stands to reason that

he should be here, on time, as he does know who we are.”

“*Which is maybe the reason why he didn't show up,*” Daniel considered, but dared not give voice to regarding the puppet who played the most important role in the script he had provide the first draft for. If he did say what he was thinking, and fearing, Daniel would get that ‘we told you so’ stare from his fellow humanoid gods. Or, since he was a god of sorts, if he voiced that speculation, the worse situation would materialize. The latter did, just as Daniel was about to visualize it. Something in his nostrils made Daniel think about how his Uncle Jacob met his demise, after he had defied the family plan and business one World War ago.

Yes, it was potassium cyanide that Daniel smelled in his over-sized honker. It was a sensation felt much in the world endured while awake rather than the one experienced while asleep. Two disorienting moments later, it was accompanied by the sight of smoke coming from the vents. Daniel observed his fellow diners coughing their way into unconsciousness. Before he could say ‘apocalyptic anything’, the specially-chosen ‘waiters’ in all four corners of the room, crack shots with the state beyond the art weapons hidden under their coats, fainted. Still able to breath with a napkin he placed over his thankfully stuffed up nose, Daniel reached for one of the waiters' weapons. He aimed it at the front door just as it was pushed open by a SWAT team bearing National Secret Service insignia, all wearing masks. They conversed amongst themselves while shooting bullets into the waiters, then dragged Lords Lawrence and Klause out separate entrances.

“What’s going on here, Mister Gronki?” Daniel asked their leader, whose voice he recognized.

“Business,” Daniel’s most trusted assistant answered, keeping his mask on while another member of the team sucked up the gas of still undetermined nature with a high powered vacuum.

“*My business,*” another one of the masked intruders said as he proudly showed his face to Daniel. “This is *my* country, continent, and world now!” Paul Devon declared proudly. Such were the last words Daniel Horowitz heard before everything in front of his disbelieving eyes went black.

CHAPTER 8

A hundred years ago, the National Pastime in Sheriff Sam Stark's neck of the woods was rodeo. Half a century back it was baseball. A generation ago football became what people watched and, health permitting, enjoyed most. On this, the first day after Paul Devon's inauguration as Chancellor, head of the Executive Branch of the government, the national pastime was now clearly and indisputably 'alphaing'. Competing for being the alpha in the room who called the shots for and on everyone else was a game that everyone could play, irrespective of physical health or physique. All it required was to have an opinion, big attitude and the God Given patriotic right to believe that everyone else was wrong.

It was a game that Sam had encountered in escalating doses ever since Devon won the election, exerted by Devon supporters on everyone else, as well as on each other. Such was contagious, even to Sam, who never intentionally put down another man or woman, as he would not accept it being done to him. Ever since putting the sheriff badge on his chest, Sam not once talked down to a stupid politician, intimidated a witness like the 'might is right' cops on the tv shows, or told a joke at a party where someone else in the room was the butt of the joke. But now, even Sheriff Sam found himself violating his own most sacred unwritten law of not throwing digs at people who couldn't take it. Recalling such transgressions the night before, he limped into his office, his back aching, his exhausted body in need of even an hour of shuteye.

"So, what did you say to Uma that made you sleep on the couch last night, again?" Pastor, and still officially Mayor, John Smith commented while helping himself to a fresh box of complimentary donuts delivered by the owner of the Sugar Palace Imporium, who had just recently squeezed his way through another health inspection. "Or by the way you're holding onto your back this time, sleeping on the chair," Pastor John continued, empathetically. "You must have really PO'd Uma this time."

"Intentionally, so she said," Sam said as he opened one of the jail cell doors, and let his aching ass hit the soft surface of the cot. "She got a whole bunch of rejection slips from record distributors for her music, and publishers for her new book. She said it was a conspiracy, because of what's in them. Then Uma blamed the inability to connect her books and music to the world to a 'karmic curse'. Translation into REAL world language, bad luck."

"And you told her that we make our own luck, Sam," John surmised, with his uncanny ability to make people say and face what they want to hide most.

"It was meant as a statement of fact! For her benefit, and education!" Sam asserted, finding the energy somehow to sit, then stand up to the accusation. "Like it or not, we live in a world where there's more competition than cooperation! Winners get the prize,

losers have to accept it gracefully. And if they try hard enough, and do their homework, losers can be winners too! Not my rule, Pastor John, God's law!"

"Or the whim of fickle voters who think with their fantasies rather than their brains? Or---"

"---It wasn't my idea to get half of the votes for Mayor, Pastor John!"

"MAYOR Smith, officially. Until the City Council, or the people, decide which winner takes all."

Sam first noted that John was more defensive than he had ever been, and vulnerable, one regret away from feeling defeated. The populist Sheriff, who did his job so well because he hated rather than liked it, also noted something about himself after informing the Pastor about the facts of life outside the Church. "I'm alphaing again. Trying to be the boss, and enjoying winning more than I should," he confessed. He laid his hand on Paster John's shoulder. "I'm sorry, my friend."

"Words that neither of us will ever hear from Paul Devon," Paster John related. "Particularly as for his first act as Chancellor, he requests that we do this."

Always Pastor and still Mayor Smith handed Sam a print out that had been faxed to his office that morning. Its letterhead was very official, its message very clear. "So, as a sworn officer of this Executive Order which is now Federal Law, you are requested to turn over all illegal residents living in our jurisdiction," John explained, as a Mayor rather than a Pastor. "To be done within the next six days."

"And if I'm away fishing? Or didn't see this memo? Or if I'm too busy going after REAL criminals?" Sam smiled back at John. He then turned serious. "You know how overloaded me and my staff are finding those three missing kids who may be in sex slave rings by now. Or dead somewhere, because doper shitheads are still selling designer drugs to unsuspecting kids, and adults---"

"---who doctors other than the one who we all value most can take care of," Pastor John interjected, placing his gentle arm on Sam's trembling shoulder. "The Law is the Law, Sam. Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's."

"And if we don't participate in rounding up 'potential terrorists' like Achmed Prasuhn?!" Sam blasted back. "Whose observance of his soon to be outlawed religion makes him a better Christian than you or I ever were. I wonder what would really happen if we don't obey this 'request' to turn in the hard working stiffs from South of our border who do the work our kids, including mine these days, are too lazy or stupid to take on? Including the un-papered migrant worker who rebuilt your church after the fire, then insisted on nothing for his labors except your blessing for his sick family back home. And my own official and unofficial staff who---"

“---Enough, Sam!” Pastor John said, holding his hand up. “I can’t act on what I don’t hear. And didn’t hear.”

“And if you, or I, don’t act on this democratically-elected ‘Executive Order?’” Sam grabbed hold of the Royal Decree from King Paul, perusing the more frightening details again. “That offers monetary rewards for those who turn in ‘illegal or undesirable’ aliens? I suppose page two of this Patriot Decree will say that not ratting on your friends who don’t comply with it can get you fined and imprisoned.”

“It already has,” John said, handing Sam that second page of the document. It was written in legalese that baffled Sam’s direct, no bullshit mind. “In essence, it says that we don’t cooperate fully with the new Feds, by next Monday, no Federal funding from them on Tuesday. Which means that we all fall behind on our mortgage payments on Wednesday. Cut back on going out to eat on Friday. Run out of groceries Saturday.”

“And pray that we render unto God that which is God’s on Sunday, even if it’s on empty stomachs,” Sam declared. He crumbled up both papers, then tossed them into the wood burning stove. “Now’s the time when you tell me these are the only copies of these documents in town, John.”

Pastor John bowed his head in silence, and shame. Sam consoled him with a man hug, during which he wondered if any cameras were watching, and if he would be prosecuted for ‘unmanly mannerisms’. Such was a mis-demeaner in Paul Devon’s campaign that could soon become a felony very soon.

CHAPTER 9

The world had become a perfect storm, locally and nationally. With regard to the latter, breaking news from the Capital showed full color pictures of the House of Commoner Representatives being burned to the ground at 7 AM Eastern Standard time. By 8 AM, an exhaustive search for the culprit had been completed. The photo showed him to be an immigrant from Achmed Prushn's home country, holding the same religious texts in his hand that the good doctor read from every day himself prior to *saving* numerous lives. The accused arsonist was killed on his way to the slammer by a fellow 'extremist terrorist leftist anarchist' who subsequently ate a cyanide jelly bean.

Uma described the tragic event that took the lives of several Pages and a handful of Clerks, but none of the new lawmakers, to her history class as a set up. She made reference to similar events that occurred in a past regime on the continent across the ocean which allowed the democratically-elected Chancellor of that country to become its absolute ruler. Said charismatic Leader brought his people and continent into a World War a few years later, along with a few holocausts that were legally allowed to happen along the way. Most of the kids listened. Some didn't. For reasons that astounded her, Uma was allowed to continue the lesson till the bell rang, then allowed to go home after the work day was done. For the next 3 days, no one shared her table at the cafeteria. She explained it to her students, Sam, and the ill-defined Creator who she was trying to figure out as 'being in most trustable company.'

For those three days, Sam worked around the clock dealing with other brands of shit. Some of the cases were, according to the new Federal lawbooks anyway, minimally-prosecutable misdemeanors, such as racial, treasonous and cultural slurs painted on businesses, homes and vehicles of those who disagreed with the present regime. Pastor John's church and car spared were spared, as was anything or place owned by Sam. A few threats were made on animals owned by 'terrorist protectors', 'leftist traitors' and 'Olivia Nelson agitators', but nothing was carried out. But even the stupidest and sadistic of low life in the town knew that Sheriff Sam had exerted far more vicious personal vengeance on ANYone who killed or tortured animals than the maximal penalty any legal statute provided. The pictures of 'accidently' removed ears, fingers, and scalps of the offenders had all been discretely distributed as a warning in the cyber-realm by Internationalist-Pacifist Uma's computer nerd son Larry, with her full blessing.

The Friday night meeting of the town council was well advertised. Everyone was allowed entry and given one ballot sheet. They were counted in front of a video camera that broadcast the findings to a parking lot that was packed to capacity this time. Issue one dealt with who would be Mayor. Issue two was proposed by the two candidates for such, its wording taken from a two hundred year old appendix to the National Constitution.

“So, do you think this town has the courage to declare its independence from the country, invoking their Constitutional right to refuse Executive Orders that violate local morality standards?” the first Mayoral Candidate asked the second.

“No,” Sam replied, sadly. “But it has enough brains to tell the Federal government that we don’t recognize their authority,” he continued to Pastor John as they both looked at the TV screen in the now rainy parking lot, as wet, cold and and anxious as the rest of the citizenry.

“Brains say we should accept the Chancellor’s authority, since he was lawfully elected,” Pastor John pointed out.

“People say different,” Sam replied with a satisfied smile, pointing to the final result on proposition two. “Paul Devon can stuff his orders for us to hand over folks he considers undesirables up his ass. Though the rest of his policies may still not be too bad. As a patriot, family man and smart businessman, Devon respects people who stand up for their rights.”

“And you’ll have to go on respecting his laws, and suggestions. With your job as Sheriff, which you are more than welcomed to keep, without pay, as that comes out of Federal dollars,” Pastor John continued as the result for the Mayoral position emerged onto the screen. “But as your new Mayor, again, I will do my best to see that your family doesn’t starve,” he pledged with a relieved, and somewhat alpha, tone.

“And my deputies, and their families?” Sam pressed. “Without us law enforcement officials, those who administrate laws are just throwing moral suggestions into the wind.”

Sam and John looked at each other as brothers rather than complimentary aspects of the same government. But each knew that the other had more power up his sleeve than he was showing, and for agendas that now seemed far more different than they ever were. Still, they were both confident that something could be worked out between them, as men.

That golden moment of tolerance, understanding and applied intelligence was interrupted by Tyler Jackson, who skateboarded his way at maximal speed past the sign declaring that mode of transportation completely illegal 24 hours a day. Without fanfare or further spectacle, he handed Sam a folded up piece of paper.

“You’re late for voting, Tyler, and still under-aged,” Mayor John said to lad. “But I do think it is appropriate to lower the voting age for local issues to, hmm. How old are you, son?”

“Old enough to know bullshit when I see it!” Tyler blasted out at the Pastor. He then turned to Sam. “I took a short cut to get here, and now wished I didn’t. For your eyes only, Sheriff. Before anyone else sees it,” he said, after which he went on his way.

Sam opened the paper, sharing its contents with no one. Not even Uma, who demanded to see it as she passed by. “Something I gotta check out, alone!” Sam said by way of explanation to his beloved wife and his, so far anyway, respectable Mayor. With that sneaked into his truck and drove away. He ignored the stop signs which he required everyone in town to honor for the purpose of safety, and the smell of pharmaceuticals on Tyler which he put aside for an even larger necessity.

CHAPTER 10

No one had ever seen Achmed Prasuhn without his turban or some other kind of covering on his head, even his surgical staff in the OR. Everyone in town had a theory about it. Pastor John thought that some of Achmed's spirituality incorporated Judaism into its religious observances, as Jews were always in the presence of their master, the Creator. Fiona Newman, the town's most sought after hairdresser, who wanted to get Achmed into her bedroom far more than into her stylist chair, speculated that it was because the good doctor had balding issues, which she was willing to ignore due to his being a '10' in every other aspect of his appearance. Uma speculated that Doctor-Professor Prasuhn had transplanted his vulnerable heart into the Core of his expansive brain, requiring extra protection from the elements, as well as the 'dull out' rays being sent down from satellite dishes which were always frying vitality and intellect out of unsuspecting citizens below. Both Uma and Sam's kids, when they believed in Santa Clause, cooked up the idea that Uncle Achmed had a radio transmitter on his head that sent messages to Old Saint Nick, said theory tested when they told the good doctor what they wanted for Christmas, and always got what was on their list under the tree.

The most popular mystery in the town was revealed to Sheriff Sam's eyes in living color as he gazed upon Achmed's very dead body as it hung on the ceiling fan in his office. Apparently, the good doctor was far from being follically challenged. His black hair was thick and long, embedded within his rope around his neck.

"One hell of a time to put a tie on for work, Achmed," Sam observed himself saying to the man who now, when it was too late, he realized had always been his best friend. "Or for your resignation from it," he continued, reading the farewell note again. "*To save everyone else the trouble of deporting me. And so no one will be able to extract information about my terrorist friends, who will bury this country soon enough*". In fairly well forged writing."

"Or his own, when this terrorist religious extremist 'doctor' could express he real emotions in print," the Provincial Police Inspector in the pitch black suit and even darker soul said as his men took more pictures of the corpse. "We caught him making calls to suspicious people," he continued, showing Sam the phone records.

"His brother and sister back home!" Sam blasted back. "About his parent's anniversary!"

"Which the family is going to celebrate by blowing up the Capital Building next week, or some other soft target out here," the still sun-glassed leader of the out of town investigative team continued. "Or maybe doing an overnight withdraw from the old copper mine here that I hear has enough uranium in it to make a two handfuls of nuclear

bombs.”

“And let’s not forget the diamonds hidden in the abandoned quarry that’ll enable them to fund state of the art counterfeiting equipment and make our money as useless as asswipe,” Sam smirked back.

“A plan we may have missed,” the Inspector continued. “Look into the permutations of that scenario,” he instructed his assistant, Third Grade Specialist Wes LeBlanc, now clad in a finely tailored uniform, who only two days ago had been Apprentice Deputy to Sam. LeBlanc’s trademark ‘hippie cop’ earlobe length lockes was now shaved down to the wood along the sides, the visor on his hat hiding his eyes as he typed in the details on his computer.

The possessed procedural ‘minds’ of these District Cops and those who they now cajoled, enticed or intimidated to be like them clearly could not detect satire, or appreciated humor. Their love of procedure as they photographed, dusted and sampled the ‘suicide site’, reminded Sam of Customs Officials whose sole duty was to keep bad guys and dangerous shit from entering his country’s borders. Even in the most liberal of times, they could hold you in the room between one country and the next indefinitely.

Sam recalled the time he and Uma came back across the line after attending a music festival north of the line. The hay lingering in his pockets from farm work at home was thought to be illegal weed, and the dope smelling dog seemed to be attracted to the smell on Uma’s coat. It took four hours for the head Customs Clown to be convinced that the specially trained intact male canine was sniffing the pheromones of Uma’s un-spayed female who had been in heat. Sam’s jacket, a one of a kind century old garment given to his Grandfather by a dying Shamen, was torn apart, then handed back to him with an emotionless ‘have a nice day’ from the self-important official.

Sam knew that making any more jokes or puns, or stating any more REAL facts about Achmed Prashn would be either unnoticed, or very noticed. Keeping his mouth shut and eyes open was clearly Sam’s only way to figure out who had the balls and brains to kill his best friend and make it look like a suicide. By the graffiti on the walls of the clinic that had been accumulating for the last few days, in many styles of handwriting, the murderer could have been any one of twenty citizens, perhaps from his own town. Whoever painted and edged the slurs against Prashn’s race, religion and political convictions was driven by blind hatred. Or was it unbridled fear? Sam’s experience overseas in national policy enforcement and, on a good day, defense of a compassionate morality, taught him that fear often preceded hatred, which then resulted in bloodshed. Ignorance fed to unsuspecting, emotionally-movable souls as falsified facts, inevitably led to cruelty that never stopped.

“So, *what is your philosophical rationalization for all of this?*” Sam asked Achmed with his eyes. “*You said neither Nature nor God gives you a problem without a solution, my good and pain in the ass when I need it friend.*”

As for what that solution was, Sam knew that he would need more facts to counteract the lies that seemed to be propagated by everyone around him. When dealing with crime, Sam's golden rule was to follow the money. Maybe that trail would eventually lead to finding justice for Achmed, whose murders just may have been those documenting his 'suicide'. It wouldn't be the first time that suspects who knew nothing, or said nothing, were disposed of after their interrogation.

The most dangerous part of it all was that Sam found himself thinking about Achmed's past, and affiliations overseas, which to him seemed irrelevant. Such suspicions were based on political discourse of course, which Sam considered as fact when he voted for Paul Devon. Such was a mistake he would never make again. Yet any modification of Devon's policies had to be done legally, as Sam could not envision a country, or world, ruled by anything except law.

Sam always prided himself on being able to see if someone was lying to him by the look in the eye. As for the perhaps illusive case of Achmed, that was not possible, as terror overtook him at the time of dying.

"So, what do we do about the 'doctor' Prashn's relations, Sir?" Wes LeBlanc asked his new boss.

"A bullet between the eyes!" the plain clothes who bore no nametage on his chest replied, looking angrily at the fresh wound on his right hand. "Then do an autopsy. It wouldn't be the first time that one of these ragheads sent their dog into a crowd of patriotic citizens with a bomb planted up his ass."

Wes took his newly issued gun in hand and aimed it Achmed's now very vocal canine companion, locked in a kennel whose bars were soaked with blood.

"No!" Sam said, putting himself between the business end of Wes' hand-held assault weapon and the barking dog. "You know Faruk," Sam pleaded of the usually inept, chronically-down-on-himself trainee whose fascination with power he should have taken more seriously.

"And we know you, Sheriff, for the moment anyway, Stark," Wes' new boss, and perhaps role model interjected. "You've got a smart head but a soft heart. They don't go together."

"But maybe they should," Sam replied to the hard-assed Inspector, while looking into the eyes of the lad who he thought was never capable of hurting anyone except himself. "And besides, maybe I can interrogate Faruk. Find out what he knows about all of this," Sam dared to say. "My wife Uma is an expert in dog speak," he smiled.

No one else was smiling, particularly Wes. "Step aside, Sir," he requested Sam.

"I can't do that," the Sheriff who valued honor far more than law asserted. "Anymore

than you can shoot Faruk, whose only crime was being himself. And doing what he thought was right.”

Sam had played poker with Wes many times, and always knew if he was bluffing. This time, he wasn't. He kicked Sam aside, then aimed his firearm at the dog. Sam punched him in the belly, then took away his firearm.

“Before you consider aiming that firearm at anyone of us, or yourself, think about the consequences, Sheriff, for the moment anyway, Stark,” the Inspector said in a calm, procedural tone. “You value your family, is this not correct?”

“And my country,” Sam asserted. “And my community. Far more than any of you do, or can.”

Following through on the terms of the unspoken deal Sam would not back down from, he unlatched the cage, threw the weapon onto the floor, and took the wounded pooch into his arms. “I'll send you the veterinary bill for this one,” he said to the Inspector as he pushed him aside and walked out the door. “You can send it to your bosses.”

“Who will ignore it, just like they'll eventually ignore you if you don't see reason,” the Inspector said, from a place of functional reason.

Sam defiantly gave him the finger.

“I am sorry about what happened to your friend,” the Inspector continued, with enough sincerity in his voice to make him seem somewhat human.

Sam self-observed his feet stopping dead in their tracks. “*Maybe there is still enough humanity in all of us to survive whatever this is, and to work together as one nation, one family, one Cause,*” he considered. Such was something Achmed would have latched onto. But before he was able to formulate the words that would reverse the chain of ignorance and cruelty that this election set in motion, his cell phone rang. His dream of leaving his job as Sheriff had just been postponed, yet again.

CHAPTER 11

“This is not legal!” Sam said as he read the arrest warrant at the Independence Cafe. “And as Mayor, you're supposed to do something about it, besides demanding that I carry it out.”

“Look, Sam,” Pastor and now Mayor John Smith said while helping himself to another handful of fries. “It’s either you bring her in, or the Feds do.”

“I’m not afraid of them,” Uma mused, leaning against the cushion of the booth brushing aside her still waist-long hippie mane, proudly displaying her “Devon: Not My President” button. “What’s the worst thing they can do to me for this bullshit charge? Deport me back to my ‘Om’ planet?” she continued, placing her hands together in Pagan prayer.

“Uma, the charges are serious,” Mayor John said to her as a Pastor. “We have you on tape saying slanderous, treasonous and threatening remarks against the Chancellor, and the country.”

“And ‘we’ is you now, Herr Commander Smith?” Uma shot back. “And you too?” she said to Sam.

Sam’s silence said ‘yes’ to Uma. She didn’t take it personally, as it was just about business. The business about enforcing a new law that abolished the Constitutional Right to free speech in the guise of National Security. Uma understood the freedom versus security dilemma, as it had plagued most of her life. Indeed, she had passed up multiple chances to be an expressive musician on the road in exchange for a safety job as a teacher, then a mother, then a common law wife to Cowboy Sam. Still, she there were two things she needed to know about the charges being brought against her which now carried minimum sentences of five years in the pen, without parole. She posed the first question to Pastor John, who was clad in a new Devon-styled suit with a National flag in the lapel, both of which he had previous sworn was ‘rendering too much to Caesar’. “For the love, or failing that, respect of Jesus, tell me why you’re serving me with these papers instead of the Feds, John?” Uma inquired, gently, inviting him to provide the truth rather than intimidating him into a safe lie.

“Because I still care about you, Uma,” he related, gently extending his hand to her shaking wrist. “And wanted to convince you to consider the strategy we talked about to get you off.”

“Confessing I was wrong when I was right!?” she blasted back, pushing the Pastor’s hand back into his chest. “Or saying I was on mind altering medication? Or saying that

Achmed Prasuhn's gurus brainwashed me into thinking that Paul Devon is the Anti-Christ, which he is!"

"And the second question you wanted to ask," Sam interjected, reading Uma's mind.

It was a hard question to ask, but one which Uma had to get an honest answer to. "Who got me on tape saying those things to the kids in class that needed to be said?"

"Tyler Jackson, if you need to know," John related.

"In exchange for what?" Uma inquired of her most valued and powerful convert, and the one who came to Sam with the news of Achmed's 'suicide' at his own risk.

"I don't know," John said. "And it's not relevant to your case."

"But it is to my sanity, and whatever morality we still share, or used to anyway," Uma said. She pulled out her computer and typed in Tyler's name. Her jaw dropped when she saw the most recent posting. Sam put his arm around her. She accepted it, for reasons that had nothing to do with logic, while he read out the details.

"So, Tyler has a new internet show, funded by the National Broadcast Company," he noted. "An 'edgy' show that goes beyond politics."

"And avoids talking about anything political, unless it's to say good things about Paul Devon, no doubt. That will no doubt replace the comedy shows that made me, and even you, Sam, laugh at Devon, that showed him for what he was," Uma replied. "Are those other comedy personalities going to be bought out as well? Or...no...they'll play ball with the system so they can integrate with it and change it from within."

"Such would make sense, from Tyler's perspective," John proposed. "And, perhaps, he did consider points of view other than the ones that you, Uma, made super cool, when you---"

"---Go to hell, John!" she blasted at the Pastor who actually did fear the existence of the place. "Which you're creating with your buds very well right here on earth."

Uma turned to Sam, offering him her wrists. "Now it's time for you to take me in, Sheriff Stark. Unless you want to join me on the right side of the bars."

Sam hesitated, just long enough for two of his deputies and some Law Enforcement Officers who she didn't recognise to finally enter the diner. They congregated around her table. "She my prisoner," Sam informed them as he cuffed her, hard. "She's my responsibility, and embarrassment," he continued, as if he meant it.

On the way to being escorted to Sam's jail, down the street from the Cafe, Uma expressed herself in song. Never had she sung the Freedom Now anthem from her

younger days as a Campus Protester more loudly, and artistically. She invited 'any free souls still alive' to join her. A few of her students, friends and neighbors did, until they were requested to shut their mouths and avert their eyes by the business ends of the Law Enforcement Officers.

CHAPTER 12

The National newscasts dealt with local events, weather disturbances and heroic stories about soldiers overseas who honored the flag and their families by their presence and actions. Comedy shows on all networks said nothing about anything political, restraining even from Olivia Nelson digs. Foreign programming went down to almost nothing, in keeping with Paul Devon's mandate to create jobs in the country for his countrymen and no one else. Even Sam Stark, who liked his stand up comedy straight, bland and generic, found the 'jokes' coming over the 6 inch portable TV on his desk at the Cop Shop boring, lifeless, procedural and simplistic as he glared at the tube, Faruk slumbering at his feet.

"Even Faruk's snoring is more interesting than Ansel Nolan's routine tonight," Sam's daughter Emily noted. "Didn't he used to be the lefto Commie who could make even you laugh at his digs at right wingers because his humor was so, like, ya, know, totally Alive!"

"And didn't you used to be a responsible seventeen year old who spoke, like, ya know, totally proper English instead of city mall brat talk?" Sam replied, gazing next at the early Christmas ornaments she had hung on her jean jacket. "And those political accessories? An 'All I want for Christmas is my country back' button? And the other colorfully-crafted slogans you've pinned on yourself that will make you a target for----"

"---Uma made them for me," Emily interjected, having been only the fifth time in her life she had ever interrupted her father. "And I made this for her," she continued. Her stern face broke into the trust-in-Life-and-God wholesome smile that had been her trademark and passion. "I know I'm not as good a cook as she is, but like both of you told all of us, 'what ya can't do with talent you can create by determined effort'."

Sam helped himself to a sniff of the cherry rhubard pie that had always been Uma's favorite. "Smells magnificent," he said, actually not having to lie about such this time. "But, you may as well take it back and share it with your brothers and sisters."

"ALL of your brothers and sisters, who aren't related by blood. Who are hungry tonight and who next week will join the millions of homeless who Paul Devon say deserve their fate!" Uma screamed out from her cot in the holding cell around the corner. "But if you want to join me here, on the FREE side of the bars, you, your brothers and sisters and everyone else is very welcomed." She then burst into another chorus of 'Freedom Now', this time in the language of Achmed Prasuhn's native land. Faruk joined in with heartfelt howls.

“I’m not stopping you from joining your mother in that hunger strike, Em,” Sam said to the former teen leader of the “Make Our Nation Great” campaign in town. “But the kind of people you’re trying to convince will let you starve to death before giving an inch on their policies or beliefs,” he gently warned his favorite biological daughter. “Or put you in a locked psych ward after they force feed you with a stomach tube. And take my word for it--stomach tubing is an exceptionally painful experience.”

“And Mom knows that?” Emily asked, referring to her step-mother for the first time with such an address.

“She does!” Uma blasted out between choruses.

Emily looked at Sam for affirmation of Uma’s assertion.

Sam shook his head ‘no’.

“Over half the town says they’ll sign this petition to get her out of here, and back into the classroom,” Emily said, pulling out a draft of such, still smelling of printer ink. “Back home, me, Rob, Louise and Larry drafted this. Even the people who disagree with everything she says, say they’ll defend Uma's God given right to say it.”

“A noble and necessary thing to do,” Sam said, reading the petition carefully. He then glanced at Emily’s new Christmas jewelry. “All I want for Christmas is my country back,” he read from the featured item. “A sound, noble and essential wish, with one problem.”

“Everyone’s vision about what country they want is different, Dad?” replied the red-haired, perhaps still virgin, who could beat the stuffing out of any boy who wanted to take advantage of her.

“Two varieties of such now,” Sam replied, sadly regarding the country he thought had outgrown being polarized on every issue according to party lines. “Yeah, two brands of ‘Right’ seem to be the only entrees on the menu now,” he continued, gazing at the uneaten cherry rhubarb pie on the table filled with other gustatory offerings brought by Uma’s friends, neighbors, students and even a few fellow teachers to make her temporary incarceration less painful, and lonely.

“And which entree of Right do *you* want, Dad?” Emily pressed.

It was a question Sam had been agonizing over ever since Paul Devon’s first Executive Order. The self-made rancher sure as shit didn’t want the 'big government takes care of everybody on its terms' mandate that was in power prior to Devon's reign. The self-made Rancher who didn't accept welfare of any kind, even when he needed and deserved to collect it, still felt that the first, second and third duty of every citizen was to his country instead of any foreign power, no matter how enlightened it was. He looked at the other side of the room where the flag of the country he fought and nearly died for

was proudly on its post, wondering what it still stood for.

“I see,” Emily blasted out as she turned around to leave. “That flag means more to you than your family, your conscience, or the world, you cowardly---”

“---No!” Sam replied, grabbing hold of Emily’s shoulder. “I’m just...”

“...Undecided, Dad?” Emily said, this time as an understanding parent rather than a rebellious child. “You told us that no decision is worse than a bad decision.”

“I did,” Sam replied, feeling a mirror placed into his face.

“But?”

“I’m still afraid of making the wrong decisions, or strategies,” he related, and confessed. “I hope you understand what I’m saying here, Em.”

“I pray to God, if He hasn’t been elected out of office by the District Electoral Voting process, that Mom does!” Emily blasted back, after which she, grabbed hold of the petition. “Mom! I’m getting this petition signed by EVERYONE in town. Then I’ll be joining you in there!”

“After you find someone to take care of the animals at the ranch,” Sam said. “Someone you can trust who won’t kill, sell or torture them to get back at you, your Mom, or us.”

Reality hit Emily straight between her bloodshot eyes, most particularly when Uma’s singing out the open window finally tore the lining out of her throat, causing her to cough.

“I know, they have bigger guns than us, but we still have bigger hearts,” Sam replied, after which he took pen in hand and signed the petition, then put Faruk’s paw print onto it. “A write in vote from the other side of the grave from someone we should have listened to a long time ago,” Sam said. “Now, you take care of the animals at home, your brothers and sisters, and yourself.”

“And you, Dad?” Emily replied. “I’m worried about what you’re thinking.”

“So am I, but if I tell you, I’ll have to kill you,” he smiled back.

Emily left, assured once again that Sheriff Sam, and Dad, would take care of everything, one way or another. Faruk threw him a ‘get real’ stare.

“I know, my friend,” Sam said said to the canine. “I don’t know what to do either. But in the meantime, maybe this would suffice. Sam cut a generous portion of the pie and gave it to the dog. Still, he wouldn’t eat. “I know, I miss Achmed too,” he said with his mouth and a hug of desperation.

By the time Ansil Nolan's 'Comedy Entertainment' had finished on the tube, putting his audience as well as probably him to sleep as well, Uma gave in to exhaustion on her cot in the cell. Sam eased into one of those 'watch sleeps' he had learned to do when in the military, his back erect, a rifle in his hand, and his eyes more opened than closed. To help him get maximal rest, he chanted one of Uma's mantras, thinking that maybe five minutes of awake meditation could substitute for five hours of slumbering shuteye. Two minutes into that state of super-rest, Sam was awakened by a knock on the door.

"She's sleeping! And Uma has more books than she ever had at home, and enough vegetarian food to feed an army of International Pacifists," Sam barked out, thinking it to be another late night visitor. "Can you come by in the morning?"

"It will be too late by then," the visitor said. "I need to see Uma, and talk with you, Lorry."

The tone of his voice was desperate, which was expected by Sam in such times. But what he didn't expect was for someone other than Uma to address him by the middle name he entrusted only her with it. Thinking who could have spilled the beans on the name for the middle initial that he kept secret from everyone, especially his Army recruiter, Sam approached the door slowly. Through the peep hole he could see it was a solitary elderly man wearing a sweatshirt with a hoodie that he kept over his head. By the way he crouched down then ducked when two passing cars broke the silence of the late night street, he clearly didn't want to be seen. He knocked again.

"It's open," Sam said as he unlocked the door. Very much armed with both his rifle and his wits, Sam took a position on the side of the door, allowing the visitor entry. "I see you've come empty handed," he commented to the visitor who smelled more like a homeless bum than a down on his luck private pharmaceutical salesman.

"I need your help, Sheriff Stark," he said through a throat dryer than the pastures that had been baked to dust two summers ago. He limped his way to the water cooler, then helped himself to three hastily swallowed glasses of water.

"Want some food to go with that?" Sam offered with warm Western hospitality, still holding on to his firearm and his guard. "But I suggest you eat it slow," he said, offering the thirsty and emaciated hobo fruit gelatin pie and the blandest bread on the table, then assessing what else would be most free of fat and spice.

"I know," the visitor said, eating from the plate Sam prepared for him. "My aunt died of pancreatitis when they liberated her from the camps. Minutes before my uncle, in the adjoining compound hobbled over to see her for a long awaited embrace."

"The camps?" Sam asked of the well-spoken, and apparently highly cultured man who sported fresh bruises on his face and bracelets of deep, dark, blood-encrusted flesh.

“In the last war, not this one,” he said. Before Sam could ask him to explain what he meant, the still hooded visitor peaked a look at Uma. “She’s just as beautiful and beautifully rebellious as I remember her,” he said with a fond, yet guilty smile.

“You’re an old friend of hers?” Sam inquired, wondering about Uma’s secret past when she was in college. “Or maybe a current one?” he continued, considering the worst explanations for her often clandestine present when Uma came back a day or two later than the out of town music teaching workshops and concerts went to had ended.

“I’m a studyier of people, and demons, who escaped with this,” the visitor said by way of explanation, handing Sam a hastily-bound file from under his torn, blood-soaked shirt.

“P. Richardo DeVanchez?” Sam said as he read the summary of the psych evaluation of the subject of the study. “Whose name I don’t recognize.”

“But whose face we all tragically, do,” the visitor replied. He turned the page with his left hand while slowly using his injured right to feed his weakened body with much needed sustenance, swallowing each bit with extreme effort. “Known now as....”

“...Paul Devon,” Sam painfully concluded, He quickly skimmed over the data and read the speculations. “A delusional narcissist with a sadistic sense of humor and persecution complex. Thinks he’s God, or is in competition with Him. An uncontrolled libido. Believes in an Adlerian model of the world whereby if you aren’t number one you’re number nothing. Incapable of empathy. Sexually aroused by seeing others suffer or in conflict. Displays a scientifically un-explainable ability to make people agree with him, no matter what he says, which is still being studied.”

“Who I, we, still think can be healed, or cajoled into doing the Right thing,” the visitor said, now with a voice that sounded more like a royal scholar rather than one of those off the grid conspiracy survivalists who Sam knew were hiding out in the hills, even in the best of political times.

“By maybe an exorcist,” Sam replied with a chuckle.

“Or someone more accessible, and trustable,” the visitor said in deadly seriousness, pointing to Uma. “Because of her special abilities, talents and brain wave chemistry.”

“Uma’s gonna sing Paul Devon into being the kind of leader that *everyone* in this country can work with, or at least live with?” Sam mused. “A great idea, but even Santa would say that’s trying to make a sway backed, foundered, dude-string mare into a champion roper, jumper and---”

“---We need her,” the visitor interjected as assertively, responsibly and compassionately as Sam heard from anyone in a long time, including Uma. “We’ve done research on her too,” he continued, after which he pulled out another file. “She’s the perfect candidate, according to *my* research anyway.”

Sam was baffled with the neurological lingo, but he smelled that whoever had researched what was in Uma's head, they were no dummies. The visitor explained that Uma was, given her current activities, profile, and brain-body classification, 'the perfect vector' to get into Paul Devon's defective head, and hurting heart. But as the pile of psycho-political babble escalated past Sam's neck, he put up his hand.

"Two questions before you continue," he said. "Who's this 'we' you keep yapping about?"

"The real people at the top," the still unnamed visitor boasted. "The ones who used to be anyway," he continued with down-turned eyes, overtaken by guilt.

"Okay, and now that you haven't answered that question, the second inquiry," Sam said, after which he pointed the business end of his rifle at the visitor's head. "Your name."

"Daniel Horowitz," he replied, fearlessly and shamefully.

"And what do you want to do with my wife?"

"That depends on what she's willing to do with, and to, herself."

"And if she decides to turn down this offer?"

"She and you will have to live with what I am living with now. And die with it, painfully and shamefully, and soon."

Sam didn't know why, but he felt compelled to believe this enigma whose face and name he didn't recognize. For the moment anyway.

CHAPTER 13

“So, how did I really die?” Uma asked the onlooker above her as her first cohesive thought when she woke up from a deep sleep that seemed far too real to just be a dream. He, or she, gave no answer. Uma then noted that she was in a sunlit tent someplace wild, wildernessy, but not so wonderful by the smell of putrid and burnt flesh around her. “And what body am I going to be assigned to next?” she asked, having seen such places many times, in several alternative consciousness states.

“One not too different than the one you were using,” a bearded man clad in a faded, weather-worn white robe replied with a warm smile under his large nose said as he reached down to touch her trembling hand.

“Can I have a look before I jump, or get pushed, into it?” she inquired of the smiling Vision above her she had been hearing ever since she lost consciousness of the world as she had known it. “I’d like to see what I’ve become, and who I have to be now in this new 'life' you, or karma, has assigned me.”

“A very good idea indeed,” the Onlooker said, instructing a long, fair-haired youth to fetch a tray for him.

Uma’s thoughts went forward into her past. She wondered what was said at her funeral, feeling denied her guaranteed right to hang around the ceremony to blow wind into the trees or whisper something more easily understood into the loved ones who still had to endure being in the land of the living. But what would she say that would really inform her children, step-kids, students, friends, neighbors as well as her most beloved horses, dogs and cats? If anything, she would demand that Sam, who had arranged her death by ‘something believable and martyrable’, tell her what he had in mind when she died. But maybe the bearded, Semitic man with the Jewish schnoze and the faded white robe could tell her. She decided to call the Man who seemed to be calling all of the shots in this place behind the scenes by name.

“Doctor Daniel,” she yelled out to the man who brought her to the Community Camp of Outliers who had the good sense to be hiding out from Paul Devon’s new Regime, or were driven from their homes and families by his henchmen. “I want to see what I look like now,” she said, after which she felt her hair, or rather the shortage of it on her head. “Or do I?” she continued, feeling cheeks that were not her own, a forehead that felt tight, and lips larger and tighter than she remembered her was.

“We didn’t have to do a lot,” an tired, old woman in surgical garb said as she brought a

mirror over to Uma. “Most of what we did was to make you look...younger. Using techniques I developed with my colleagues. And, one day, was considering having done on myself,” she continued in a very upscale accent from the other side of the Big Pond.

Delaying a look at who she now had been transformed into, Uma looked up at the surgeon with what seemed to be a prematurely aging face, perhaps because her eyes were so hopeful, youthful and defiant. “And your colleagues are...?” she inquired.

“*Were*,” she replied with mournful eyes. “Dedicated healers who gave their services to others according to need, rather than want, monetary wealth or social status,” she continued, rage behind her ocular portholes.

Uma needed, or maybe just wanted, to know what happened to the surgeon’s colleagues, but clearly it was time to ‘woman up’ herself. The now-dead soul mate of the sheriff she had trusted with a scheme beyond any of her readings or imaginations lifted up the mirror, then slowly opened her eyes to the image it showed her. “So, Barbie?” Uma said to her new self, fighting with her just-shy of the shoulders shagged bob, a style she was always fascinated with but had been scared shitless to have done on her. “I didn’t know you were in me.”

“Tanya,” Doctor Daniel said. “Your name is Tanya. The woman who Rick Devon was crazy mad about when he was in his twenties. Who he never got under the sheets.”

“But always wanted, and needed to please,” Uma said, trying on the dominatrix voice that Doctor Daniel said was nearly identical to the dream babe who got away, or who left young Devon before she could be conquered. “I like this accent ‘Paulie’ Devon was fascinated by and obeyed,” Uma said playfully in her best Slavic Natasha dominatrix alpha voice. She pushed herself back on her feet, sasheeing around the room as a woman who had no responsibility to please or serve anyone except herself, something completely new to her life as Uma. “You want me to command Paulie to do what first? Maybe we make him take off his pants in public, so everyone can see that his penis is as tiny as his brain?” She smiled back proudly at Doctor Daniel, and the surgeon, awaiting their praise and applause.

Doctor Daniel was not impressed. The lady surgeon seemed disappointed, saying something in an across the pond language to her colleague. Dan replied back in another tongue from that continent that Uma didn’t recognize.

“And as translated into the language of my un-cultured, upstart country,” Uma replied in her own voice. “I need to do a whole lot more work to be convincing?”

“The first step of such would be stating that as an assertive statement rather than a question,” the foreign born lady surgeon replied.

“Something I’ve told my students many times, and, I now have to tell myself,” Uma replied as herself. She looked in the mirror, trying to see Tanya in the reflection. Not

being able to feel her as well would cost Uma and the world everything. “So, where do we start?” she asked her two coaches, in her best Tanyaese.

Daniel seemed to appreciate the effort. The lady surgeon was a little less disappointed.

It was a start, in a long journey that would have to be taken one giant leap at a time. But there was one question Uma wanted, and needed to know. “What happened to the real Tanya?” she asked. “And why is she coming back after all these years?”

To those questions, neither Doctor Dan nor the surgeon-psychologist had answers. Such intrigued and scared Uma, both at the same time.

CHAPTER 14

Sam Stark designed and lived his life according to several credos. One was 'I do not intentionally trespass upon another man's rightful property and life, and expect others to do the same.' Another was, 'do no harm whenever possible, but if you have to, respect your adversary as you hope he respects you'. A third was the oldie but goodie-- 'blood is thicker than water'. That immutable law of physics was violated when Sam took another look at the young man sitting at his desk at the Cop Shop.

"I told you, it was my decision, and I had to make it," Rob Stark said as he flipped another page in a manual Sam once used as his Bible, but now considered an instrument of the devil. "I would have thought you felt proud me for following in your footsteps when I turned eighteen. Defending my country against killers who only now we're being told about. Including the last Chancellor who was working for foreign terrorists from 'Doctor' Achmed's country all along."

From his perspective in the now locked jail cell, Sam looked upon his freshly-shorn son in his Army uniform as he read on with determination and fascination the recently revised National Military Manuel. It was re-written by a General who had been dismissed for incompetence and fabricating information two years earlier, with a stirring forward by Commander in Chief Paul Devon, whose only military experience was in a suburban high school when his rich father ran out of ways to reason some sense into his bratty son. "I'm glad you finally discovered the joy of reading," Sam finally said after a painful and reflective silence. "But it's important to smell the words and check out the data before you incorporate them as fact or truth, son."

"My name is Third Class Specialist Stark, Sir. Not 'son'," Rob replied as he turned another page, his firearm within a millisecond's reach of using it against the disident he was charged with guarding. "And you are my prisoner, Sir."

"And still your father."

"Who accidently left the keys to your Patrol Truck in the cell with Uma Petrovitch, then faked her death in a truck accident, Sir."

"An accident that I told you, your brother and your sisters about, in confidence!"

"In matters of national security, family confidences are expendable. Particularly now that we are at War, to defend our borders against dangerous and powerful aggressors, Sir."

Paul Devon had declared war on three nations abroad which had oil, minerals and water that he didn't feel his country should have to pay for, Sam had explained to his son Rob several time already, along with the hard fact that all first strikes were made by Devon's forces. And that one of those 'aggressive' nations had shared a border with Sam's own country peacefully for the last century and a half. "Why?" Sam asked his son, regarding what had happened to him, and to the father-son bond they used to value about all else.

"Why what, Sir?" GI Rob slurred out of the corner of his mouth while helping himself to another bite of roast beef taken from the food bank collection bin by new federal law, as feeding the homeless and hungry would 'enable the poor into staying poor', according to Devon's official statement about that mandate. "Why what, Sir?" GI Rob inquired again of his meek, weak and deluded father.

"To start out with, why did you put on that uniform and forget your obligations to, and love for, your family?" Sam asked, as gently as he could.

Rob finally put down his reading material, then lectured to his father in a loud, condescending voice. He referred to the burning down of the Commoner House by the extremist who was killed by his buddy, who then killed himself, but this time was a twist that sounded like it came straight out of Paul Devon's delusional yapper. He then related warped versions of old stories relating to bombings and mass shootings done by lone wackos during the last administration's watch.

All the 'facts' Rob spurted out with patriotic fervor made every country other than his own seem like a lurking in the wings aggressor, and everyone living there as the enemy. Sam recalled how well the military tried to instill that view of 'feriners' into him during basic training, but also took note that at that time, most of his fellow grunts didn't take it all that seriously. Or maybe they did.

Hoping that Rob's ranting about how Paul Devon was going to save the country from itself was a phase, like his thankfully brief period of wearing suits and wanting to be a big city lawyer when he was eleven, Sam recalled his part in all of this. "*Yeah, I voted for Paul Devon, but not for this,*" he said to himself. "*And not a son who would turn on his own family. A son who is now my enemy, that I have to fight with everything I still got inside of me.*" The thought of a civil war within his own country was something Sam had prepared for many, many times. But a war within his own family was something else.

Finally, Specialist', aka PRIVATE, Rob concluded the lesson. He went back to reading the manual, enjoying the colorful read of the forward by Paul Devon. He helped himself to the healthiest desert in the reclaimed food bank cart, no doubt so he could feed his body so it could become a maximal fighting machine in the cause of 'freedom'.

"I see that the you're eating something with more nuts and nutrient in it than sugar, Specialist Stark," Sam noted. "As I well remember, when I was in active service of my

Commander in Chief as a Sergeant, an Army does move on its stomach.”

“That is does, Sir,” Private Rob replied, seeming to be addressing a fellow veteran.

“But it doesn’t have to be without some enjoyment, Specialist Stark,” Sam said with a respectful bow.

Specialist Stark looked up at Sam, and seemed like Rob again.

“Some rhubarb jam, in my left drawer,” the deposed Sheriff said to his Provisional replacement. “With strawberry preserves mixed in. I still don’t know what the difference between jam and preserves are, but I know they can make even the pancakes I made you eat when I cooked breakfast taste edible. Even good.”

Specialist Stark allowed his stern face to crack a smile as he seemed to recall the memories of enduring his father’s cooking on the ranch, salvageable by his step-Mom’s converting the leftovers into something that you’d want to eat, even if you weren’t hungry. “This jar?” Rob asked his father.

“My private stash, that I use to make what I eat eatable,” Sam replied more as a comrade than a father. “A gift to you, and to...whatever we both still can value.”

Rob dipped the banana nut bread into the jar, and took a small bite. He found it to his liking.

“Come on, Specialist Stark, eat like a man, not a pansy-assed queer whimp!” Sam bellowed out. “You deserve to enjoy something you like before being deployed.”

Taking ex-Sergeant Sam’s advice, Specialist Rob gobbled up half of the banana bread and all of the preserves. He felt satiated, then sedated. Before he could figure out what was going on, he fell into a sound sleep, dropping his weapon and his guard.

Sam knew that Rob would get shit for sleeping while on guard duty, and even worse after he lost his prisoner. He felt badly about drugging his own kid with special jam made by the druggie anarchists up the mountain, after telling him again and again the drawbacks of using medication not prescribed by a responsible doctor. Reaching for the emergency key to the cell that he kept in a secret compartment in the cot, Sam let himself out of his jail, took hold of his son’s rifle and addressed his happily slumbering face, which had the same aura as it did when he was dreaming about life outside the ranch at home, or getting his own spread one day. “I gotta do what I gotta do, son,” Sam wrote on the rap sheet which had been prepared on him. “And when you see what your new family is all about, after they’ve had their way with you, you still have a family in us.”

Sam left the note in Rob’s front pocket, hoping it would not be seized by his bosses. “See you on the other side,” Sam said by way of voice, after which he grabbed hold of a bridle on the wall, his hat, and as many weapons as he could carry.

CHAPTER 15

The Enclaves preparing to spend an unusually cold winter in wilderness land officially owned by the government or property loaned to them by anti-Devon owners had no shortage of enemies. Everyone who chose to live away from the cities and towns which were now run by Devon's new 'freedom' protecting laws, and viscious enforcers, had left a lot behind. Some who had come to the camp had escaped imprisonment in the various facilities which officially didn't exist. Each escapee had a price on his or her head, collectable by anyone who decided to turn them in to the authorities. By all reason, the renegade rebels, called treasonist potential terrorists, had a lot to be afraid of. If the upcoming winter didn't do them in, the roving bands of Devon's 'freedom troops' would do the job. Yet, that fear brought these misfits together in ways no one would have thought possible.

Those who were rich and those who were poor shared whatever food was available equally. Former White, Blue and no collar workers pitched in to do whatever work was needed to build the shelters and protect such from being detected. Each gave according to their ability and took according to their needs, without any law requiring such. No one could be called a ruler. Every man was a king, every woman a queen, but no one wore a crown. And most unpredictably, those who had been judges, critics and stars in the 'what's cool, acceptable and artistic' competition back home were now active collaborators with those who had been below their social station. The latest evidence of that lay before Daniel Horowitz' eyes at the evening play, which became a musical in which those who had been award winning vocalists shared the stage and songs equally with tone-deaf amateurs whose only performances were to themselves in the shower.

"And they all sound magnificent together," he said to himself as he took another bite of stew prepared by the new camp chef, a displaced housewife and mother whose need to be appreciated as a preparer of food far surpassed her ability to cook anything. "But you dogs will eat well tonight, Faruk," he whispered to the canine who Sam Stark insisted accompany Uma's drugged body to the site that had to remain unknown to anyone in authority, even Sam at the time.

Faruk nibbled at the concoction containing some kind of meat and what had at one time been green vegetables, then looked back up at the third show that night to be put on, wagging his tail in time with the music. "Man and woman kind all united against a common enemy," Daniel muttered softly to the newest two legged member of the community next to him. "Like in the Outer Realities tv show about a group of scientists

who elect one of their number to be transformed into an alien leading an army of other ETs in an invasion of earth,” he related, of course not telling his guest that such was a plan almost put into action by himself and the other members of the ‘trio’. “Maybe democracy is only really tested when a common threat of some kind threatens to decimate everyone,” he continued with a sense of very private pride, after which he adopted a more humble tone. “No pain, no gain. Indeed maybe there is a Higher Wisdom than all of us that needs us to go through more pain than ANY of us envisioned possible to become Enlightened.”

“An interesting theory,” very much ex-sheriff Stark replied, throwing the lion’s share of an apple towards his horse. “But there are two questions I want and think I deserve to know before I throw in with you.”

“How your wife Uma is, Sam?” Daniel replied.

“*Where* she is doing,” Sam grunted back.

“I truly don’t know,” Daniel replied, self observing himself speaking from the heart rather than the head. “She completed her Tanya training faster than I thought she would.”

“And how well did she do?”

“Acceptably.”

“That bad, huh?”

“Your wife is adaptable, intelligent and caring. And we gave her special training in not letting bullshit baffle her brains, be it from master of believable deception Paul Devon or any of the assholes and/or idiots he’s delegating power to now so he can enjoy playing the theatrical role he bought for himself,” Daniel discoursed, and shared. “Our Uma will be alright as long as she doesn’t get baffled by his bullshit.”

“Or yours?” Sam inquired. “Because if anything happens to Uma, it’s your neck I’ll put into a noose,” he blasted at his new ally.

“We’ll all hang together if this and the other plans don’t work,” Daniel replied. “Plans that as I’ve explained to you, in confidence, depend on all of us trusting each other and working with each other. Holding back no secrets.”

“From the pot that calls the kettle black,” Sam replied, with an ambiguous smile, after which he got up and moved his supper and bedroll next to his horse. The steed had not yet assimilated with the other horses in the herd, just as its owner hadn’t.

How Daniel wanted and needed to tell Sam about his real past, and hopefully still-present connections to data bases and people abroad only the Committee of Three knew about!

That committee was now, for better or worse, a committee of one, unless Lawrence Wentworth and Klaus DeVries-Schultz had been lucky enough to escape Devon's Secret Service as well. But for the moment, Faruk was the only life form Daniel could trust with such. And, perhaps, the Deity in and above the stars whose existence the former Chief Mogul without a title was still not convinced of, and whose Nature was still suspect.

CHAPTER 16

Soft, subtle and reserved was not something Paul Devon did when on the political stage as a Chancellor. He claimed that he never spent a dime of his own money on his political campaign or public functions at which he had to be the center of attention all the time, but so many people gave him freebees. Maybe it was the 'them that's got gets' rule that applied in politics as well as electrons around the outermost shell of an atom, but whatever Paul wanted, Paul got, and with minimal output. Indeed, his body motions were as minimal as possible. The fastest gait he was recorded as undertaking was a 'brisk power walk'. His elbows always remained at his side. His hand motions were restricted to waving his juxtaposed fingers to motion people to do a job, his index finger pointing accusingly at the nearest scapegoat when that job went wrong, and the third digit upward to any reporter who dared to question his motives, methods or manhood.

It was the latter which was Devon's major appeal to the public who elected him, and his Achilles heel. Such is what Uma thought about when she snuck into the wedding of Paul Devon's daughter as one of the solo performers hired by his underlings. The forged wedding invitation she had been provided with got her through the front door of the palatial Devon Towers Ballroom as Tanya Lazanski. The imprints on the assortment of fifty thousand dollar limit credit cards got her backstage without a hitch. But it was the Wedding planner who held Uma behind the curtain just prior to her self-assigned appearance on stage.

"This song," the still stunning thirty-something blonde bombshell wearing the latest fashion bearing Paul Devon's third trophy wife's name commented to Uma, after looking at the music Uma requested the band to play. To the right, left and behind the bombshell gatekeeper stood three expressionless very male security guards nearly twice as big as her, and better armed than any of the other lobotomized or paid off goons Uma had encountered in the way in. "I don't recognize this song, 'Tanya'," she repeated to Uma.

"Paul will," Uma smiled back confidently in the best Tanya.

"You mean Chancellor Devon," the wedding planner with the perfectly-crafted face reminded to her fellow XX chromosome bearing fellow human, being far more powerful and intimidating than her station permitted.

"Give an aging-despite-her-best-efforts Barbie a little bit of power and she'll turn into a Bitch. Particularly if an old fart like me can out Barbie her," Uma thought, but dared

not say. Perhaps because Tanya could say it better, as it was her who taught Paul Devon the art and thrill of sticking your bootheel into someone's dignity, and heart.

Suspecting the worst for her still beloved, and probably highly paying, boss, Barbie Bitch motioned for the head Security Guard to search Uma, starting with a pat down around the waist. "Come on, it's no fun for either of us if you don't fondle the mountains to the north, and the valley to the South," Uma said with a flirtatious grin to the penis bearing goons.

Barbie Bitch nodded in approval for such. While it was happening, Uma took note of the first, then second guard who did so. "Unprofessional but understandable behavior," she said with a big Tanya smile regarding the woodies emerging between their built-like-trees legs. After doing so, Uma snuck a hotel room key and time into the pocket of each of the goons with a personal note that make each of them smile.

"She's clean," the head guard informed the Barbie Bitch.

"And this song, Tanya?" the small framed woman who apparently resented being cast in a role older than her self image. "I don't recognize it, or your name."

"That is strange. Everyone else who knows what real music is does," she said, after which she grabbed the music sheet, and turned around to the security guards, who were doing their best to hide their smiles from Barbie Bitch. "Everyone who is cool knows me, and this song, yes?"

"You bet," goon number one said.

"One of my favorites. Very cool tune," good number two added.

Uma took back the sheet music and handed it to back to Barbie Bitch. "Perhaps you have heard it in translation?" she said. "It's been the top ten of every REALLY cool list. It's been recorded in four different languages, all of which, as we all know, are Chancellor Paul Devon's favorite." Uma sung a few bars, in her own dialect of Atlantian, inviting the goons to join in harmony.

"Yeah...I suppose it is," Barbie said, not wanting to be considered uncool, or un-informed. People like her, after all, could not handle being left behind by the crowd, as they had not yet discovered their ability to thrive outside of it. "Break a leg, Tanya," she said after handing her back the music.

"An third arm," Uma replied, inventing yet another trend the Barbie would feel compelled to follow. "Break a leg is so yesterday, but it will come back some day, as everything does."

Having mislead, and no doubt humiliated, Barbie Bitch, Uma handed the music for the band to a production assistant, moved to the on deck spot adjacent to the stage. The

'above all do no or minimal harm' Uma felt good about it, somehow, or maybe it was Tanya who was feeling good. Allowing herself one more moment as Uma, rather than the persona she had to become in order to be convincing with such, she did a fast rewind of her own life, wondering what kind of harm she did to those who deserved it, to those who didn't deserve it, and to those who loved her despite herself. "This one is for you, Sam," Uma muttered regarding the latter category. "Whatever it is," she continued as she looked up at the stage light, blinded by the bright luminence, but never more determined to jump off the cliff and fly this Mission to success. Trying to ignore, of course, her fear of heights and uncertainly.

The song was composed by Daniel's specially hired neurological musical composers, incorporating Devon's personality profile classifications, funding history, attendance at concerts, and personal recordings he had owned. How all of that was obtained was something Uma asked about, but got no clear answers to. What Uma was sure about was that the billionaire puppet had mutinied his Committee of Three masters. Everyone in Paul Devon's life now was either a conquest, an opponent, or a subservient ally. All except Tanya Lazinski, who Daniel said was a combination of Devon's first, second and now beloved, according to all reliable and political sources, third wife, Belina.

Belina looked picture perfect next to Paul Devon at the parents' table. She liked the first verse of the devotional love song almost as much as Paul did, until the Chancellor ignored her, pulling his hand away from hers. By the second verse, 'Patriot Paul' pushed aside his daughter when she asked for a dance. By the third verse, the Chancellor who promised to 'let no detail go unattended to' under his watch dismissed a General with a worried face bearing an envelope, which Devon handed to his Vice Chancellor. By the fourth verse, Paul Devon was won over. He rose up and applauded Uma, introducing her as 'the next star of stage, screen radio and whatever other mass media' his team of geeks could come up with.'

While the thunder of applause drowned out personal animosities as well as reason amongst the wedding party and its guests, Paul Devon walked up to the stage, dismissed the rest of the bands, and personally gave a new, supersized microphone to Uma. "Welcome home, Tanya," he said with a cordial bow, the first time Uma ever saw him lower his head to anyone. "Where were you?" he inquired, more like a kid who lost his mother at the department store than a lover who had been jilted by his beloved.

Uma answered with another song, which Paul allowed her to sing on stage, alone. During that second song, the third and fourth, Uma directed Tanya's feelings of passion, pride and connection to Paul Devon's eyes. The lyrics were about a hard working self-made visionary who was a hero, turning a weak country into the strongest in the world, with occasional digs built into the libretto that ridiculed the weak, deluded and degenerate.

But even narcissistic asshole-idiots elected to the position of a god like Paul Devon had to obey some laws of nature, and matrimonial protocol. The finale was reserved for Paul's daughter's favorite band to take the stage, for a farewell song which sent the new

bride and her hubby off to their honeymoon. Paul's request that Tanya join them was accepted as a commandment.

Uma never thought she would ever wind up within two feet of Jon Englebert and his Dragonians, who she had worshipped ever since she sprouted breasts.

'Professor-Philosopher' Englebert had been the champion for free thinking anti-establishment 'love and compassion is all you need' fans everywhere. Here he was, playing for a Capitalist who wanted to establish a 'might is right' competitive mentality into every aspect of the nation's life. Whether such was a due to coercion, choice, or maybe a strategy similar to what Uma was doing, Uma would consider at a later date. For the moment, Paul Devon's heart was in Uma's, or rather Tanya's, hands. Getting his mind into such would be a lot harder, and riskier.

CHAPTER 17

Delivering sermons on Sunday morning for still-bachelor Pastor John was something he always enjoyed, and did very well, even if there were more mice hiding behind the walls of the church than people in the pews. Now that the nation was in a Rebirth of Moral Righteousness, the pews were filled with citizens who now declared themselves as Christians in service of their Country, as well as those in uniform. Given the way they distributed themselves on this cold and windy Sunday, it seemed like the citizens were being watched and listened to by their military and civil protectors. Pastor John watched from the pulpit as the entire congregation sang a new composition that combined praises to the Lord, dedication to the Nation and prayers for the new Chancellor. A Visionary portrait of Paul Devon and his family now hung on the back wall of the church, the Nation's flag at the left side of the altar. "*At least the sign of our Faith is still the Cross and not the dollar sign,*" John assured himself as he opened the first page of the sermon that had been re-edited that morning, by someone else's hand.

Whose hand it was didn't matter. How he, or she, broke into Pastor John's Office was a point of concern. Reading it as it was with enthusiasm would bring more money to the Church. Reciting it dispassionately or in its original form could cost John his position a Mayor tomorrow morning, and his Government's, rather than God's, given right to minister to people's souls.

But the soul that worried John most was not his own. "*Go on, we're all waiting,*" Provisional Sheriff, and Reservist First Class Rob Stark said with his eyes to Pastor John from his position in the middle of the crowd. His uniform was pressed, all of the brass and salad on his chest polished, and he stood up straight when the ceremony required so. Such could not be said of Robby Stark prior to his enlistment in the Armed Services, who had to be dragged into Church and when he did, wore an oversized suit coat, weather-worn torn jeans and a clean bandana around his neck.

John perused the pews for other the other Starks, taking note of a very angry Emily. Next to her was a terrified Louise Petrovich, and computer nerd twin brother Larry, who thankfully still knew the art of maintaining a poker face. John's favorite Stark wasn't there. The Pastor who believed that the solution for every bad thing in the world was in the Good Book had hated it when he opened the floor to 'testimonials from the heart' and was confronted by a discourse of the Mind from Uma. Uma had claimed that Jesus AND Buddha encouraged their disciples to honestly question their Spiritual Teachers, and to expressive with their emotions rather than burying their Passions in the coffin of

‘conventional morality’. What Uma believed seemed to change every time she opened her yapper, but then again, she defended it by saying that ‘if your faith and belief in what is Beyond and within yourself doesn’t keep changing, both of those gifts die a horrible, lifeless death’. Uma also had said that ‘we never really know what we believe till our beliefs are tested or forged by actions.’

Oh how John wished to have one of those stressful Sundays than the compliant one where he was being promoted as the Voice of God, in the service of the Nation of course, through the Nation’s new official religion! In the last two seconds before he had to obey the current mandates, John looked at the flag that his son overseas was risking his life to serve. Then he looked over the congregation of lads not old enough to be in uniform and those who recently became of age to be conscripted into as ‘volunteers’ in the three new wars that would stimulate patriotic fervor, as well as home-grown economy. One of them was with a country John’s grandfather had immigrated from.

“Pastor, are you alright?” John heard from a lone woman’s voice in the congregation.

“Touch of the flu,” he said to the always-overdressed, blisterless-fingered ‘farm woman’ who the new owner of the town bookstore. The new and improved establishment featured cheaply available printed material on how to make money, be a good Christian and have a happy sex life. Along with flowery romance novels championing the ‘gentler’ aspects of womanhood, simplistically written heroic tales of manly men who fight for their country, and biographies of the new Chancellor and his new staff.

With that, Pastor John took in a deep breath and inspirationally proceeded with the sermon, ‘rendering unto Caesar’ publically so that he would be able to somehow clandestinely render unto God that which was God’s.

CHAPTER 18

The deal was easy for Tanya to put into place, a lot harder for Uma. *“Let your man think that every good idea that you suggest to him is his own invention and Vision,”* she recalled her mother telling her when Uma had decided to move her and her two then very dependent babes in with the Westerner whose religion, politics and taste in music differed so much from her own. Uma’s not taking that heartfelt (and to be truthful, effective in her time) mother’s advise is what kept Uma and Sam so together in ways that mattered, as the struggling rancher was far more evolutionary evolved between the ears than any of the over-educated suits who determined the price of cattle, wheat and horses.

It was always a mystery to Uma why Sam had actively supported Paul Devon, as the new Chancellor seemed to represent all of the values the Sheriff by necessity and rancher by choice common law husband never applied in practice. It was Sam who always saw that people who were hungry got fed, considering those he helped as Comrades rather than dependents. Paul Devon thought of everyone who he decided to help as a fortunate slave, or someone who would pay him back big time later, on his Devon’s own terms of course. Sam overpaid his taxes on good years, as he felt that it was his obligation to pay his fair share to the country he loves. Billionaire Devon paid minimal or on some years no tax, saying ‘it’s good business’. Environmentally, Sam always considered Mother Nature as our master, and protector. Devon considered her a hand maiden we can extract from and rape at our own choosing. Maybe it was the Devon audacity, charisma and common speak humor that Sam had liked when he was a reality host superstar that somehow hooked him. A man’s man who always called his own shots and never showed you any vulnerability.

But as Uma was finding out every moment she voluntarily spent with Devon, his ultimate fear was to not be liked. He was even more terrified of being rejected. Though he dressed in power suits with lifts in his shoes that made him appear like a giant as well as a finely groomed Neanderthal, Devon was still a little boy in short pants who had lucked into becoming the king of the playground. Uma heard it in Devon’s voice as she arose from his bed, having been fully clothed under the sheets, and never having been violated by him in his very private suite.

“So, when will we get, like, really intimate, ya know?” Paul Devon said as he commenced to put on his trousers, one leg at a time. “I’m Chancellor now who...” he continued, having just realized he inserted his right foot into the left pant-leg. “My new tailor!” he blasted out, tearing the ‘made in home country’ garment into pieces. “He

fucked up this suit. I'm gonna have him fired! Deport him and his whole family!"

"You have that right, but as a Chancellor, you have an obligation and opportunity to educate him," Uma suggested, as Tanya. "A Great King allows his subjects to be innovative, not imitative. Makes his kingdom stronger by diversity rather than sameness. And is compassionate to all not because he is soft hearted, but because what goes around does always come around. And that the ultimate methodology of a highly intelligent mind is effective compassion. Win win situation all around, for everyone, my dear Paulie," she smiled alluringly at her mark, while retrieving another suit for him to wear.

"And what about us, my I assume, dearest Tanya?" he asked, still in his underwear, this time without a woody. "I do have feelings for you. And know, or hope, that have feeling for me."

"Which is why we have to keep our relationship, as loosely translated from my country, 'between the ears'," she said, after which she gently stroked the Mighty Devon's shaking cheeks. "Is far more satisfying, for the most powerful man in the world who keeps his power as long as he rules wisely, and in service of his people, who, for now, require certain standards. And of course in service of me, as I serve you and your best Visions," she continued, now seeing a third leg pop up under his BDVs. One which, Uma mused to herself, would require a specially tailored three legged suit, bearing Paul Devon's name on the label. "You keep your eyes open this time," she continued moving in towards his lips.

"Why?" Paul asserted, defensively falling back to his theatrical self. "He who has the money and the power makes the rules. I'm Paul Devon!"

"And I am Tanya, asking for you to be bold enough to be open to a new opportunity," she countered.

The dare worked. Uma, as Tanya, kissed Devon on the lips, while looking into his eyes. Using her grandma Svetlana's power of witchcraft, Uma blasted the words she had said to Devon into his eyes. He seemed to open some doors. "*After the rest of them are open, I know there is a mind in there I can re-educate. Maybe even a heart I can open up.*" Uma told herself. *Right Granny Svetlana?*" she pondered.

The answer in Uma's imaginations came back from grandma Svetlana as an affirmative 'yes'. Such was the same kind of answer that never steered Uma wrong, and now seemed like one of the key ways to set Uma's country, and world, right.

CHAPTER 19

For those who chose to remain in regions of the country still under Paul Devon's control, things didn't get any worse. They actually went a bit better, now that the Chancellor was delegating more to the people under him so he could have more private time away from family to 'contemplate even greater plans'. An unexpectedly large number of houses were built for the homeless, most of whom had lost their homes due to Devon's real estate deals, and were spending the winter in apartments bearing Paul Devon's name. Plans to convert the National Parks into oil fields and coal mines were put on hold for the Winter and Spring, with short term grants given to alternative energy research scientists to figure out other ways to make the Nation both prosperous and energy efficient. The scheduled commencement of the three foreign wars Devon had deemed necessary to 'cull the world from dangerous and deluded misfits' had been put on hold as well, and it looked like peaceful relations were about to be re-established, according to the easily and now always upbeat commercial media outlets.

"So, it looks like Uma's doing her job, as planned," Daniel commented to Sam Stark at the daily public viewing of the Evening News and National Report in the Enclave General Purpose hut, sharing whatever heat was available from the wood stove and roadkill surprise, according to the new chef who claimed to be a hunter, but whose skill at the Enclave Camp shooting range left much to be desired.

"A job she agreed to doing, but I didn't," Sam replied, as an ad for Tanya's Talent Search came on the air on the big screen tv in the General Purpose hut. "Uma always said that any artist who's paid what she's really worth had to put out to somebody to get there."

"Uma being in bed with Paul Devon is a small price to pay for saving the country and the world," Daniel replied as he attempted to swallow a bite of what now had to serve as food.

"Said as someone who's not his husband, 'Daniel'," Sam shot back, re-kindling doubt for his new Comrade's identity as well as his real reason for being part of the Resistance.

"Uma's also probably saved your son Rob's life as well, and not sending him out for deployment somewhere dangerous, Sam. If I had a son who's in Rob's position, I'd---"

"---be just as ashamed of him as I am," the ex-Sheriff grunted, pushing aside his ration

of food and the years of trust he had for the son he had always considered the most natural inheritor of his ranch, Visions and essence. “But thankfully Rob’s now stupider than he’s brave, or clever. It’ll keep him from figuring out that his blood sister Emily and his step brother Larry are keeping underground internet news AND entertainment sources we can trust alive, and on the air, and getting to the right people.”

“The right people being us, or them?” ‘Daniel’ asked in that professorial tone that made Sam respect and resent him, both at the same time.

“Both!” Sam replied, with pride. “Particularly when convictions get put into comedy and satire,” the incurably responsible protector/father continued, holding back for the moment his envy at those who could be humorous, witty and funny, like Uma had been. Or so he hoped she still was.

Faruk, who despite his age and debilitated condition, was still part of the animal population in the camp that ate rather than was eaten, nuzzled his way to Sam’s frostbitten feet. “Your Pa, Achmed, will be avenged,” Sam pledged to the dog as he fed him his ration of food.

“Along with every other occupant in Devon’s internment camps that officially don’t exist,” Professor D. pledged as a very real Daniel. “And every child ANYwhere who goes without bread or water because Devon’s kids eat steak. And their parents who die of curable diseases because Devon asserts that if you don’t have enough money for health care, you don’t deserve to have it. And...and...and...” Daniel’s anger at Devon converted into rage directed at himself. He whipped off his belt with his permanently-scarred-in- captivity right hand, and beat the stuffing out of his left forearm.

Sam went to stop him with his arm, as did several others in the tent, but Daniel held them all back. “Please! I have to do this! Justice requires it!”

“Just as long as you stop before you reach bone, alright?” Sam requested. “We all need you and the connections you still have if we’re going to get back our country and the world,” he directed at Daniel, using very similar words the guilt ridden Jew had said to Sam when he was thinking of doing worse to himself for having voted for Devon.

After a few painful moments of private self assessment, so it seemed anyway, and three firmly delivered lashes that drew only a minimal amount of blood, Daniel turned around to the congregation. “I’m sorry, for this and a lot of other things,” he said, losing himself inside himself, yet again. “But perhaps there is something positive to all of this, as I see all of your tortured, brave and intelligent faces,” he said to the group, after which his shaking lips broke out into a redeeming smile. “All of you have overcome tragedy with the ultimate victory---comedy, satire and wit. The jokes you have made about Devon and his appointed staff of hero-saviors. The quips you all have come up with about who they are, and the evil principalities they all currently representing. They made me think, and laugh more than the highest paid and most talented comics I have seen anywhere. Like...”

Daniel pointed to each of the Enclave Resistance Peace Fighters, reminding them of a joke, quip or witticism of brilliance and vitality they had come up with under various circumstances. Some were followed by a small volley of improvised additional comments that got even the dour and humorless Professor to come up with something funny.

“So, this sense of urgency seems to be leading to something that seems to be Alive, big A,” newly-circumstance-appointed Professor Sam thought to himself, while voicing those words to his Vice Professor, Faruk. “Mankind, unlike dog-kind, is a lazy species that sometimes needs some adversity to commit itself to democracy, compassion, intelligent achievement and basic morality. That adversity makes us stronger,” he observed himself surmising, just as another insight walloped him in the brain box. “But...it would have been easier and less harmful for everyone if we got stronger in the heart and the head by going to the gym and the library.”

Faruk threw another one of those ‘you sure said it as it was, partner’ bark in Sam’s direction. He needed that imagined or perhaps real assurance now, more than ever. Most particularly when he got a text on his cell phone, in a code his stepson Larry and he had devised during said stepson’s Galaxy Detective phase, that cyber-phobic Sam thankfully still could translate.

CHAPTER 20

“So, is this everyone you could save after the governmental forces did another midnight national security raid, Emily?” Sam asked his now only non-estranged biological progeny regarding the inhabitants in the stolen stock trailer and two rental trucks she and her two step siblings somehow got through the blockade around their home town.

“The best we could do, Dad,” Emily replied, apologetically, as her usually calm father angrily opened the doors, shone his flashlight inside and counting the frightened souls inside of them.

“We didn’t have a lot of time,” step bro Larry said as he threw his fifteen year old geek body out of the cab of the rental truck, nearly braking his ankle when he hit the ground.

“And not a lot of money to get them out,” a still shell-shocked Louise yelled at her brother, remaining in the driver’s seat of the second rental truck. “It took every penny we had or could steal to bribe the superintendent of the holding facility. ”

“It’s called an auction mart,” Sam barked back as he took count of the rescued souls, assessing who was still able to travel by their own steam and who had to be transported by truck to Enclave. “And Frank Bransten knew these were our horses, cows, dogs and llamas,” he continued as he noted that two cows were shot. Dharma, Uma’s favorite horse had whip marks on her back and fresh lacerations that cut into the right front and left hind down to the bone. “I’ll kill that cowardly, greedy bastard! After I kill your brother Rob for letting this happen.”

“The Kilinostan Home Guard may have already beaten you to it,” Emily related, handing her father a printed copy of the e mail sent to her the night before said printer and the ranch-house in which it was housed was laid waste by machine gun fire, then gas canister fire bombs. “He was deployed three days ago, sent to the front lines of a war that started yesterday. Where for every one of 'them' we killed or captured, we lost ten of our own, permanently.”

“That we reported to you and the other Enclaves on the internet,” Larry said.

“Which we didn’t get any word about,” Sam replied. “Paul Devon’s favorite place to have a war. Your mother related to us, IN CODE, that maybe you should have used, that

Paul Devon made peace with the Kilinostanese. Better for business was the reason for his decision.”

“A decision that Mike Lance, his National Security Chief, who Devon just put in charge of the particulars of the deal, decided was inappropriate given new ‘intel’,” Larry related.

“Intel that had nothing to do with intelligence, or integrity,” Sam grunted out. He went on about how Devon was not only the biggest idiot ever to be spawned by a human womb, but the channel for primal evil. What he said and how he said it reminded Emily of her step mother Uma, who she felt closer to now than ever. A woman who Emily pretended to mourn at her ‘funeral’, who she feared was now dead for real, under an assumed name, having been snuffed or smothered by a monster who Emily once considered an eccentric, entertaining and expressive patriot.

Imaginations and realities could not have been worse, though there was one thing Emily now held onto. “There is a silver lining to all of this,” Sam said in the fatherly way he had always used in the worst of times in the golden times when Paul Devon was merely an entertaining Reality TV celeb. “We’re all together now,” he continued, embracing his three children with his long, strong and loving arms. “And your mother, she’s survived me and all of you. I’m sure she’s okay, doing what she can for the Cause, and us.”

Louis and Larry needed to believe their step-Dad’s hopeful projection, as much as he himself did. Emily did her best to pretend that she believed it too. Maybe this time, majority vote, and belief, would result in the elected reality. That is, unless the Basic Law of What Goes Around Comes Around was still in effect, and not repealed by Devon, or his newly empowered cabinet of wacko egotists who all had their own warped agendas.

CHAPTER 21

Uma was always under the impression that the Chancellor was the most powerful office holder in the country. It baffled her that every member of Devon's cabinet did whatever he (as there were NO 'shes') wanted to. It terrorized her that now, without warning, everything those non-elected idiots and assholes did was against what Devon wanted. It horrified Uma when Paul Devon would look at what was done, or not done, with his directives with his standard reply of 'I'm the smartest person in the world, and I hired the right people, so they must be doing the right thing'. After saying that, or variations of such, Paul Devon would turn to Uma and ask her how about what she thought about politics, the cuisine he provided for the dinners he had at least four nights a week, her most recent love songs that he guaranteed would be top on the charts, the quality of her various luxury lodgings, the behavior of the mesagenistic secret service goons protecting her, and of course, himself.

Uma answered as honestly and effectively as Tanya would allow her to. She found herself wondering if Devon, or a microphone inserted into her bedroom by someone else, had heard her muttering her real thoughts and feelings as Uma, having observed that her nightmares were getting more intense and personal. Or if anyone was intercepting, or perhaps replacing, the coded messages she sent out to husband Sam, handler Daniel and her son Larry.

This most recent clandestine 'philosophical workshop and Platonic love nest' was just outside the National Capital, looking over the river that coursed through the clean, white buildings that shone back 'scholarly' to the sunlight when it showered it with heavenly rays. "I could write a song about what I see, putting between the lines what I smell," Uma muttered to herself when seated at the piano bench, letting her fingers search out the chords would lead her to the right melody. "Like the pollution in pure lakes, that were not put there by mistake, because reality's turned fake, can't we please fix it for our children's sake," she sang to the accompaniment of four diminishing chords that led her to the lower register of the keyboard. She stopped herself, and looked up. The mirror captured her reflection and wouldn't release her from it.

"If you're in there please do tell me," Uma continued, singing acapella, in her own diction rather than Tanya's. "Did I do all this to keep my kids free. Or is it something

that I did for me. Why do I like most of this, I need to see.”

The mirrored reflection of Tanya, decked out in the latest fashions provided for her by Paul Devon, appended by a shorter but sexier doo which he said he said would please him and her fans, offered no reply. Neither did the eyes that still belonged to Uma. “You really are a selfish bitch,” Uma said as herself to the reflection of the musical star she had become in Devon’s hands that she could have never been on her own. “Both of you. A mother should think of her children first, the Revolution she decided to walk out on twenty years ago second, third or---”

Uma’s attempt to discourse with the various parts of herself that she was becoming was interrupted by a knock on the door. She looked at the clock on the wall, noting the time had passed faster than she thought. “Coming Paul,” she said, as Tanya, priming up her hair and adjusting her ‘mammary ballons’ en route to the door. “I was just trying out libretto for pop opera I’m experimenting with,” she continued, dropping articles as it make Tanya’s discourse sound smarter and her diction more sexy. “For new television show that features you again as star---“

“---Or Starlette?” Devon said after Uma opened the door. Belina Devon, that is, who was dressed to the nines, looking as hot as a thirty-eight year old ex-model ready to be traded in for younger eye candy. “So, this is one of the places where you and my husband write music together,” she said as she marched into the room.

“Eh, yes,” Uma said, bowing to the former beauty queen and sometimes actress on stage, and the boardroom. “Is place where we work on compositions to inspire people to be better citizens and happier people, Madame First Lady.”

“Please, ‘Tanya’, or whoever you really are or were to Paul back in the day, call me Belina,” the usually soft-spoken, subservient First Lady blasted back at Uma in a working class accent she never used in public. “If we’re gonna have a cat fight over Paul, I want to know who’s blood I’ll be spilling on the floor and whose hair I’ll be pulling out. But before we start with the preliminaries, why did you come back, after all these years? ”

“I had to work some things out,” Uma replied, as Tanya, trying to sound as vulnerable as Belina obviously was. “But I swear, me and Paul. We were never intimate.”

“Between the sheets, maybe,” Belina continued perusing the private papers Uma had spread around the room. “But between the ears, and those earrings that you’re wearing that I know you didn’t buy,” she continued, trying to decipher the chicken scratch that was Uma’s handwriting. “But that’s okay. Even if you’ve fucked Paul’s brains out, it’s what he’s supposed to do. He is the Chancellor after all.”

“Yes, I am!” Paul Devon proclaimed as he appeared at the doorway. “And Belina, weren’t you supposed to be speaking at a Fund Raiser for Hungry Kids?”

“It was cancelled,” Belina replied, in her First Lady’s voice, carefully tailored in to sound other Continental in a home-country charm school she paid for with inheritance money she stole from her siblings, according to Daniel’s most reliable data. “By Steven Parks. Who gave me the afternoon off because he had a meeting with the Military Security Agency.”

“An agency I never heard of, but, hey, Parks is a good guy, who knows what he’s doing, because I hired him,” Devon said as he walked into the room like nothing had happened. He opened a bottle of scotch from the liquor bar, poured himself a glass and took in two large sips that seemed more like highly palatable gulps, after which the chairman of the board took over the unanticipated meeting. “Belina, tell me who told you about this place?”

“You have your secrets, I have mine. It was the arrangement that we had and you said we could still keep when you became---“

Devon silenced wife number three with raising of his hand. He took another swig of scotch, then pointed to Uma. “Tanya. Tell my dear wife what you are doing for me, and for our country.”

“Turning you into a lazy, soft-hearted nebbish, who is delegating away all of your power,” Belina interjected before Uma could answer. “And worse, you’re becoming a---“

“---- practical and expansive thinking Visionary who is doing the best Right thing that is possible,” Uma blasted back at wife number 3, feeling oddly like she was already wife number 4.

“Until you came along, Paul did whatever he wanted to do, not what he had to do, or was suggested to do,” Belina spat back at Uma, afterwhich she turned to her still legally married hubbie. “What do you want to do, Paul? Besides enjoying seeing two women fight over your arrogant, over-rated and pussy-whipped ass?”

Upon being accused of being pussy-whipped, Paul Devon turned into a lion. He grabbed Belina by the collar of the dress that he bought for her, clenched his fist, and prepared to belt her in the face he overpaid to maintain as young as biologically possible.

“No!” Uma self observed herself saying, thinking a moment afterwards that she could have captured Paul Devon on her own camera phone battering a woman like his Armies were beating the stuffing out of innocent populations of civilians overseas. Such would be grounds for exposing his vicious nature to every woman in the Nation, including the wives of the men who could use such to kick him out of office. Now, Uma had to come up with another plan, utilizing a different portion of Paul Devon’s complex soul, which was still not understood by anyone, even by himself. “Paul wants to do the right thing, even when he is being goated into doing the wrong thing,” she said. “That’s what makes him a man.”

“A little man who wants to fuck you more than he wants to hit me,” Belina said. “Right, little Paulie?”

“Me and Tanya have an arrangement,” Paul said. “Which I choose to honor.”

It was the first time the ‘would do anything to make the best deal for me and my legacy’ Chancellor used the H word. Uma felt that indeed she had not only indoctrinated his mind, but opened his heart. That is until Belina, still being held by the collar, opened up something else in her loving husband. “A real man would fuck this bitch. That’s the man I married, and the man this country elected as their leader. A man who does what he wants, not what he’s told. Especially from a woman who he’s still trying to prove himself worthy of. So, Chancellor Paulie, what do you want to do!?”

Uma observed, Chancellor Devon’s back as he lowered his fist. He let go of Belina’s collar, and gently buttoned it back up. Then he kissed her, on the lips. When he turned around, Uma got a clear view of the demon inside of Paul Devon’s face that was every thinking woman’s nightmare. It was made worse by the sadistic grin on Belina’s face. “I want to watch this,” she commanded. “As long as you want me to, of course, Chancellor Devon. No, *Lord* Devon.”

Possessed by demons he had never hired, nor knew existed, Devon grabbed Uma’s dress with his right fist. He then tore it off while Belina took hold of Uma’s, using it to film the event. “No!” Uma said to Paul, then Belina.

“Which means ‘yes’ ‘yes’,” Belina smirked as her hubby Paul grabbed hold of a knife she slipped to him, no doubt a blade she intended to use to skin and scalp Uma with. What Paul did with it was far worse after he threw her onto the couch, then whipped off his tie and secured it around her mouth.

Uma felt the Devon’s Neanderthal-sized hand pull on every layer of clothing covering her shivering body, threatening with his growl to cut into her flesh if she resisted. She felt the cold air blowing onto her sweat-soaked skin, hoping that it was sweat and not blood that made her feel wet. The wetness got worse as Paul Devon pulled down his zipper and inserted it into Uma’s anus doggie style, then vulva.

“It’s just an initiation rite, Tanya,” Belina said as she sat down on the most comfortable chair in the room, a drink in one hand, her camera phone in the other. “The first time he treats you like a dog, the second like a lady, the third and fourth...a magnificently win-win experience with many fringe benefits,” she said with shame and pride, “Like showing a horse who is master before it becomes your best friend...one of your best and trusted friends anyway,” she continued, sounding more like a slave sister voluntarily sharing the benefits of a deluded, manipulatable and super-loaded master.

Physically, the ‘initiation rite’ was a replay of how Uma conceived her two beloved children, Larry and Louise at the grubby hands of her first husband. It took a lot of

courage to leave D. Henry Nutsford III, whose father could have bought Uma any musical career she wanted. In this case, given what still could be done with the most powerful man on the continent, and maybe the world, leaving her first husband, the courageous act now would be to stay.

CHAPTER 22

For the last century and a half, conflicts between the Nation and its officially sovereign country to the North were restricted to who had the right to have the best hockey team, who produced the largest number of quality comics per capita, and if football should be played on a large field with three downs or a smaller one with four. Through a series of blunders, accidents or perhaps manipulative business maneuvers regarding natural resources, Sam Stark's country was now at war with the nation that his Grandfather had called his home and native land prior to his emigrating south to start a family with his Grandma. The rancher who learned to ride before he effectively learned to walk always dreamed about being a liberator on horseback, aspiring to live up to the legends and facts about his ancestors going back six generations. He never thought he would be doing it from a foreign country and against the one he pledged allegiance to every day of his life at the commencement of the school day.

The proud, large and sparsely populated country of Adanak had less than 1% of the military toys and weapons of mass destruction that its richer, fatter and less educated neighbor to the south had, and could have been easily conquered in a week by the weaponry in Paul Devon's arsenal. But for reasons that neither Sam, nor the involuntarily armed civilian soldiers under his command in the Enclave knew, the invasion of Adanak used conventional weapons, most of which were from the previous century.

The decision to move the Enclave, as well as most of the other pockets of resistance, to Adanak was necessary for Sam's countrymen, and accepted by most Adanakians as a global necessity. Requirements for political asylum against mounting abuses of human rights in what had been 'the land of the free' included taking a loyalty oath to Adanak as well as the world. And of course to not make disparaging remarks about the rules of Adanak football, or mean spirited jokes about the Adanakian Football League, the presence of more substance than spice in the nation's food, or the conditioned reflex of every Adanakian to apologise for anything that offended anyone.

Many came to join Sam's Enclave just across the Adanakian border from his homeland. Some came to seek basic food and lodging denied to them back home because they were not competitive, lucky or vicious enough in a winner take all economy that trickled down

to the smallest of businesses and survival-requiring transactions. Some came to get badly needed medical attention that was affordable down south now to only the rich or those serfs the wealthy considered necessary for their survival, comfort or amusement. Some came as escapees from detention camps, their self-declared release due the heroic actions of often slain guerilla resistance fighters (some of which had been in Sam's Enclave) who made their getaway possible. Still others came to beg forgiveness for helping Paul Devon gain and keep power. One of those repentant souls stood in front of the old bridge table Sam used as a desk in his command tent. He took note of the contents tied to the backpack of this most recent refugee, and perhaps ally.

"That skateboard won't get you very far here in the woods, Tyler," he said to the 17 going on 70 lad who was far better dressed than any other seeker of asylum who came into his camp, his face cleanly shaved and unbeaten by either fist, club or weather. "You look healthier than anyone else in this camp."

"Not between the ears, General Stark," he said, with more pride and dignity than most former Devon supporters.

"It's Comrade Stark, Comrade Jackson," Sam offered with a guarded kindness, addressing the former student in his home town by his Surname, for the first time. "And I still don't know why you are here. Is it gather information about us so you can report back to your bosses back home? Or is it to observe we inferiors, deluded, spoiled brat, whimpy traitors doing what we do so you can make more jokes about us on your television show to get more money, ratings or action with hot babes under the sheets?"

"I want to be useful to the Cause, Comrade Stark," Tyler continued, this time with humility.

"By cancelling your tv show?" Sam said, leaning back on his three and a half legged chair, helping himself to a piece of beef jerky obtained from a Anadakian moose who had been shot for sport and left to die in the woods by one of Devon's snipers while sitting comfortably in a tree on his side of the line. "Or turning the jokes back on Rick Devon back home?" he continued.

"Actually not, Comrade," Tyler continued.\

"You want to defect to Anadak because you didn't make the Olympic skateboarding team at home, and want to get a gold medal you can show off to a whole new crowd of hot looking babes with for rent signs on their forehead who don't need their new class clown to had a High School diploma," Sam mused, enjoying a well deserved self-generated chuckle. "But there's two problems with that. Firstly, in Adanak doesn't take kindly to anyone of its citizens not getting an education, and will be sure there's enough money in the federal budget to keep its citizens smart, informed and caring. And second. The Olympic Committee has just declared people from your country as persona non gratus at the ceremony and on the competition field. Not so good for business, but healthier for the Olympic tradition. So why are you here?"

“Her,” Tyler said, pointing to the picture of Uma on Sam’s desk. “It was my tape of your wife telling us the truth about Devon, and the world, when she was subbing that got her arrested for treason, sedition and domestic terrorism. Which they got because I handed it to them when they----”

“---offered you a chance to change the system from the inside?” Sam interjected, after which he allowed practicality to replace Passion. “We all made mistakes and miscalculations. Toxic water under an overpaid for bridge that someday may be cleaned up by a sewage treatment plant,” he said while looking at the mirror behind his eyes. “But there’s something else that brought you here,” Sam continued, seeing something interesting in the former class clown and skateboarder extraordinaire’s face, the left side showing a different agenda and emotion than the right.

“Some *one* else,” Tyler said, pulling out a photo from his pocket, placing it next to Sam. “Tanya. Who, in the eyes, the music, and the commitment of voice, is your dead wife Uma re-incarnated. And since reincarnation only occurs at birth, and Uma would not be so inconsiderate as to possess the body of another woman already using or abusing her body...”

“Wishful speculation, Mister Jackson,” Sam said to Tyler with his best poker face, one that never failed to win a hand at the gaming table with any opponent or friend.

“Irrefutable fact, Comrade Stark,” Tyler answered. “Verified by her backstage after we did a gig together.”

“And no one else knows about this?” Sam said, finally inviting Tyler to sit down. He retrieved a bottle of whiskey from his drawer and two mismatched glasses, putting equal quantities into both. “You’re sure,” he continued, offering Tyler one of the glasses.

“Not unless she’s told anyone else, or you have,” Tyler’s reply, after which he switched glasses and requested Sam to join him. “Maybe whatever is in that drink convince you to be honest with me. Or make me go to sleep like your son Rob did when you----”

“----A necessity precaution,” Sam said, taking the contents of both drinks and spilling them into the ground. “I’m afraid that such things are required in my new line of work.”

“But I could use with some food, from maybe that jar of beef jerky you’ve been eating from,” Tyler said, his claim verified by a rumbling in his stomach.

Sam put his hand into the jar, then placed a generous handful of chips into his mouth. He extended the jar to Tyler inviting him to do the same.

His guest availed himself of a healthy fistful, gobbling it down like a horse so hungry he could eat a cow. Between bites, Tyler suggested the first plan he and Uma had discussed. It was based in a method Sam’s great great grandmother did during the

Revolution in which his country split from the Motherland across the sea. Messages from occupied districts would be sent to rebels via published newspaper articles by the Motherland Army. To the unassuming reader, they seemed like harmless, frivolous and anything but political gossip, or recipes for dishes to please the palate. But if one knew the code, information about anything could be related to anyone, the costs of such was completely incurred by the Motherland. “We’ll do it in songs, movies, game shows and celeb interviews paid for and sanctioned by Paul Devon’s private companies and administration,” Tyler explained. He then looked around him, and seeing that no one was watching, snuck Sam a pamphlet from his pocket. “The Complete Moron’s Guide to understanding Atlantian code, written in Uma’s writing.”

“Or forged as such,” Sam thought, but didn’t say. “And the other mission Uma, or the spirit of such, was sent to do? How’s that going?” he inquired, worried for very real about why Uma’s communications back to home base were less frequent than usual, and the policies instilled by Devon’s administration were getting more oppressive, destructive and stupid each week. But before giving Tyler a chance to answer, Sam allowed his aching heart to supercede his brilliant mind. “How is Uma doing?” he asked.

“She knows she has to keep going,” Tyler asserted with pride in his teacher and himself. “But she’s having...some challenges, that she’s working out, I think,” he continued, averting his eyes.

“Such as...?” Sam pressed, then asked, then pleaded.

“I took an oath, to myself. If I tell you, I can’t live with myself,” Tyler pledged.

“And if you don’t, you won’t live at all,” Sam grunted, after which he pulled his revolver from his holster, pointing it at Tyler’s head.

“She told me not to tell you about it!” the actively anti-military comic not yet life tested lad asserted.

“And ‘it’ is what?” Sam repeated, grabbing Tyler by the collar.

“Bambino, which I found out about by accident!” Tyler muttered out through shaking lips, pointing to his belly, underneath which was urine stained trousers. “She said her your new son or daughter is going be born into a country that’s run by the people. No matter how long it takes.”

Sam considered the contradictory words and the more horrifying meaning of them. The thought of Uma being violated by any man was Sam’s worst nightmare, particularly if it was Paul Devon. “And what is she doing about ‘it’?” Sam inquired, hoping that trying to think practically would prevent him from acting irrationally, and ineffectively.

“Get Paul Devon disgraced or defeated ASAP,” Tyler replied, taking stock of himself. “And getting me a fucking new pair of pants!!!”

There was something about Tyler's exploits and his tale of internal woe that rang true to Sam, but he didn't know what. Being primarily a man of verifiable reason rather than ethereal intuition, he searched his brain trying to figure out why Tyler was so much more mature, and evolved now. Recalling how he talked rather than what he said, Sam stumbled upon the realization he needed to continue considering he request. "I, like, ya know, noticed that your language is now, like totally, real. And super no nonsense, dude."

"Yes, Mister, I mean...Comrade Stark," Tyler replied as a sensible adult who had outgrown an obsession for cool language and a need to be mischeivious.

"Sam," Comrade Stark said with an extended hand in friendship that Tyler accepted as a responsible man. A man who still retained the ability to access his sense of humor and playfulness, Sam hoped. Tyler's ability to keep people entertained was not only required for him to be kept alive by the Devon regime, but to be a useful tool for the Revolution, whatever it was now.

CHAPTER 23

With the Spring thaw and an early Summer, it was a great year to grow grass, feed cattle and plant crops. It was also a great season to fight, film and promote a War, and boost the National Economy, for those on the top anyway. Incarcerating people who refused to support or participate into the Wars was a great stimulus to the wallets of those who owned shares in the expanded Prison Industry. Loonie bins took the overload that the Pens could not accommodate, sanity acquiring an even narrower definition than it ever had before. Electronic and physical walls surrounded the Nation, keeping out any undesired people and information.

For the most part, the Nations attacked by the Devon's Army took defensive postures, but not all their defenders went along with this globally-agreed upon strategy. One of them was Sam Stark, who conducted raids into his home country on a regular basis. His intended targets were detention camps, surveillance centers and buildings in which state beyond the art weapons of mass destruction were being devised. He and his Rangers came back across the Adanak border with more trophies than liberated prisoners and scientists. Yet again, Daniel asked him at the Dining Shack, which he refused to call The Mess Tent, if there was any collateral damage.

"Gotta poke a wolf in the ass to draw him out and the rest of his pack into the open," he replied, while eating an extra raw chunk of red meat, the hue of which matched the patches on his clothing which was now more camouflage green than rancher cowboy blue. "Didn't lose any horses, though," he said with pride. "And I wrote up a bill to Paul Devon for that that need fixing up."

"Interesting jewelry there, Sam," Daniel commented regarding the newest pieces of leather hung around his neck.

"Body donors," Sam replied regarding the very human looking eyes, ears and tongues. "I'm saving two slots for Paul Devon's balls."

Daniel turned green, anger emerging behind his sleep deprived ocular portholes.

"A joke, Dan boy," Sam explained. "You didn't think I'd really open up a new line of

human body parts jewelry. Even though Devon and his demons are probably selling them on the black and blue market, particularly to their women folk.”

Sam went on, being witty, graphic and edgy with regard to his commentary on Devon. But none of it was funny, even to the most hard bitten audience. Or to himself.

“Sam, we’ll get Uma out,” Daniel assured his once sane, once stable and once more caring than vengeful Comrade. “When the time is right. We have to think of the big picture here. We’ll lose the Global Alliance if we become as barbaric as they are.”

Sam negated that over proved fact with every expletive in the book, adding some non-complimentary insults to Daniel regarding his own ethnic heritage. Thankfully Daniel was the only one who heard it. For now anyway.

To shut Sam’s mouth and open his one tracked mind, Daniel presented him with the day’s intel from Uma, and Tyler. “It was just recently decoded. Troop and prisoner movements. New policies that are about to be passed by the House of Commons. And some personal messages to people in this Enclave and others regarding lost loved ones.”

“And lost used-to-be-loved ones?” Sam noted as he looked over the snippettes, finding something regarding his son Rob. “Uma still thinks MIA in a combat zone means coming home soon as he used to be before...” Sam froze in mid agony, expressing himself with a loud pounding of the fist on the table, causing damage to both wood and flesh.

Sam’s hand picked Mounted Rangers who hailed from both sides of the border, looked with raised eyebrows at the man who had led them so brilliantly in the field. “Family problems with his ex,” Daniel told them by way of explanation. “No one better than an ex to press your emotional buttons even after you’ve replaced them with zippers,” he mused, recalling his own experiments in matrimony.

Thankfully, this time anyway, the multiracial and multinational Rangers gave their beloved and trusted commander space. They went on their way, colorfully exchanging insults about each other’s ethnic background and biology, putting off for the moment dealing with the demons that would plague their nightmares yet again when they dared to get slumber. “Such is the ‘normal’ cost of being necessary evil’s in the Cause of good,” Daniel thought, but dared not say. “Particularly with what they’ve seen and had to do,” he recalled of the Peace Loving Souls who had all taken human life in this International Police Action to keep Devon’s Empire from expanding to the rest of the world, and doing far worse than they had done to innocent civilians. Such is what the Enclave shrinks told them again and again, hoping it would eventually sink in.

“So, any news about the ‘accident’ that Uma hasn’t taken care of yet, according to Tyler’s messages to me anyway,” Sam asked Daniel, having extracted enough damage on the table and the appropriate ration of split blood from his hand. “A child born to a

family first President is an embarrassment to his Church going administration.”

“But the only male heir to his throne,” Daniel pointed out.

“Who could be aborted with a coat hanger,” Sam grunted.

“All life is sacred to Uma, Sam. She was always actively pro-life.”

“The only fucking political issue that didn’t align with the rest of her leftist beliefs.”

“She also said, regarding your family, that ‘biology is biology, parenthood has nothing to do with who the sperm doner is’. Larry and Louise are proof of that,” Daniel said by way of conclusion, which was logical as well as true.

“And God is a sadist and doesn’t even know it,” Sam answered, looking to Daniel for a retort.

Daniel answered with silence, unable to refute that easily supported claim, but still refusing to believe it.

CHAPTER 24

The Nation had attempted to liberate its still Commonwealth Country to the North twice in the last two centuries. The first failed due to invading during the wrong season. The second flopped because three generals and all of their men were competing for glory. Devon's Invasion, as it was now called, failed because it collapsed from the inside. The all sizzle no steak invading Army was well equipped but discovered that even poorly-equipped citizens fighting to keep their own land were far more effective per capita. Then there was the way the National Army was organized. Competition within the ranks rather than cooperation between them was actively encouraged. The lowest ranking grunts were given the honor of being on the front lines. And as for what they were fighting for: the career officers discovered very quickly that soldiers conscripted to fight through Devon's conscription mandates were far less effective fighting machines than those who signed up as volunteers.

The turning point for the War that would have many different names once it got written up in the history books was in Edmonsville, a Adanakian small town surrounded by multiple natural resources below the ground, prior to the battle anyway, an abundance of wildlife above it. Whatever was left of Devon's Army was pushed back to the border, relieved of their weapons, then told to go home with three special parting gifts.

"A large Adanakian oatmeal cookie better than anything any of their Mom's could make, a flower in their lapel to remind them that if nature is left alone it smelled better than death, and a 'come back anytime with the wife and kids' hug?" Sam Stark said as he witnessed the last of his former countrymen walk, drive or hobble back to their side of the line. "They deserve and need a kick in the ass, a headshave that goes two inches below the scalp, or some other kind of punishment tailor made to remind them what they did, and the horny, rapist megalmaniac they did it for."

"They are being punished. Consider what they are going back to," Daniel related to Sam, while passing him a bottle of the best wine available North or South of the line. "A country that won't import anything from the outside, and still insists on its citizens using only what's made in their own country. Citizens who are now starving for food, medical care, dignity and truth a wall they build to toxic foreigners out."

“Citizens who are still potential vectors of evil as long as Devon and his henchmen are in control,” replied the hero of Edmonsville who was responsible for inactivating more of Devon’s troops as well as saving more Adanakian soldiers and citizens than anyone else. Such was a fact that Sam Stark knew, though he also was well aware that intel from Uma, and Tyler, did just as much to insure an Adanakian victory. “The only way Adanak and any of the other countries in the International Alliance are going to be safe is to invade Devon’s country, depose him from office, and establish a Provisional Government with an election that’s fair, and honest.”

“And not rigged by elitist assholes who maybe deserve to be kept in Internment Camps they made possible,” Daniel replied, averting his eyes and real meaning for those words, so it seemed to Sam anyway. “But in the meantime, the Prime Minister of Adanak, who’s negotiating the details of the Peace Treaty, sent you these,” he continued, pulling out two envelopes from his breast pocket, requesting him to open the larger one first.

Sam pulled out his buffalo knife and opened the seal, too tired to try to figure out why Daniel was the messenger for the official package. “The Service to Freedom Award,” Sam somberly noted. “The highest honor this country gives to even its own. That will go to Uma, when we get her up here next week, as a condition of Peace that maybe you can suggest to the PM?”

“Not so easily done,” Daniel replied, pointing to the second envelope. “Which I got as well as you did, if it means anything,” he continued as Sam opened it up and let his eyes gaze upon it.

“The Adanakians are deporting us?” he said.

“They say it’s up to us to fix our own country, then we can come back to theirs. Being here as refugees is still fine. But as Resistance fighters, there are problems with that internationally,” Daniel said.

“Even if we take oaths as being Citizens of the World?” Sam offered. “Which we did! And are! Fighting a war against our own country, to save Adanak! And the other countries in the alliance! Do they really know what I’m fighting for?”

“They know WHO you are fighting for.”

“And how many of the Adanakian ‘thems’ know about Uma now?”

“Enough of them to request us to leave them in peace, and fight the rest of this War on our own soil, my friend.”

Sam looked at the Southern horizon, envisioning where the next battle would be. He envisioned riding his horse down the street of the capital, his grandpappy’s sword in hand, singlehandedly chopping off Devon’s balls then pulling Uma on the back of his

saddle and making a getaway to anywhere. The rest he was now prepared to leave to more influential Comrades, such as Daniel, who still had not revealed who he really was, where he came from, and why he was even more dedicated to neutralizing the Devonian cancer than anyone else.

CHAPTER 25

“Is there anything else you want, or need?” Bill Sereda, head of the Secret Service detail assigned to Uma, she requested of her as she sat in the kitchen of the luxury music studio, licking up the last of the lunch the hungry agent had specially ordered for himself. “Anything at all?” he continued with a forced smile he dared not break, after he had personally cataloged all of her music scores, gone back to the stove for the fifth time to make her tea the way *she* liked it, and insured that there wasn’t the slightest whiff of manure or urine left in the litterboxes that Uma’s five cats, and her, soaked brown.

“Wipe my ass,” Uma replied, as Tanya of course. “With your tongue this time, while you are on your knees. Is a game a play to ease my stress, and insure that Paul Junior is delivered safe and sound from that cavity, yes?”

“Yes, Madamme,” the model of machismo grimaced as he got on all fours.

“Just kidding, darklink!” Uma said, patting the brush cut atop the head of the top man in Devon’s security agency. “But I give you choice. Lick floor clean where I vomited with your tongue, or give me key to take long walk on this beautiful day to anywhere I want, alone.”

Agent Sereda lowered his head, opened his mouth, and proceeded to lick the floor clean. Two female house-servants polishing the furniture, both of whom were clearly chosen for their beauty rather than their brains, shared silent chuckles upon seeing the man who tried to make them feel like dirt cleaning him up himself. Uma looked to the piano, thinking that maybe it was time to create even more mischief. “How much is that doggie in the window?” she sang, then played, inviting the two house-servants to join in.

Though Bill Sereda did deserve to be licking the floor after he demanded that the servants lick his genitals, under penalty of deportation or worse, Uma did feel a tad guilty for making him squirm. “How I wish I could get your father Paulie to be cleaning the floor like that, and get a picture of it to show everyone,” Uma said to the life she was incubating in her womb. Being the mother of rapist Paul Devon’s only possible male

heir was something an accident that had never been in any of Uma's game plan. Keeping it now gave her ever advantage possible in the cat and mouse game against the demon still occupying Devon's soul.

As the carrier of Paul Devon's greatest Project, 'Mama Tanya' was pampered to the max, insuring that her pregnancy be stressless and that Paul Jr was born with not only a silver spoon in his very healthy yapper, but a cultured mind to go with it. Anything that Uma said to Paul Devon was not something he both listened to, considered and in one way or another did. What Devon's staff was doing was another matter, as they seemed to be under the command of another Chancellor, or demonic entity. Who that was seemed now to be Uma's primary concern, as any good, noble or effective idea that she suggested to Paul wound up being inverted into something destructive and ugly.

But, in the meantime, as Uma knew about stars all the way back to the time when she needed fake ID to get any bar, or voting booth, 'act like an asshole, get treated like a saint'. Such worked for noble souls until, of course, you ran into a bitchier asshole who knew the same trick. One of the worse specimens of such entered the hallway. Upon seeing them, Uma snapped her fingers and sent Rover Sereda to the bathroom, ordering him to 'stay' until further notice.

Upon entering, Belina was dressed to and beyond the nine's looking every botoxed inch. Devon, as always, looked Regal to those with superficial vision, like a blue collar thug who bullied and bribed his way into the palace to anyone with open eyes. "We brought you a present, Tanya," Belina said with a wide smile, after which she pulled out a glittered, gift-wrapped package from her handbag.

"Something that will make your life classier, Tan, and Paul Jr's prenatal education more enriched," Devon said.

"I can always use more rare books and esoteric classical musical scores," Uma said as she opened the package. "Playing classics makes me more marketable and Paul smarter. Reading books to him also makes him more..." Uma words were held hostage in her wide open mouth as she gaped at the last thing she ever expected, or planned for.

"It's a divorce settlement, between me and Paul here," Belina related with a happy smile. "Something we've been planning for a long time, and finally, because you and Paul Junior came along, we can finally do it."

"But...the Chancellor is supposed to reflect family values of the country," Uma offered, slipping in and out of her Tanya's voice, and temperament.

"The Chancellor is supposed to reflect the reality of his people, Tan," Paul replied, quoting yet another one of brilliant ideas from his own head that Uma had planted there. He extended his bearlike arms around Belina's super thin waist, then kisses her fondly, on the lips. The happy to be rid of each other couple smiled lovingly at each other. "And the people want..." Paul said.

“...To have their First Lady be an independent woman,” Belina appended, in speech that evolved into song, ironically, one of Tanya’s hit tunes.

“...And Chancellor who knows that if you really love someone,”...Paul Devon continued, in song, and on pitch.

“You let your lover go,” the soon to be divorced couple sang to each other, in blissful and perhaps, according to Uma’s worse suspicions. deadly harmony.

“Belina, Paul. This was divorce is wrong. Is and was never my intention,” Uma pleaded, as Tanya, displaying a repentance that character was never scripted for. “What do you want me to do to make all of this Right?”

“What you’re doing now, of course,” Belina smiled. “Giving Paul the son I could never provide him. And for the world, another generation of Devon’s to carry on the Chancellor’s legacy,” she continued, then turned to the towering puppet next to him. “Right Paul?”

“Right on the money, Belina,” he smiled, after which he got a call on his cell. Belina snuck a look at the display when he wasn’t looking. Then she got a call on her own cell.

“I gotta go, Bel,” he said to his soon to be ex-wife. “Unexpected business.”

“Me too,” she said, perhaps rightly or perhaps wrongly.

“Mind the fort and mind our legacy, Tan,” Paul said as he walked out the door.

“And, congrats, on becoming the First Lady, Tanya. Mazeltov!” the very non-Jewish soon to be ex-First Lady said as her parting words to Uma, who unlike Tanya, was half Jewish, a fact that only handler Daniel and hopefully still loving husband Sam knew.

Uma went over the to piano bench and let her ass plop onto it, enabling her to feel the rumbling inside her belly. “I know, Sam junior,” she said to the life inside of you, “You want to come out into the world and see it for yourself. But if you can hold on a little longer, I’ll arrange for you to face your namesake. For sure. In all probability. I hope, and pray.”

CHAPTER 26

“To be of the land is to never own it,” Sam Stark recalled from a fellow Devon Resistor whose ancestors had been on the continent centuries before his arrived as he looked over the terrain at the new home for the Enclave. The trees spoke to his eyes with their changing colors, to his ears with the wind whistling through them, and to his heart by their very presence. Indeed, they were the oldest and most intimate of his friends, as the land he was now squatting on had been his less than a year ago. The man whose name was now on the deed stood next to him, feeding the lion’s share of his lunch to Sam’s favorite horse. “I thought you were afraid of horses, Mayor Smith.”

“I am. Afraid of horses that is,” Pastor John replied. “Afraid of a lot, these days, but being afraid of something and doing it anyway is....”

“....called courage,” Sam replied, laying his assuring bearlike hand on John’s small framed, shaking shoulder. “Or, faith, for a man of the cloth, which you always will be, even if they take away your congregation, church and licence to negotiate with God.”

“Who requires that I do one act of courage, faith or stupidity before I become...hmm.”

“One of us, Comrade John?”

To be referred to by that C word was something John had considered an insult, as well as a badge of disconnection. He had heard that to be an effective outlaw you had to be honest, but in truth, it required courage, and faith. The kind of courage and faith which enabled one to be alone. Excommunicated from the world of rules, laws and predictabilities. But the request from one of his parishioners forced his hand.

“You know, if you don’t want to baptize Uma’s baby, you don’t have to,” Sam assured his former enemy, current landlord and never more trusted friend.

“I want to and need to,” John replied, after which he broke into a chuckle. “Particularly

because she risked her own life getting the message out as to where she was.”

“That she sent to you, not me,” Sam grunted.

“Because she knew that maybe I’d make you go in with some kind of sound plan to get her out, and not with guns blazing from the top of this super athletic, gun-trained horse,” he continued, stroking the neck of the steed with his well extended left hand. “Who’s lucky enough to have not been killed already.”

“I know,” Sam admitted. “I’m gonna have to do this liberation real carefully.”

“You mean WE,” John countered.

“I am not going to take a man who never even fired a gun into the most dangerous extraction the Resistance ever attempted,” Sam asserted. “This game is for keeps.”

“And I’m the best one who can get you, and us, to the playing field,” John added, after which he handed his unofficial and highly illegal tenant a gold plated card.

“Impressive,” Sam said while looking at the invitation for John Smith and Guest for a backstage pass and front row center seats for Tanya’s Grande Finale Concert. “Am I supposed to be your brother, cousin, underaged uncle, or...”

“Something more...interesting,” John replied with a playful smile, keeping in mind he was playing a game here that was approved by neither Chancellor Devon, Lord Daniel or the Heavenly Father above, and, to make it more interesting, even Uma herself.

CHAPTER 27

Being of pioneer ancestry and, unlike his sell out city slicker siblings, still temperament, Sam Stark always loved freedom. As a law enforcement officer nationally and internationally he knew all too well that intelligent and effective security was required so that all could access that God given Right. The security around Uma's 'Free Wheeling and Whaling' concert in the Nation's capital was effective and for its own purposes intelligent. Guards built as big as giants, and not all of them with sloped, Neanderthal foreheads, monitored who and what came into the entrance way to Capital Hall with diligence and no nonsense precision. Scanning devises and pat downs were done on everything walking on two legs, and as well on several service dogs with visually impaired corporate diplomats.

"So, if they're going to do a cavity search and facial internet search on even bitches in heat, what's gonna make you think that they're not going to do the same to us?" Sam inquired of John Smith as the limo driver dropped them off at the outer perimeter.

"Have faith, Sister Samantha," Pastor John said big, wide all is happy smile to his Guest as he straightened his clergy collar. "And for God's sake, or whoever else is looking after us here, walk like a Lady of the New Church Order, not like the battleaxe Nuns who taught at that Bible Camp your father sent you to, forty years ago," he pushed out through a discrete hushed whisper to his clerical eye candy as a news reporter snapped a pick of John showing off his 'Devon: The People's Choice and God's Choice' button.

Sam averted his eyes, and face, bowing his head for the cameras, and the crowd. He felt stared at, but in a way that he never experienced before. He started to shake, after which Pastor John put his arm under his and proceeded to the gate for special guests.

"There are other ways that I could go unrecognised," Sam whispered to John as he felt cold air on his for the first time in forty years hairless face and legs, smelled perfume on his skin instead of sweat or blood, felt the pinch of high heeled pumps around his toes and ankles, and saw the image of a himself in mirrored surfaces along the way to the

designated gate. "I look more like a hooker than a Nun," he said regarding the tight skirt, large breasts and elegant habit which covered only a small portion of the wig that bore girly bangs that covered his forehead and jawline.

"In keeping with Devon's new plans for a National Clergy that will welcome more women into his ranks," John said as they advanced up the line. "Violating the sanctity of a Woman of God is a sure fire ticket to hell, according to Devon's top Corporate Christian supporters," he continued, referring Sam's attention to another Nun of the New Order who passed through security with a bow of respect from the guards, rather than the pat down and body scans required of her fellow male and female companions.

The Nun, who looked more like a kindly dominatrix than a Sister of the Lord, looked back at Sam and winked at him, perhaps as Sister to Sister, or Woman to made Man. Which was which had to await further investigation.

In the meantime, John submitted his gold plated card to the security guard bearing a "Free Wheeling and Wailing" hip and cool teshirt on his torso, and military issue fatigues in which every pocket contained a devise that could kill another human being or find out what he, or she, was carrying inside clothing, body cavities or mind. Pastor John went through a minimal search. Sam was allowed to pass unfettered, excepting of course a lingering, hopefully admiring, stare from the very male security goons as he sasheed towards the hallway leading to backstage.

John led Sister Samantha down the hallway through frenetically rushing around Production Assistants, Roadies and stage managers, while musicians in the adjacent rooms tuned up their instruments and did a final adjustment of their heads with a toke, snort or gulp of moonshine. A fair portion of them looked at Sam like he had never been looked at, or into, before. Some tried to engage Sam in brief conversation, which he avoided with smile and bow. "So, are you enjoying any of this, Sister Samantha?" John inquired of Sam at the last 'courting'. "You don't have to answer that, but just pretend that you are. Uma's dressing room is just around and the corner, so stay cool, and act hot," he continued. "After we get get to Uma's dressing room, we'll do a make over on her, and sneak her out."

It was a good plan, as everyone was trying to get into Tanya's Free Wheeling and Whaling concert. The diversionary weapons and devises Sister Samantha had hidden in her bra, panties and booties were would be used as necessary. Of course, Uma had to consent to being extracted, so that the baptism of the demon seed inside of her could be done at home instead of in the devil Devon's playground. For that, Sam had a special elixir he would make her take, attached to his lips. One kiss and she would be as an obedient zombie as most of the fans in the audience, who, as Sam saw it anyway, were at the special event to be seen more than to hear to Main Act sing her heart out, or try to instruct their minds, and enlighten intoxicated souls.

"Yeah, all would work out," Sam thought to himself. "And I'll be back with Uma on home turf having been educated somewhat as to what it's like to be a person of her

gender, or one of those misunderstood souls who straddle both sides of that line.”

Finally, John and Sam reached the dressing room, guarded by three very armed, and non-sloped foreheaded goons. John presented his engraved card.

“So, Pastor John,” Goon number one said, looking at the pass, then scanning the marks made onto it at the main checkpoint.

“And Sister Samantha,” John said, bowing to his date. “Tanya’s sister biologically as well, as well as in the cloth.”

“Tanya’s expecting us,” he said.

“You, Pastor John, but not her sister, or any Sister,” the Goon said, turning to Sam, giving him the once over from top to bottom, then from bottom to top. He looked into Sam’s eyes, letting them linger there for a moment. Just as Sam was about to lose his poker face, the Goon chuckled, then smiled.

“I’m afraid your both out of luck,” the Goon said, handing back the credentials to John. “Lady Tanya’s already in the wings. Ready to go on stage any minute now. Change in schedule.”

The Goon turned to his assistant, instructing him to escort the good Pastor and the hot Sister to the auditorium. “Third row center seats. Be sure they get seated to their seats. The most expensive in the house that, hey, one day, maybe you and me can afford.”

Every guest seated in the orchestra was escorted to their seat by an usher. They were perfect specimens of racial White purity and Aryian genetics, except for a hunchbacked gimp lad with a bad crew cut which took off as much hair as scalp, and badly bruised face who stumbled in front of John, handing him and his date a program. “Come this way, Pastor, Sister,” he said in a voice more feminine than masculine, which Sam thought he recognized.

“Interesting haircut, Belina,” Pastor John said in the language of his ancestors from across the sea, confirming Sam’s suspicions. “And what happened to you below the neck?” he continued, more as an agent of Lord Daniel than an Instrument of the Heavenly Father.

“A lot less than what happened to the rest of the cabinet, Pastor John, when they found out when my ex-found out what we were up to,” she whispered to John in the same tongue. “And your ‘date’ for this event is---“

“---Someone who understood everything you just said,” Sam replied in his best Samantha voice, in the same language, but different dialect. “But who prefers to continue this conversation in the language of THIS country, that you did more to destroy than build,

with your---“

Usher Belina faked a stumble in front of Sam and Pastor John, then got up on her two feet, blood emerging from one of them. “This way, Father, Sister,” she said as she led them to the center seats, which had reserved signs for Devon’s cabinet members on either side of it. All of them were empty.

“---The fog machine song,” ex-First Lady Belina slurred out through the functional side of her broken jaw, which became more painful each time she tried to clench her teeth in rage as she pointed to the program in Pastor John’s hand. “I can make it become thick smog if I can pay off the PA operating the equipment.”

“Make it black smoke song, girlfriend,” Sam said in his best Sister Samantha voice, which didn’t sound convincing even to him. He reached under his bra and pulled out one of the smoke bombs he had been saving for emergency getaway, discretely replacing its bulge with the folded up program.

“It will help, but I need something more than that to convince the operator to let me have control of the machinery,” Belina continued, trying to make that ‘give me money sign’ with two and a half barely functional fingers.

John forked out a few bills, then some more, then everything in his pocket. Belina looked to Sam for more. “Sister Sam?” your contribution to the Cause?” she requested.

“And I should trust you with it because of why?”

“This!” she blasted back, shoving Sam a pocket phone in front of his eyes. “Recorded for different reasons than I have now,” she explained of the video featuring Devon as a passion driven expressive lover’ with Uma as his very unwilling victim.

“Apparently Tanya’s fear made little Paulie’s sperm count go up, or maybe it was me daring him to fuck the goddess Tanya that turned him into a fertile demon,” she lamented.

“Uma, her name is Uma,” John related, seeming to reflect on the many conflicting feelings he had for her as an adversary, political activist and woman. “And my female companion here is---”

“---someone who seems to care a lot about Uma,” Sam heard Belina say while seeing images he had envisioned in his nightmares. “Almost as much as I do, now.” She continued, taking back the phone. “This will be seen by everyone here, after the fog song, even him!” Belina said, pointing up to the center balcony, where Paul ‘the bear’ Devon, as he was now being called, was seated in the middle, surrounded by two new Barbies on all three sides, a wall of behemith thugs in suits that outclassed their eyes and demeaners behind them.

“One shot into his brain will take care of all of our problems,” Sam whispered, in his

own voice, reaching for the a pistol strapped under his skirt between his legs. “One shot to decapitate the snake.”

“Who has to be seen for what he is first, Sister Samantha,” John said, placing his hand on Sam’s wrist.

“Getting a little personal there, Padre,” Belina said, as stumbling, bumbling the gimp male usher she was supposed to be, noting that she was being watched by the head usher. “But what happens in Capital Hall amongst men and woman of the cloth, stays in the Capital Hall,” she continued, after which she turned to . “Right boss?”

Belina was waved back to work by her supervisor, who got a call on his cell before he could figure out why his boss had had hired such an injured and disfigured gimp. Or so it seemed to Sam, whose cover was still not blown. And whose pistol was now missing.

CHAPTER 28

The program called for Tyler Jackson to introduce Tanya amidst a comedy routine that honored her, her music, and the upcoming marriage to Paul Devon. The script for such was approved by the authorities at hand, who still knew nothing about the fact that it was in code, revealing the most recent developments with regard to Paul Devon’s purging his cabinet in a quick, violent, and deadly purge. As Tyler ‘took sick’ an hour earlier, his replacement read the script line for line. “And does she really know who she is talking to, or about,” Uma said to the life inside of her womb, the presence of which was barely visible given the waist-less gown that accented every other non prengnant hot feature about her Tanya persona as she stood nervously in the wings. “But by the eyes of this ‘Ken’, he really is a Fascist. Who at least is staying on script with regard to...” she muttered until the Comic decided to go rogue, and append the script with a few racist, anti-feminist, pro-war, anti-labor and anti-environmental digs that were uniquely his own, as he avoided looking at the teleprompter above the audience.

Devon laughed at the jokes, after which the two Barbies next to him giggled. The goons behind him, perhaps his new Cabinet, or perhaps the enforcers who had eliminated his pre-existing Cabinet that had turned disobedient to him, did a very convincing belly laugh.

Amidst the laughter, one of the Barbies found the hole Uma had made in the curtain, delivering her a message straight into her eyes. While Paul Devon reviled in comedic digs delivered to his opponents, and praises for himself, the small framed, probably underaged bombshell pointed to Paul, then to herself, appending the declaration by sneaking her small cat arms under his bear-sized elbows.

“You can have him,” Uma said to her in absentia. “But not until I say on stage what has to be said first,” she continued, after which she turned to the seed that had grown into a weed in her belly. “For both of us,” she continued, constructing a musical and lyrical script of her own that included coded messages, and a lot more that she hoped would open up hearts

The first song Uma sang and played from the piano. The selection was pop Tanya, something that the crowd needed to know where they were. It got people paying attention to her. Pablum for the romantic sentimentalities, very non-political.

The second number involved a violinist joining her. The lyrics were about children, legacies and the Eternities, intended to make people feel that thinking was not only okay, but a potentially a painless and happy experience.

The third was her prize composition, brought in earlier than expected. She had just written it two days ago, patterned after “Blissful Harmonies”, an obscure pop-classical tune which Paul Devon had grown up as a kid, and banned himself from listening when he became an adult, according to the most recent intel from Daniel about Devon’s ever growing psychological profile research. “It had the power to make me soft when I had to be hard, Tan,” he explained to the mother of his first and only child by way of explanation when she played it. “I can’t afford to have any music that makes me weak!” the Chancellor yelled out like a terrified peasant while putting his hands over his ears, his heart wanting to listen, his mind knowing he shouldn’t. “I never want to hear it again! Not from you or anyone else!” he continued, tearing up the sheet music into confetti, then spitting on it while tear welled up in the corners of his cold steel eyes that seemed to turn baby blue.

Uma knew that she’d have to ease into her version of “Harmonies” to make it effective, converting the sour-tasting medicine into something sweet so that Paul Devon would swallow it before knowing what it was. Dismissing the violinist for the sake of the music, and his own skin, she let her fingers ease into the new song “that found her, in the service of the man she loved.” Actually it was for the world she loved, and if there was any man involved it was the baby inside of her, and perhaps the ex-sheriff outlaw who she was determined to take over becoming his father someday. Perhaps if Uma played Tanya’s new composition effectively enough, that day would come sooner than later.

Uma felt her soul becoming absorbed into the scientifically and artistically composed song, then could feel the Silence in the room getting louder. The air felt ethereal, then real, then a heavenly mist seemed to envelope her. She felt to be in her own space, and dimension, a realm of white which soon became smoke, then nearly pitch black. The Silence turned into ohs and ahs as the only thing she could see was the remnants of the stage lights on her fingers. A wall of blackness that smelled ominously sweet emerged between between her and the audience. She started to feel faint, perhaps taken in herself by the hypnotic power of the music herself. Indeed, she felt as close to Death, and whatever Life awaited her thereafter. “It’s time for you to go, now, Uma,” she heard whispered behind her from an angelic beauty whose distorted features made her all the more other worldly.

“I’m not finished here yet, Sam,” Uma said to the ghostlike figure behind her, not knowing if he was dead or alive. “And the music---”

“---will continue after we’re gone,” the ghost’s companion said, inserting a black box next to the piano which played the music Uma had already performed. “But we have to move fast!” Pastor John continued, his face recognized as such by Uma.

“And quiet,” she heard from the unrecognizable female ghost, who grabbed her wrists with a firm grip. “It’s me, Sam,” the angel explained as she tried to get away. “We’re going home,” he said by way of further explanation.

“Not until I finish this song,” she whispered back, as the Silence in the audience behind the black wall turned into soft murmurs. “The next stanza is going to turn the world around. The notes that will change the world,” she said, after which she pulled away from the Vision of her husband that could be real, or could be an hallucination she was experiencing because of something mind altering in the fog that had become smoke.

Uma turned off the black box, then defiantly played the tender song, and becoming it. She heard and felt the Silence in the room become louder, and louder till it was deafening. She closed her eyes for the last passage, and as soon as she envisioned her husband Sam at the beloved, she felt his lips touch hers. Two seconds later she lost connection with her fingers. Two more seconds later she heard the music she had played being echoed through the room, the Silence getting louder with each breath. “It is accomplished,” she uttered as she went into a deep and blissful slumber.

Upon seeing that Uma was asleep, as was much of the audience, Sam removed the mini-gas mask from his nose, then the drug-soaked tape which had covered his lips. He stripped off his Sister Samantha get up and put it on Uma. “So, where to now, John?” he asked, now clad in spandex pants and a tee shirt in keeping with his own gender.

“You carry, I cover,” John replied, pulling a gun from his breast pocket, cocking the hammer in the manner of a man of war rather than a man of God. It was a top of the line hand held automatic assault weapon which Sam didn’t recognize. “Some things, you never forget, even you’ve spent a lifetime trying to,” he said by way of explanation.

The news reporters and remotely run broadcast camera filming the live gala event took care of relating the rest of the events of the night, as they actually happened. After the fog had given way to clear sight, and the hallucinogenic effect of Sam’s smoke bomb had worn off, the audience saw an empty stage, and music coming from a performer-less piano. A screen dropped down from the floor of the stage, in clear, HD video, the lead in visuals backed up by the remainder of the music. “Yes, it is real,” a voice rang out from that echoed throughout the auditorium. “Paul Devon, star of stage, screen and cruelty, unscripted as real as the plugged up noses and previously closed eyes on all of our face!” the familiar voice of Belina Devon continued as the rape of Tanya which she had filmed played to a packed then shocked house, unedited.

“It’s a lie!” the real Paul Devon yelled out as he got out of his chair. “Take down that screen and arrest whoever’s in the projection room who put that fabrication on MY screen! And someone go find Tanya!!!”

Half of Devon’s armed security followed orders. The other half held their weapons in hand while watching the video with shock and indignation.

“And if you need more visual proof of what Paul Devon has done with those who dare to question his authority,” the voice of Belina echoed from places that could not be found. It was followed by a dated photos of the cabinet members being beaten, tortured or killed, some by Paul Devon’s hand personally.”

“Not that we didn’t deserve it, for being bigger assholes than he is,” the voice continued, now identified with a body that walked out on stage from pocket of black fog. “Yes, it’s me, Belina,” she said. “Or what’s left of me after he did this, to me.” She stripped down, showing the full extent of her bruises, burns and beatings.

“Someone arrest that ungrateful, traitorous bitch!” Commander in Chief Devon said. But this time, the few soldiers who were still loyal to him were held in abeyance by the many who now were not.

Devon ranted and raved about how it was all a fascade to make him look bad, instigated by foreigners who had been brainwashed by the Pagan religion that he had officially outlawed on his shores. He called upon those under him to stand up for what is Right, Moral and Patriotic. Eventually, after looking into each other’s souls, they all did.

CHAPTER 29

“So, Paul Devon finally got what he deserved,” Lord Lawrence Wentworth said as he read the newspaper reports about his incarceration into one of the infamous Holding Facility in which he had placed his most feared and powerful enemies from the comfort of a cabin atop a mountain that had been used by the Resistance barely two weeks ago.

“As did we get what we deserved, Lawrence,” Daniel said to his liberated comrade whose right hand, which had written so many mandates condemning innocent mortals to suffer unthinkable acts, remained in a cast, repair of which was done by a mortal physician working for the Resistance.

“Speak for yourself, Daniel,” Lawrence grumbled back. “And Klause, what do you say about all of this?”

“That it will be interesting to see what a fresh election with new people will do for, and to, the Nation, and the world,” he said between coughs through lungs which had been water-boarded into complete disuse. “But there is one thing I still wonder about,” he continued spitting out blood from his throat, feeling vulnerable and old rather than comfortably powerful. “What are these mortals going to do if they are allowed to rule themselves? The only way they realize that their leaders are cruel and stupid is by seeing them in the act of doing doing harm to others. They heeded nothing that came out of Paul Devon’s mouth, and could only see what he was when they saw what he did with his fist, or a firearm. When will they ever learn.”

“After we finally do?” Daniel suggested to the committee that still knew more than any other in the world, and could therefore potentially be the committee that ruled the world yet again.

“Indeed yes, I suppose,” Lawrence added, struggling to load his pipe with his left hand. “But there is one question I must ask of YOU, Daniel,” he continued.

“What’s to happen to Sam Stark, Uma and their new child?” Daniel replied while getting up from his chair. He hobbled to the window on legs that still bore than damage incurred on them, unfixeable by any doctor or medical procedure all of his money could pay for. “Who will never know who his real father is, as long as I have anything to say about it!” he continued, determined for the first time to defy majority vote, even if it meant exile from the caste he was born into and could never really leave.

“No, I was talking about Tanya, the real Tanya,” Lawrence said, finally managing to ignite whatever tobacco still remained in his pipe. “The Tanya who vanished after she stole Paul Devon’s heart, then left him, so we could be the next ones who pulled him around by the nose ring she implanted into his upturned nostrils.”

“Your sister, Daniel,” Klause added.

“Who had enough sense to stay away from all of this,” Lawrence stated.

“And the good sense to stay away from us,” Daniel related as a confession. “Thank God,” he added, silently giving thanks to the Creator who he now saw as the real Chairman of the Board. For now anyway.

END