

# TURNOVER

by

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## CHAPTER 1

It was the kind of victory post-election rally that shook the political equilibrium in Albany, created an earthquake on the hard rock mantle under Manhattan Island and violated the laws of physics that way Red and Blue would never find their ways to be most expressive with that magical hue of Purple. Moslems, Jews, Christians, Pagans Atheists and religious Atheists shared music played from a festival stage yet directed somehow from the audience as a celebration. It acknowledged the separation of Church and State but also the union of Spirituality and, as yet to be defined, new Government. This post-election rally that did not discriminate against anyone on the basis of age, race, gender, desired gender honored the poor struggling workers of the world. It did not persecute those who had an aversion to labor either. Still, it was centered on figuring out ways to convince the 1 percent of citizens who had 90 percent of the wealth to share more than 10 percent with the others, and for those 'haves' to realize that donating 60 percent of what they had (or stole) with the 'have nots' would make them richer in many other ways.

In the middle of it all was governor elect Edie Callimari, a moderately older than middle aged woman with a still shapely 25 year old body whose blonde hair still had not surrendered its hue to grey nor its anchor to her scalp to wind, or an assertive hairbrush. The deepened crow's feet around her eyes revealing how wide open those oculars were. Her confident yet still invitingly gentle smile on posters bordering the main stage assured the viewer that she really DID stand for Universal rather than Selective Compassion for All, That it is NOT cool to be cruel. And that the most primary of all the laws and bylaws in her administration as Governor of the Once Great Empire State of New York would be 'Each Gives Beyond Their Abilities and Takes Less Than Their Needs, or Wants'.

Yes, Edie was enjoying the victory of beating the candidate New York State AND the United States in general initially wanted most but needed least in a landslide fair election. It was fought at her end with weaponry that didn't belong exclusively to the right or the left, calling out the cruelty of the former and the hip hypocrisy of the latter. And it was against the most 'sizzle rather than steak' politician that the circus which had become the Right Wing's darling, and king, Iron Mike Richter.

Edie's ears were filled with music from her golden time in the 60s along with the most popular (and in some cases best) of every genre popping up in every decade since. The lyrics and musical rendition of "All 'Finally' Together Now" were expanded by band and audience members, ranging from 18 to 18. And most expressively by those who were both of those ages at the same time.

Edie's always hyper working muscle between her ears were occupied by other agendas, due to something real that felt like it was to materialize. And it was not her natural proclivity to pull away from applause directed at anyone, especially her. Or her natural proclivity to retreat from every conversation around her, or anyone else, that broke into jovial laughter. Reminding her that such was not appropriate now was Lars Jenkins standing next to her in the crowd. He was gleefully converting air into music with a

flute along with the band on stage and every fifth victorious constituent around him. His handsomeness as a senior stud who would never grow old left his beloved for the right reasons wife Edie in the dust with regard to the natural biology of aging.

Lars was not able to interfere with Edie's intense stare at whatever ghost, demon or evolving political complication had penetrated into the air thick with cannabis, tobacco and cheap beer. Even though it was all brought together with the pungent sweat of closely packed and dancing in their own way festival attendees. "Hey, Edie!" Lars yelled to his wife, still getting no response. "Yo, Philosopher Queen Governor Elect," yielded empty results again. He took in a deep breath, then pushed his way into her eyeline, keeping her head in place with a firm but loving holding of her small shoulders with his bearlike but blister free fingers. "Come on, join the dance. A dance with me, and them! The one you created!"

"Because?" Edie pressed, demanding that this time Lars would give her an honest answer, and one that was accurate as well.

Lars took a deep breath, raised his head to the sky, then plopped it down to earth. "To everything there is a time and purpose, under, whatever is up there," he expounded and sang, in the manner of Pete Seeger, the old fart of his youth who convinced him to go into politics to eventually abolish it rather than to change it.

"Theoretically most probably yes," Edie replied.

"A time to plant, a time sow, is this not so?" Lars continued in the manner of Socrates as casted in Plato's Republic.

"Yes, it is so," Edie acknowledged.

"And a time of war and a time of peace," Lars' next affirmation.

"More of the latter than the former," Edie conceded.

"And a time to have...what's that dirty f thing?" Lars gleefully blasted out. "Which you need more than anyone else here," he admonished.

Eddie's lips tightened, but before she could push anything assertive out of them—

"Oh, yeah, that thing called....fun!" Lars delivered into her taunted and worried face.

"Had enough of it in the womb, until I was evicted from it," Eddie replied in her normal style of delivering metaphors with a contemporary edge, along with her own real experiences. "And a past life that was happy, so your daughter Silvia the Psychic said." She looked away from the man who wanted to give her more than she was able to receive. "Right now, I'm just--"

"--Preoccupied with seeing the bad within the good?" Lars proposed.

"The fall after the happy," her retort, averting her eyes yet again. "The work after the play...The agonizing realizations after the...."

Lars grabbed rather than touched her by the shoulders, facing her. She lowered her head, feeling shame, failure and fear, somehow all at the same time. "Hey! We elected finally someone who is worthy of being Governor now, and President very soon later!"

"So I've been told," Eddie conceded, still with downturned eyes.

"And you've earned it, Eddie!!" Lars blasted into the covering of sorrow and worry that emerged onto Eddie's face no matter how much foundation and glitter she layered it with.

"But," she said, raising her right index finger up with more affirmation than any cattle drive boss on screen did with making a point. She then looked straight at, and into Lars. "Anyone who wants to be Governor, and particularly President, shouldn't be trusted with the job.

"Yeah...You're right," Lars conceded. "Like him!" he proclaimed with anger at his own species and the Deity elected to or charged to rule over His presumably favorite creation.

Lars pulled out a campaign brochure of candidate from the inside pocket of his half-professor half wannabe Russian gangsta elbow patched coat and gave it to Edie. The penetrating cold steel but inviting eyes of Mike Richter blasted into her and wouldn't let her go. Her consciousness completely ignored the overgrown, perfectly trimmed 19<sup>th</sup> century Wall Street Mogul brown beard on his pale white face as well as the overabundance of American flags, guns and LGBT rainbow decals behind him. "A neo-Nazi wolf in Christian neoconservative and revisionist WOKE clothing, who you beat, fair and square," Still Assistant Professor at Cornell Lars reminded his trophy and beloved wife.

'Yeah, I got lucky,' Edie conceded softly, still looking at the picture of the most photogenic monster since Adolf Hitler, or most recently, Kevin Bacon.

"WE got lucky!" Lars affirmed. "All of these people here got lucky," he reminded her.

"So, why are you looking so...scared of this loser?"

"Because he's a sore loser. And a dangerous one," Edie reminded her glass is always half filled, and unbreakable as well, husband.

"Who you had arrested. And put away," the theoretical polysci professor reminded the doctor who had given up her medical practice to fix vicious laws that sent innocent people to the gallows rather than the laws of nature which dictated who got what disease. Doctor soon to be Governor Edie pulled back her lips, remembering the day she saw the richest man in Downstate New York be pushed into an Upstate Grey Bar Motel housing common criminals.

"Yeah. I did put him away," Edie said, finally with an accepting smile on her dry weather bitten lips. She then acquired her normal 'on the job' mug, hugging her husband. "Yes, WE put Iron Mike away, even if it was for a weekend," she said. "And..." she turned to the crowd, who still were more interested in the music and dance they were making more than the stars on stage, or in the audience. "These people, each one of them, put Iron Mike behind iron bars then, and will do so again, for a longer period if it comes to that!"

The initially three minute Yellow Submarine Album song back in 1968 from the stage emerged into a nearly 30 minute variations on the theme in nearly as many genres finally ended. The overly tattooed 30 something neohippie grabbed hold of the mic as if it was a talking stick passed around by his Mohawk ancestors. He reached out to the stoned face but certainly not stoned bass player behind him, requesting him to throw him a JFK wig. Then to the piano player

who had worn out the keys on the board who threw him a authentic tweed sport jacket. He bunched up his half blue and half orange Ukraine hair in a manbun then placed the oversized wig onto his small head. He took in a deep breath, then grabbed hold of the mic again with the strength, confidence and humility worthy of the youngest man to occupy the main desk in the Oval Office. "Now...It's time for you all to ask," he said in a spot-on Boston accent that NO one in Beantown would say was from a New Yorker. "Ask not what your state can do for you. But what you can do for your state.. Not because it's easy but because its....haaaad! Fellow citizens of this..."

"---Country!" the Black Muslim base player bellowed out in a voice as deep as his faith in Allah and hatred for his brethren who used the Koran as an excuse to kill men and subjugated women.

"World!" the Wicken piano player declared, hair adored with an equal number of beautiful flowers, toxic weeds and sharp thorns. "Or if we expand our vision!" she declared, opening up her arms, and heart to Edie, still standing in the crowd as a common citizen. "Fellow citizens of what, Doctor Mayer Philosopher Queen and future President Edie?" She pulled out a flute from under the piano and threw it to Edie in the manner a talking stick is tossed to the next person allowed or required to speak as a meeting of many nations, or conflicting agendas.

Silence overtook the crowd, as loud as any music that had come from the stage. Edie, with flute in hand, and heart took in a deep breath, looked at the sun as it decided to penetrate through the Fingerlake Clouds, then at the mascot Gremlin from Mars behind her who for the next act was to pledge his planet's support for Edie in case a few billion humans needed to re-locate.

"Ask not what your state can do for you but ask what you can do for....the Universe?" she asked Marvin Martian but got no response, causing her some confusion. Her and everyone else's attention were drawn to the band leader on stage.

"Like you said to everyone else who has pseudo woke Millennial disease, Doc Gov Edie," the Bandleader admonishes Edie in his natural downstate Brooklyn voice. "Ya don't, like, ya know answer a question with a question? So, what's your answer!?"

Edie smiled, feeling a deeper victory than ever in a campaign that was as much against defective Millennial codes as MAGA. She put the mouthpiece of the flute to her smiling lips, then let out Bach's Bourrée, moving the refrain from classical to great jazz version. Lars and others around her lifted her up, carried her to the stage. The band on stage and stray players in the crowd joined in. Great music created by the third brains that evolved between everyone.

Edie reflected on what Jesus was reported to have said through some of his hand picked Jewish publicity agents. "Whenever two or more of you are gathered in my name, I drop in as well'. Yes, that fairy tale which Edie still wanted to believe was coming true. Until that little voice, or perhaps a very real one whispering her name into her pathologically diligent mind, yelled out a command to divert herself from the task of converting air into music, and music into multi-genred magnificence. A turn of her head confirmed a change of agenda.

There, in the wings of the outdoor stage, was a figure in a fourth hand hooded coat, proudly sporting a red, white and blue All American bandana-with an eagle sitting on a swastika. The unrecognizable admirer aimed the business end of an assault weapon at her, holding his, or her, fire, then at the rest of the band.

"Everyone, down! Now!" Edie yelled out. The harmonic cacophony of loud musical instruments was replaced by rapid gunfire from the assailant, accompanied by stray from no less than three other locations overlooking the crowd. Then--the screams of people overtaken by fear of losing their own lives or losing those they cared for more than themselves.

From her own position of justifiable self-preservation on the ground, Edie could see, feel and hear all of the musicians ducking for cover. The security guard hired for crowd control lay on the stage, blood spurting out from his belly and legs. Edie rushed to his aid, tying her belt just above the bleeding from his upper leg. He refused any other help from the Doctor Governor elect, pointing to his gun and the source of the first shooter. Following Pete Jakowitz's insistent and hopefully not last request, she turned around to the gunperson. He and/or she disappeared towards the panicked crowd below. "Go. Go!" insisted the 'guard for hire' who failed the entrance to join the police department and was unable to strum his guitar to the satisfaction of any band member. Edie, whose only experience with firearms was shooting artificial ducks at a peanut gallery and whose fist had never hit any human flesh other than her own, took off in pursuit.

The path of the assailant who chose to kill others rather than her was easily determined by the ducking of festival attenders hoping and praying to not get shot by the two other 'gunpersons'. A large portion than expected covered either their loved ones, or strangers next to them who in the moment had become family, friends or lovers.

Who was doing the shooting and from where was not known. But what did seem certain to Edie was that the main shooter enjoyed being chased, and particularly by a gun-toting Peace Now and Always Candidate whose gun ban platform was stronger than any other gubernatorial candidate in the US, or provincial contender in Canada. Shots were fired at her from the assailant, but they missed her. Finally, she got a clear view of the shooter, as that cowardly low life was hiding behind a 'loving lemonade and and 'subvoiyisive literatuure' stand that had been pushed into a barricade.

But before Edie, as seemingly the only attendee in the possession of a firearm, could fire the shot that would wound or, if necessary, kill the assassin a sneaker bearing red, white and blue hues with the face of Ghandi on it tripped her. She looked up to see who was its bearer, but the other foot pushed her to the ground, causing her to not know where she was, or what universe she was in, if in any universe of the living at all. The unidentified tripper pulled her away, dragging to a position of 'safety' from the bombardment, then ran away, disappearing into the mass of huddled and wounded bodies.

Gunfire persisted from three hidden and well protected locations of the 'assistant' shooters, such being the last thing Edie could consciously hear till she faded into unconsciousness. She was awakened by the sound of motorcycles approaching from the back row of what had been a happy festival, then gunfire from ominously low volume automatic and thunderously loud single fire weapons coming from them. Gunfire from the strategically located and protected perches of the still unidentifiable shooters stopped. Edie looked up, noting that the cavalry that had come in on two wheeled horses had fled away in hot pursuit. After a few seconds of ominous silence, the air was filled with moans of the wounded, worried and terrified.

The assuring sound of police sirens finally took center stage, but with only two blue and whites and three ambulances. Tall, NON-Bubba belly bearing Sheriff Oliver Evans, wearing jeans that had been worn by weather and cowboy boots that have been scooped on real horses, emerged from the lead car, He took note of three biker jackets positioned in such a way so that they would not be unseen even by blind man. With minimal movements of his apposed index and third finger, he sent half of his scant uniformed staff, and sometimes support team, over the grounds to have yet another routine look-see at yet another shooting site. He sent and the rest

of the detachment to pursue the bikers and/or shooters who had fled the scene. He then slowly and deliberately walked over to Edie, who was spitting up curses in Italian along with blood from her mouth.

“Where’s Lars?” she inquired with mixture of anger, shame and fear.

Officer Evans pointed to one of the ambulances where Lars was being treated for a wound on his arm. “I’m ok, Edie!” he said with calm assurance to his wife, allaying some of her fears.

“And you, Doc, Governor-elect and hopefully soon President Capillano? Are you okay?” he asked, knowing that this issue was always, and still was, last on her masochistic workaholic agenda.

“The blood between my teeth is still my own,” she stated with pride and her usually wittfully textured answer to any question as she spit out, hopefully, the last wad of blood from her bruised mouth. But there was something distasteful to the tongue that she couldn’t hide.

“Salty, Doc?” Evans said. “The taste of fear, Edie. Which is...”

“---Where’s the rest of the medical cavalry?” Edie asked upon seeing no more than three ambulances on the scene.

“Still stuck on the bridge. Behind two ‘accidentally stalled and stuck’ abandoned freight trucks,” he stated without an ounce of terror, fear or apprehension, at least any that could be seen by anybody else, he hoped. “Only reason why I’m here is that I was in the neighborhood and---” He diverted his attention to the three biker jackets left behind by whoever accidentally came onto the grounds well after the nick of time. Or perhaps who was secretly hired, to manage crowd control and arrived late. “Interesting...Real bikers never leave their colors behind, Governor elect Edie,” Evans said, hoping his soft whispering speech was not audible to journalistic human ears and wannabe or perhaps real reporters. “Any idea who they were or who brought them here?” he asked Edie.

“No,” she replied taking charge of the events and perspective of it all. “But I know who, and what I am.”

Edie handed over her gun to the Sherriff, as if it is toxic. She then grabbed hold of the stethoscope from under her coat, for reasons she still could not determine, non-blood stained coat.

More paramedics emerged from the ambulances, and two more that finally arrived on the scene. Hoping on the horse always between her legs, Field Commander Edie took charge. “Any doctors here?” she boldly asked, holding her hand up. “With medical degrees?”

Ten hands went up with shaking arms attached to them from the bewildered crowd.

“And real experience with this shit, in two OR four legged patients?” the next inquiry from the Philosopher now General Comrade Queen. Some hands went down. Others came up. Some of the latter from victims who were unable to stand up.

After three four second assessments with her eyes and ears Edie did the walk around the festival grounds, assigning paramedics and docs to the appropriate patients. She noting the ones in need of care first with a single digit, secondary importance with a victory sign of two fingers, and tertiary concern with a three, much like she did when prioritizing which issues are most important and lease critical for the moment while doing campaign speeches. She was interrupted by a particularly emotionally evoking moaning coming from the victim in the location where she was shuttled to by the ‘sneaker dude or dudette’ who tripped her and dragged her to safety.

Upon closer examination, the victim was a brown faced dreadlock bearing middle aged woman. Her dull and dark hued mug was highlighted by the brightest shade of red lipstick, loudest blue eye shadow and most blinking sparklies on her cheeks that Edie could remember seeing on screen or in person on the campaign trail. “Move your legs for me,” she asked the woman, whose eyes alternated between being a quarter open and 120 percent closed.

“You got it,” she replied in a musical Jamaican diction as colorful as her natural complexion, accompanied by nothing moving below the waist.

“And your fingers, please?” Edie requested.

“No problem, Doc?” she emitted from smiling lips, her averted eyes opening wide enough for Edie to see abnormalities in her rapidly oscillating pupils, accompanied by motionless fingers. Following the gut instinct which never failed Edie with regarding understanding medical biology and, so she hoped anyway, her recent understanding and treatment of human political pathology, Edie smelled the once patient, and now person’s, breath. She let the medical data consciously seen, and unconsciously felt, rumble around in her head, allowing all of the information to find its natural slots as it related to an understanding of the problem and, theoretically anyway, a way to fix it.

The woman closed her eyes. A Paramedic came by, assessed the situation by the usual mean and shook his head in that negative manner which meant ‘even Jesus can’t resurrect people up from this kind of hole’. The Paramedic pointed to another ‘case’ ten feet away. “Doc, you’d be most useful over---”

“---Here, where I am right fucking now!” Edie insisted, after which she removed an acupuncture needle from her pocket, poking it up and down in a hen like action at the frenulum above the Jamaican patient’s bright red, perhaps due to blood or maybe lipstick, lips. “This one’s mine,” she insisted as there was more than a barely audible death rattle coming out of her enlarged nostrils.. As for the reasons for Edie taking special attention to this victim over the others. “She looks interesting and...her symptoms present an interesting and contradictory challenge that only I’m qualified to take on.”

“Huh?” the Jamaican woman suddenly blurted out. Such terrified the overly trained but under-experienced Paramedic into a near heart attack.

“You’re gonna be alright,” Edie assured her somehow resurrected gun shooting with a sure smile, holding the patient’s still motionless hand. Then letting it go, putting her open-fingered right hand up in the air, fingers forcibly-apposed to each other. “Drop out from the Scouts for the right reasons Honor, you are doing to be alright!” Edie promised with more assurance than any political pledge she had offered anyone.

“Thanks...Doc,” the patient muttered in a barely audible but loudly felt whisper. After which she closed her eyes, allowed her outer lips to move upward in a smile. And started to bleed from the abdomen and leg. “Thanks, doc,” flowed out of her quivering lips.

“But ya gotta stay with me!” Edie yelled back at her patient, and most important agenda. “You too!” she threw back at the Paramedic.

Sheriff Evans watched Edie assist the wet behind the overly ringed ears of the paramedic load the woman on the stretcher, putting her into an ambulance which was about to be loaded with two other patients. She assertively gave medical instructions regarding all three patients to the transportation staff, then rushed out to take over triage that she had set up. Such involved taking over for those whose abilities she overestimated and giving more responsibility to those whose skills she didn't appreciate, or bother to fully assess. Nothing new for a field commander wearing a badge or carting around a stethoscope.

## CHAPTER 2

Angela DeMore was one of the rarest kinds of nurses. Other most of her colleagues, her dream mates were not Cops who rescued victims and captured perps. She avoided talking to adult patients like they were scared, selfish or stupid kids. Her voice was harsher and more direct than the motherly tone expected of most nurses by doctors, patients, profit-oriented hospital administrators or casting directors looking to find real life nurses to play health care providers for the cameras. And, she was fascinated by diseases sometimes more than she cared for people, a trait that was so often the property of doctors. Like all good nurses, she knew doctors better than she knew herself.

How and why Nurse DeMore, hard core blue collar Upstater, dedicated to her home town of Buffalo NY and even more so to its football team, connected with over-diplomaed Downstate expatriate New Yorker and die hard Giants fan Edie in Ithaca was a mystery. Angela attributed it to God's grace. To Edie, the best working hypothesis was that the laws of karma decided for once to work for rather than against humanity. They did a bit more for than to each other, making them the perfect match professionally and, some speculated, romantically.

As governor elect who just got a landslide mandate from the people, Edie insisted that Angela be the ONLY OR nurse in Finger Lakes Hospital who spoke English to be present when the Jamaican shooting victim who had no ID was to be treated. Admitted unofficially to the hospital due to Angela's ability to manipulate the paperwork and because of her determination that ICE would NOT deport another sick undocumented immigrant who was trying to 'steal valuable health care funds from hard working Americans so she could go back to dealing drugs and whoring in her asshole country'.

On this particular case, Nurse Angela watched on with fascination as Doctor Edie completed stitching up the soft tissue in her legs and abdomen with her special surgical skills, after making those limbs functional due to medical elixirs and electrical stimulating devices that were not introduced into any of the medical records. "Great stitchery there, Doc," was all Angela had to say as she checked vitals on the still gorked out patient. "And sensory and motor function restored due to those experimental drugs you developed."

"That still hasn't gotten FDA approval, because they're cheap, effective and would put Big Pharma out of business And encourage the Docs under their thumb to look for another line of work. Getting my effective meds and those devised by others off the 'thou shalt not use under penalty of stupid man and idiot woman made law' list is very temporary situation if I have anything to do about it as governor. Which I do..."

"You mean WILL be in a position to do something about, at SOMETIME in the future. Maybe, Edie."

"Fair enough, Angela," Edie conceded.

"And you insisted on working on this patient because...You knew her?" Angela maneuvered into the conversation Edie did not want to have.

While sewing up the last line of stitchery on her biological handiwork, and not missing a beat with hand or mouth, Edie replied, "A challenging case. An opportunity to document another, hopefully publicized in the effective places,, trauma induced paralysis fixed by super off label surgical and medical interventions, Watson...eh...I mean Angela."

“Eddie. There were plenty of other docs in this hospital who are licensed. And in this jurisdiction, the law is...”

“My first act as Governor is to re-license myself and anyone else here

Who knows what the fuck they’re doing,” Eddie shot back. “And revoke anyone’s license who questions mine. Which...I sort of forgot to renew.”

“Because of personal, legal and political problems with the Medical Association that---?”

“-- will be restructured PDQ when I take office in Albany, with re-written GUIDELines when I get to Washington,” Eddie countered.

LA

“But...the Medical board HERE, and now?.

“Will listen to You at my hearing,” Eddie asserted. “Right Lord, or Lordess up on High? ... Particularly, since You let me save this woman’s life and mobility so easily.”

“Or a man who thinks he wants to be a woman,” Angela’s retort to at least some of the portion of insults her agnostic friend delivered to her God, and to herself as a believer in such. “But who is still with us, yes?” she said with a thankful smile, noting that the lack of breaths for the last four beats was made up by a supersized inhalation. “Because—”

“No!” Eddie yelled out to and into the walls as she washed the blood and dirt off the brown woman’s face, revealing a snow white mug under it. One which seemed to have overly male features. Whose eyes, after the mascara and eyelash were wiped away, seemed to be not unlike that ‘model of modern manhood’ Mike Richter.

Eddie dared to let her brain overlay Richter’s trademark J.T. Morgan beard around the face, conferring the evilness in the eyes. The visual in Eddie’s personal horror movie playing between her hurting ears was amplified with a sound tract, in stereo, of the populist Fascist chauvinist

narcissist's sadistic laughter, projecting crude jokes directed everybody but himself. Edie dropped the jar of the cleaning sponges on the floor. It caused a crash that arose Angela's attention, concern and the temptation to be as witty and unconsciously biting to Edie as so often 'the people's Doc' had been to her.

"Doc? Ghosts of Solstice past?" Angela inquired of her partner in healing, and yet to be discovered other endeavors. "Defective psychic boy or girlfriends in the future? Or imaginations about..."

"No, it can't be....him!" Eve shot out. She following it up by spitting on the head of the demon she could see but for whatever reason, Angela could. "No it can't be him!"

"And probably, certainly, isn't....him," Angela tried to assure Edie, with a loose hug intended to stop her shaking but not trap her into anyone else's reality. After all, Edie did have a history of mistaking faces on the campaign trail, and previous to that, in the hospital. Seeing one person's face in another was reported be one of the most common side effects of the most recently 'improved' isoflurane-based gas anesthetics. And there were the rumors that Edie's enlightened brain in matters medical and political was shot off the launching pad with high potent LSD in her radical 20s, which could have lingered, for good as well as bad, in her fabulous 40s, fantastic 50s and beyond.

Angela was not sure if Edie was faking sanity again or had pulled herself back to reality. Once again, the undertrained but over-experienced nurse said the two words that made people close themselves up, or share a can of toxic worms that could only be inactivated by more than one person at a time. "You okay?"

"Yeah," Edie replied, with an honest tone, thankful tone as friend to friend. "But don't let this... this...patient, die!" she commanded as she tore off her surgical smok, then stormed out the door.

The remaining staff in the OR looked to Angela for answers as to what just happened, their inquiries in Spanish, Russian and Chinese. "Nothing important," Angela said to them in each of their languages. But, as people on the bottom of the totem pole, they needed instructions from someone a rung or two above them to confer to them purpose and security.

“You go lunch,” Angela said to her underlings, handing them coupons for the cafeteria to be sure they would yet again think that they were being promoted rather than being pushed aside on the totem pole, or thrown on the ground around it. “I take patient to special recovery room,” Angela offered as a ‘gift’, delivered in sign language as well as spoken word. “A very exclusive recovery room,” Angela whispered into the ear of the still unnamed patient.

That white male patient mouthed an inaudible ‘thank you’, which came from places that Angela didn’t recognize, and was too tired to identify.

### CHAPTER 3

The sign on the door in the soon to be demolished or perhaps rebuild corridor C of the hospital read ‘under construction’ which, in reality, it was. Reconstruction of thoughts, perspectives and actions for the few docs and nurses who needed a place to not be found by their patients, bosses, errant kids and bitching spouses out to find out where those errant offspring had fucked

off to. The signal for the abandoned staff lounge being occupied was not a locked door, or a surgical mask taped to the handle of that door, but a 'radioactive' sign seeable at eyeline for anyone between 4 foot 7 and 6 foot 4 without having to bend or stretch the neck.

Edie's back lay against the mostly torn rubber mat that covered the torn up wall behind her. Her eyes were lost somewhere on the white wall in front of her. A place Angela could not identify but had to so that Edie would not become one of those overworked and over-accomplished docs who were promoted, or demoted, to dimensions of warped consciences no one returns from if you remained at the door of the abyss too long. .

"Governor Capillano?" said as a question rather than statement after picking the lock on the door, carting two cups of coffee.

"Aspiring Philosopher Queen till the gubernational inaugural," Edie replied. "How are the rest of the victims from the shooting?"

"Alive....because you supervised triage at the site..." Angela noted, and related.

"And what I did in the ER afterwards!" the new leader of the promised new world pronounced with an extra self-imposed dose of self-respect that leapfrogged into arrogance. 'Right?'

"Yeah...you did," Angela conceded, as a subservient. "Which means you deserve this," she continued, holding one of the cups of coffee to her, hoping she would take it before it burnt her fingers.

Edie accepted the brew, Angela accepting the unannounced and perhaps absent invitation to sit down next to her. "And you deserve---" Angela advanced.

"---to live in a country where shit like yet another mass shooting this doesn't happen. I know, I'll fix it, even if it's unfixable," Edie slurred out of her dry mouth, still staring at the wall. "After all, I did pledge to heal this state, and country, in body mind and spirit. Healers like me, no us, are an under-represented demographic in politics. And law and..."

Angela pointed to the coffee in her Comrade's hand, then to her quivering mouth. Edie took the invitation, request or order to accommodate her host, acknowledging the sincere gift with a distasteful spitting out the brew.

"Yeah, I know," Angela confessed. "We medical people under represented in the art, science and calling of food preparation. But, can't be good at everything. Everyone I know is great at six things sucks at six hundred, EDIE."

"Yeah..I know," Edie said, allowing the emotions torturing her face to surrender to an 'all is ok for the moment' smile. "The Trick to not being found out as a loser is to turf what you suck at to someone else, give them a title, some praise and..."

After enduring and medicating herself with the coffee she was offered, Edie smelled something foul in the air. "I know that's not that most offensive odor known to man or mouse. It's not the soul killing stench of sterility but..." Edie let her oversized Roman schnoz lead her to Angela.

"It's not coming from me either...But maybe this..." Angela said, handing Edie a white sac she had brought into the 'lounge' with her.

"From that trans or want to be trans woman who you saved?" Edie speculated.

"WE saved," the affirmative reply.

"Yeah. A dirty and smelly job, but...someone has to, or is ordered to do it," Edie noted while .peripherally gazing at the early Christmas stocking from Jane/John Doe that said 'To be opened by Edie Only' on top.

"Her clothing and personal effects. That she left with us, as a special thank you to you, because she...and/or he, didn't have any insurance, and had to flee so she couldn't be found. And she said YOU were the only one God chose to save her."

Believing the dilemma with the insurance issue, and still not buying the 'Divine Coincidence' non-sense correlation, Edie thumbed through the personal effects, after each item was given to her by Angela.

"An authentic Mohawk beaded vest," the Edie noted.

"Made in China," Angela added, peering in to see the back label. "But...Maybe by kidnapped Indigenous girls and women who won a scholarship and training Program in a sweat shop in Beijing."

"Tickets to a Proud Boys benefit with George Washington Jackson as highlighted performer. Whose 'America First Second and Last' simply and inaccurately lyricized song did make it to the top ten country charts," Edie scoffed.

"Because of the music," Angela proposed. "Gotta sugar coat the arsenic any way ya'll can" she added with a mock country accent that both impressed and worried Edie.

"Eight hundred dollar tickets to the New York Islanders vs Maple Leafs play offs. A fight where they're predicting that a hockey game may break out," Edie read next.

"Because of the music, not the libretto," Angela blurted out, hoping that her witticism would out do the one Edie was about to come out with.

"True enough...true enough," Edie said with pride to her most prized student in her constant attempt to train more medical professionals skilled in the art of mischief than monotony. ..."And the next present in this, as I noted on this card in the sac, imprinted with made red ink, or maybe blood. A, as it reads so clearly. 'suggested gift for a Commie-programmed liberal'?"

Edie motioned for Angela to give a comedic retort, but her 'second banana' was looking at her phone. Edie pointed her to the bag, throwing Angela's phone to the other side of the room to a,

luckily, well cushioned landing pad. Angela dug into the bag for the next item, a piece of cloth. There was another a note on it. Edie insisted on Angela reading it.

“For a bad doctor girl in need of some more education about morality and life

A washcloth to clean up the Shit in the WOKE all gender bathroom that says...” Angela read, squinting to read the sloppily penned salutation.

“No!” Edie gasped as she grabbed hold of the cloth. “No!” she yelled out when she saw before her eyes the American red, white and blue bandana with an Eagle sitting comfortably on a Nazi swastika. The one worn by the shooter who chose to shoot at everyone else in her victory festival other than herself. Who she saved from paralysis and wounds that the shooter incurred at the event from other gunmen, or perhaps faked somehow.

“Where is...’he’. Yeah...HE!” Edie yelled at and into Amanda as she grabbed her shoulders, attempting to shake the answer out of her.

“Ah....she he..left...On two strong feet...that...” Angela muttered out of quivering list.

“---that I made possible!” Edie screeched out, pulling away from her assistant in that crime. “Damn me! For something I didn’t see. In someone who, yes, was and IS still too familiar.”

Edie grabbed the tablet in Amanda’s pocket. She pulled up pictures of Mike Richter with his most hyper machismo persona. “Toxic in more than one way Macho man with a beard...The worst choice for office for anything including dog catcher.”

“Herr Fuhrer Iron Mike Richter.” Angela noted.

Edie adjusted the picture. “And without beard, and the kind of brownface and hyper girlie make up that would hide him from being caught after shooting 30 people....Thirty of MY people!

The Image on screen was identical to that of the trans Jamaican patient who Edie had saved from the gallows, so that the beast could transform into a bigger and stronger monster. One who had to be found, and stopped, ASAP.

#### CHAPTER 4

A fact of life is that one picture says a thousand words. But in the case of Sheriff Oliver Evans, whose life was a violation of facts in the quest for a workable truth, several pictures on his office

wall said a very few words. Proceeding, ironically, from right to left, those pictures started with Evans being presented with a gold detective shield as the youngest lieutenant in his Manhattan Precinct at the tender age of 24 in Manhattan. Then serving, with distinction, as Seargent on a special force in Brooklyn three years later. Then a photo of him saving the Mayor and his dog from being killed by gangstas in Suffolk county on the outpost of Montauk, Long Isssllanntte four Christmases after that. Winner of the bronco bucking rodeo in Westport, New York, two years later. Best dog and horse trainer for the Syracuse Police Department the year after that. And finally, the photo on which his smile revealed the most pride and satisfaction. An award from the American Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals for investigating and exposing corruption and abuse of human rights by three local SPCAs and twice that number of money grubbing veterinarians in league with them for unfairly seizing animals from responsible owners and selling them at auctions out of state for a handsome profit.

“Interesting progression upward or...maybe outward?” Edie said to Evans, referring to his second-hand cowboy boots, worn out jeans and the non-symmetrically pinned sheriff badge signifying his being in charge of a town containing ten more times of cows than people. “And doing...that?” Edie continued, as she took more than active notice, and attitude, of him repairing the loose drawers in his weatherbeaten desk as Head Sheriff with a hammer that was three bangings away from falling off its handle. “Yes, Interesting progressions, Oliver” she said of the enigma she met when a fellow scholarship funded freshman at Columbia where they both had undeclared majors. “Going from a big fish in a big pond in the Big, now Crab Apple to being...”

“...a different kind of fish up here in this less complicated pond,” Sheriff Evans replied with accent that lost its Downstate diction but certainly not its intense New York City edge. “Where there ain’t as many rules to bein’ a law and morality obeying citizen,” he replied, oscillating between Up and Downstate dictions. “Or high rents that eat up half of your legitimate income and most of what ya get paid working under the table...Or parking problems when you wanna go to Chekov play or Beethoven Quartet concert. A less complicated pond where ya can be an effective number anything you want to be in your own game. Instead of having to be number one or number nothing in a game you’re forced to play.”

“Like he’s playing with ME, and US!” Edie blasted back, ramming pictures of Richter as ‘Iron Mike’ with a full beard and his most recent personal as a brown faced woman.

“I have my best men, AND women, working on finding him,” Evans said, his eyes fixed on cajoling a defiant nail into the right hole, pointing his finger to the image of Richter in his macho

man persona. "And her," he continued tapping the photo of White Supremacist Iron Mike as a Jamaican. "They're doing everything they can, Edie," he calmly assured Edie.

"But, soon to be Governor Capillano, and your future boss, Sheriff, Deputy or Parking Monitor Evans, what the hell have YOU been doing?!" she blasted back.

Evans took in a deep breath, holding back his anger, frustrating Edie even more. He opened another drawer. He calmly removed a large file folder overloaded loaded with papers and without warning, pounded them on his desk. "Oh.Just," he said, restraining the volcanic rage in his gut. "And this...this...and THIS!" he continued, pulling out three more files, pounding them on the desk with even more ferocity, no small portion of it directed at Edie.

"Because, according to my now abruptly and legally ex wife, I care more about catching the shooters at YOUR rally than I give a shit about her. And that I'm obsessed with nailing Mike Richter to a cross so he stops crucifying more innocent workers, citizens and non-criminal immigrants. And that I'm being an asshole to my kids, who their mother is saying I've neglected. Kids who I'm trying to create a world for that works for rather than against them. And for all of that, I get rewarded with THIS!" Evans pushed his left hand into Edie's face, being sure that she saw the exposed white ring of skin on the fourth digit.

"Because, as well, my once dearly betrothed wife claims that I've been having an affair with you and your Cause!" Evans continued. "As proof, she presented me with the most convincing AI footage of you and me getting kinky AND intimate that's convinced three judges to throw a restraining order on me! And as for Mike or as you say Mika Richter as one of the shooters!"

Edie, having finally accepted, understood and appreciated her old flame's dilemma, gave permission for her thinking brain to take over control of her mind, and soul. "Shooters? Plural?" she inquired.

Evans closed the shade on his windows, double locked his door, then pulled out another file from a hidden compartment under a table. He invited Edie to examine them herself .

“Some of the other suspects, right now,” he related, softly. “Who maybe shot their employer while mowing down your people and my people. ‘America First Bikers for Jesus’.

Who supported Richter’s campaign for Governor. With the kind of money no one reports is missing, then worked as body guards who are still wearing COVID masks. Crowd control at those rallies where Richter paid useful idiots to like him and convince others to worship him. Hired muscle to use against anyone who counts the ballots on election day or votes in the state assembly the way Richter or his really big time funders don’t want them to. Those funders being...” Evans referred Edie to the back portion of the piles of the mal-aligned papers and photos.

When fumbling through Richter’s sources of money, Edie’s eyes opened so wide with shock that they hurt.

“Yeah. Some of them were your funders and campaign workers,” Evans noted. “And as for Mike or Mika Richter avoiding being caught, jailed and privately prosecuted by my new special task force whose members---”.

“----who don’t have any family members who can be hurt or go ‘missing’ if they do their job?” the unlicensed Doctor who was several weeks away from being legally Governor interjected “A task force which is---”

“---Me...and you, now, Edie. Assuming your husband Lars is ok with this.”

“He..eh...is...” Edie observed coming out of her mouth.

“Or will be anyway?” Sherrif Evans inquired with a downturned head and upturned eyes in the manner of professors who said ‘so, this brilliant term paper you submitted is all of your writing, Miss Capillano?’

“Sure,” Edie replied to her new professor in this new course life had enrolled her into. Lars will be okay with this.”

“Why?” Evans pressed.

“Why not?” Edie smiled back, hiding as much as she intentionally expressed.

The more law abiding than law breaking citizens in town knew the 'Cannibal Roadkill Steakhouse Cave' as the best establishment for a prime rib eye or tenderloin in town, never questioning the source of the meat. After all, truth be told, no eatery without a bold sense of humor to its name will have dull staff, mediocre tasting food and absolutely no spice in the manner of its delivery. The manager and main staff proudly wore their 'America First Bikers for Jesus' with pride and just enough machismo irreverence to make their brand of eccentricity hip, cool and, most importantly, legal. And the servers, all female of course, knew very well how to dance gleefully on the sword's edge between interestingly slutty and snobbishly classy. The signs greeting guests were bordered with American flags, exclaiming in bold Old Western Print, 'Seat Yourself, it's a free country, in here anyway'.

"With the 'o' in country in, accidently of course, faint enough to ignore if you read it too fast, or too voracious appetite for a particular color of human meat," Governor-elect Edie Capillano commented to still somehow Sheriff Oliver Evans as they entered into the establishment. "Served on the plate, or upstairs on the..."

Before Edie could impress him, and of course herself, with another witty quip. Oliver stepped on her toe with the heel of his cowboy boots, hidden behind the suitcase he was carrying. He was approached by a scantily clad twenty-something blonde, and of course white skinned, goddess by the name (at least the one on her nametag) of Diana.

"Hey, Officer Oli, your usual table in the back is open," she released from an all is better than well smile.

"Ahh yes, the Wild Bill Hickock table, D?" he asked.

"Reserved only for our most valued gunslingers," she continued, after which she led Sheriff Evans, who led Edie, to an empty table in the back of the room, well separated from the others around it, its chair backed up against the wall.

"Officer Oli?" Edie whispered to the contemporary Sheriff who felt himself promoted by being transported to a previous, and perhaps simpler time. "Wild Bill Hickock table?"

“Back to the wall. No bullets in the back,” he whispered back as he twirled his overgrown mustache. “And,” he continued as Edie sensed the eyes of mobsters and legal officials looking at her like she was the enemy, and Oli as a friend. “Keep your friends close, and your enemies closer,” he said in Italian.

Diana seated them, Evans first of course, then with the least amount of respect possible, Edie. She whipped out a menu, placing it in front of the ‘Good Sheriff’, then buried her consciousness into the writings to happen on her notepad.

“So, what will you, and your old lady have Officer Oli?” she asked Oli.

“Some meat that isn’t roadkill, or if it is, no WOKE human meat, if possible? Too toxically inoffensive for my need for real nutrient,” Edie replied with an inviting smile.

Diana didn’t appreciate the first portion of the quip and seemed to not be able to understand the latter. And as always when under nourished minds are offered real food, she retored with an angry grimace and condescending eyeroll.

“A joke, Diana,” the overly educated older woman kindly assured the over-indoctrinated younger one. “Probably not the first one about roadkill or cannibalism you’ve heard here, right?”

“Yeah,” goddess Diana conceded to the upstart mortal. “But I’ve heard it delivered better,” she shot out from the side of her mouth. “So, what’ll ya’ll have?” the server of diners, and most probably pleaser of love starved pleasure seekers continued.

“Two Number 666’s, rare,” Evans interjected.

“Well done! Please,” Edie added.

“Marked down today, good choice,” Diana noted.

“And...a talk with Axe?” Evans requested. “Which...”

“...Isn’t marked down today. He’s busy,” the reply, delivered without an ounce of malice or deception.

Evans pulled out large sealed envelope filled with papers from a compartment of his briefcase. “For him,” he said by way of explanation, placing it on the table. “And, for YOU!” he continued, retrieving a small envelope from his breast pocket, placing into Diana’s hand.

Upon opening it, she was pleased with the number of Presidential Portraits it contained. A special smile of satisfaction came to her lips when she spotted two packets of ‘sugar’, the special brand of which she confirmed with a whiff into her undersized nostrils and a taste on the tip of her ringed tongue.

“I’ll see what I can for you,” she said. “Now, with Axe and later with...hmmm.” With a wiggle of her ass directed to Evans she left the Sheriff who knew how to work both sides of the law to obtain some workable brand of justice showing her a cautious smile in return. All of such arose concern from Edie, which she dared not show with any facial expression.

“He or she who asks too many questions gets too many answers, Edie,” Evans delivered in Italian to his, so she hoped anyway, trusted companion.

“What my campaign managers kept telling me...,” Edie related, and confessed.

“And advised you to obey if you want to stay in office, or on this side of the dirt!” Oliver shot back in the manner of her overbearing father who warned her to not go into politics, and her husband Lars who suggested that being Chairperson of the Physiology Department at Cornell and teacher of the year more than satisfied the quota The Great Spirit blessed and cursed her with at birth. “ “Which...”

Enter a small-framed man in biker colors, complimented by a tie and business slacks. “So, Oli... What brings you and your...maybe new boss to my culinary establishment?”

“No maybes, particularly after all those innocent people got shot, Axe!” Edie dared to shoot back at the prime suspect enforcer who orchestrating the fireworks at her Victory Rally. “You’re about to be arrested for...”

“----Littering the crime scene...with these,” Evans interjected, pulling out three “America First Bikers for Jesus” from his suitcase. “Whoever was wearing these fired shots into the crowd.”

“Above the crowd. At the shooters. So I heard.” Axe affirmed with not a microgram of anger.

“Who you went after. And, of course, couldn’t find,” Edie pressed.

The undisputed Arch Bishop of the Christian Biker organization took a deep breath into his small chest, let it out slowly, chuckled, then delivered an intense brotherly stare into Evans. “Officer Oli. Got a smart cookie as your assistant here. Too smart for our good, and hers, who...”

Edie was about to belt Axe, but Evans held her hand back before grabbing the five foot three leader of the tallest Bikers in town by his neck, or balls.

“I think a thank you is in order,” Axe asserted, to Edie as well as Evans. “For us showing up at the rally to lend you support. Free of charge. As your new bodyguards. No one’s better at bringing law and order to this great country than an outlaw. Particularly, outlaws in the service of...Him,” he proclaimed pointing up to the sky. “And of course, Him,” Axe continued pointing to likeness of Jesus on the leather jacket found at the site.

“And him?” Edie volleyed back, pulling out a picture of Richter, the trademark campaign image of him with a full beard and masculinely groomed short military style hair.

“Your sworn political enemy, soon to be, thanks to us, Governor Capillano,” Axe noted with shortage condescension, and pity.

“Election LOSER Richter is a political enemy, an ideological enemy!” Edie blasted out, standing up on her own two feet, figuratively and literally. “And now....

Edie has vengeance in her usually compassionate eyes, held her right hand in a fist, which concerned Evans. “Richter is a personal enemy!” she growled. “Who...”

Axe gently laid his open hand on Edie’s shaking fist.

“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Matthew 5:44,” the Christian biker boss said with a more loving tone than any speech she heard from Ghandi or tried to imitate at rallies for pacifism and world peace.

“Right,” the new, awakened and NOT WOKE Edie scoffed....”And ‘do good to those who hate you and bless those who curse you’. But...”

Edie tried to remove her hand from under Axe’s tight ‘assertively loving’ grip with effort, but to no avail. “But not when he shoots my friends, and family. At an event where...”

Empowered by the kind of rage which three days ago she considered toxic, Edie finally pulled away from Axe’s firmly supportive open hand. His released fingers were immediately clenched into a fist.

“Strange that you guys showed up ‘miraculously’ to save the day, scaring away the other shooters,” she effortlessly fired into the castle behind Axe’s fortified walls. .

To Edie’s shock and hidden relief, Axe held back his anger, opening his fist. “Like you said, everyone gives according to their abilities...”

“And takes more than what they need, or want?”

Axe rolled his eyebrows, condescendingly this time with, yes, pity. “ Confused Comrade Capillano. Capitalism always, no pun intended, trumps Socialism. At least in this country. And, interestingly, I heard, Doc Edie, you saved Mike Richter from dying.”

“Yes,” Edie replied, with shame. “After doing triage!” she affirmed.

“Saving lovers of peace and harmony and inclusion of all cultures into the American melting pot? Your loyal supporters?” Axe noted.

“Yes. YES! Fucking yes! Goddamn motherfucking YES!” Edie said, her confidence increasing with each volley. Along with blatant egotistical pride accompanied by banging on the table so loud that even she could feel the earth tremble under her feet.

Edie’s yelling aroused the customers, normal peace loving ‘citizens’ and some hipsters, most of whom had ‘I Like Edie’ buttons on their lapels, some of them next to LGBT colors, some bordered by American flags, some enveloped in the UN flag. She shoo’d them away. They stood their ground, some afraid, some angry.

“Yes!!!!” Edie yelled out with firey rage.

Evans nodded in affirmative to the customers, suggesting that they leave. They did so as quickly as possible.

“Yes, Governor Capilano,” Axe noted standing up on his own two flat feet. “Your loyal supporters, till now Pagan and godless Communists who will have a chance to realize that he,” he said pointing to the picture of Richter. “Is what America needs now so they could earn their way into heaven. A Christian heaven. The only heaven. Where men are men and women are women. A Salvation led on earth by him (Richter) who---

Edie rammed a picture of Richter as an injured woman into Axe’s ‘saved by Jesus’ mug.

“Iron Mike Richter...who looks like this now!” Edie growled.

“AI generated,” Axe shot back after a cursory but sufficient look.

“I don’t think so,” Edie insisted.

“And, more importantly, WE don’t think so,” Evans interjected, finally, pointing to himself and Edie.. “Richter’s on the run now. Probably as her. Maybe coming in here for a beer and burger? After he, or ‘she’ shot himself with an easily fixable wound, and faked paralysis?”

Axe sized up his two guests, then gazed into the pictures Edie had taken on her phone of the Jane/John Doe patient she had saved. After three intense breaths, he released his final assessment on the matter. “IF Iron Mike Richter listened to Satan and allowed himself to become a...perversion. My motorized congregation will eliminate, ‘him’. to save you, paperwork, Oli. And you, Edie, a political scandal. Good for ALL of our businesses.

“Your business being....?” Edie pressed.

Before Evans could deflect the rage Edie no doubt welcomed to be fired at her, Axe laughed, condescending. His biker friends came out of the kitchen, lined the wall. Knives used for carving meat and people strapped to their belts, their hands on their handle

Evans rose up, then handed Axe a card.

“And, Norman,” he said to Axe. “In case you have any leads on the shooters.

“Which included your former boss,” Edie added.

“Who YOU miraculously saved with a medical miracle, unlicensed Doctor Capillano?” Axe countered.

Edie looked at Axe, scared to ask how he had access to that very private information. She turned to Evans for an answer to that unspoken inquiry, getting a 'don't know, search me' shrug of his shoulders as an answer.

"How did I know all of that?" Axe proposed to the Edie as one of the sole patrons of his Cannibal Roadkill Café. " Well...a secret from outlaw to, eventually, another. Since, "He or she who wants to be Governor, then President, should not be trusted with and will probably fuck up the job.." he said, in German.

After taking the fire out of Edie's gut, and confidence from her soul, Axe turned to Evans. "And he who DOES have loved ones with two and four legs who asks the wrong questions does get, well...painful answers," he related, in Russian.

Axe then addressed his Biker associates. "Gentlemen, we have customers! Honored guests!" he proclaimed proudly.

The bikers put on aprons, not stained in blood, went back into the kitchen, and brought out a plethora of trays of food to Evans and Edie. Axe put a Jesus tune on the loudspeaker. "And with five small loafs of bread and two fish Jesus fed five thousand!" he proclaimed to the sky.

"Five thousand plates of bullshit," Edie whispered to Evans.

"Some of it," Evans relayed back to her, in Italian. "But sometimes we do need useless idiots and ...Assholes. And..."

Before Evans could continue his statement pisan to pisan in their ancestral tongue, Evans took a bite of food offered to him, then smiled to his servers, saying "Delicious...Whatever it is..."

"Or whoever it was," Edie noted, after taking in larger portion the freshly cooked meat.

“A joke, guys!” the Sheriff who took on more responsibilities than the constituents who elected him considered possible said to the servers, appended by something in a language Edie didn’t understand. It averted violent consequences and restored good spirits and better will. Bold laughter emerged from all of the bikers, Axe, and even Diana, but not from Edie.

There were many things, including the uneasy feeling in her stomach biologically and otherwise after getting a free lunch at the Roadkill Café, that worried Edie as Evans drove her to places he chose to not reveal, and to be fair, didn't ask about. But one concern topped the list. "That joke you delivered to the bikers and Diana in a language I didn't understand, but had to laugh of course since it's an 'old lady's' place to do so. Was it about me?"

"And if it was?" Evans offered.

Edie allowed her tense back to rest easily on the half torn seat of his 1994 pick up that had somehow passed yet another yearly required inspection by Joe and Joanne's Mechanic shop. It ran more reliably than the vehicles built in the 21<sup>st</sup> century which contained more computer parts than engine under their hoods. "I should get used to it," she conceded, and finally accepted. "The talk show hosts don't get laughs praising idealistic politicians."

"Good point there, Doc, Governor elect, Professor and, according to every musician I know, and had to arrest for possession of too much weed, Maestro," he replied.

"And if you're good at music, the nuances of politics and the anatomy of a well framed international negotiation, you suck at other things," she calmly noted. She clenched her right fist, preparing to bash it into either the dashboard or her already self-bruised arm. "Like...How to find a sore loser of an election who---"

Edie's natural instinct to fire aggression inwardly was shifted to push it into an outer direction when her eyes were held hostage by a homeless hooded busker in the same coat the shooter at the festival had, accessorized with a red, white and blue bandana highlighting an Eagle sitting proudly on a swastika. He was playing 'God Save the King' on his recorder, the sign next to him reading in bold red print on white background 'Real American Hero Needs Real American Job', a collection pot in front of him.

The eyes inside Edie's head ushered her consciousness into the sight of that shooter gazing at only her from the wings of the happiest day of her life which turned into the worse nightmare two seconds and 50 bullets later. But as for the present---"Real American my ass! Playing God save the King!" she blasted into the face of the busker which, to her best perception (which was all she had left) was indeed Mike Richter pushed shock into action, bypassing realization.

“Stop the truck!” Edie commanded Evans. “Now!”

“I’ll call it in, so we can get legal witnesses, drive around him so he doesn’t notice us, yet.” he offered, calmly, picking up his phone. “We’ll need back up.”

“So you and the Keystone Cops can lose him again! No fucking way!” With that Edie snatched Evan’s service revolver from his belt, pulled the ignition key from the steering wheel and pushed herself out the sometimes working but mostly defective passenger door, pulling it out of its main hinges, after which it was thrown onto the road blocking the advance of an upcoming cab.

“Come on, let’s go!” Edie yelled out to Evans. As did a gaggle of drivers behind him, honking their horns.

“Okay, okay!” Evans yelled back to the angry mob he had created, getting even angrier at himself having seen his gun gone. And frustrated beyond rage when he noted that the busker had moved to another location, said location blocked by a crowd of ‘innocents’. chased by a soon to be not so innocent Edie.

After spotting the ‘homeless Busker’, comfortably embroidered into the fabric of passers by who were better at pitying than providing for him, Edie picked up a packet of dog shit from a garbage bin. Slowly, so as to arouse no suspicion from any onlookers, she dropped the manure into the collection bin in front of Richter. She made sure that it mixed in with the collection of bills and coins that he, no doubt, would not declare on his income tax along with the billions he had stolen from those contributors while he was a reality show celebrity and real estate mogul who got rich by going bankrupt at least five times. “Donation of shit for a shit,” she said to Richter, whose face only she could see.

She allowed Richter to see a revolver stuck under her belt, her hand tapping on its handle. Richter returned the discrete gesture with a blatant bash of his cane onto her calves, causing her to trip and fall painfully, and loudly, to the hard pavement.

As seen by the group of spectators on their lunch break, the homeless busker made a run for it, asking for help from anyone in Spanish. And identifying her as ICE. Edie, gun in her hand ready to shoot him down, or dead, took chase. Past political posters advertising her as the Hero for The Homeless. And friends of Immigrants. And past posters bearing her face as 'The first thinking, feeling and super cool governor and soon...president' and 'A Renaissance woman who won't let history repeat itself' They were being posted up by a man in clean business leisure suit and another in torn overalls and paint-spotted work boots

"Isn't that...her?" the White Collar city council member in a leisure business suit volunteering time for his new comrades noted to his working class 'fellow citizen'.

"Yeah, it is," the blue collar worker said to the colleague who used to be his boss.

"Or was..." the painter's new, soon to be official, 'comrade in Cause' noted.

With that, in common cause, worker and aristocrat tore up the posters of the woman who brought them together in support of her, and in support of...someone else, no doubt.

Edie's pursuit of Richter continued, without Evans. He could not find his way through the crowd of drivers he had stranded, no matter how, and perhaps especially because, he identified himself as a police officer. As the crowd saw, hear and felt it, the poor, homeless and half lame busker yelled out more requests in Spanish. Then heavily accented English, saying 'No illegal. No immigrant. No drug dealer. No terrorist'.

"No way you are going to get away from me, and us, this time, you motherfucking, cutthroat loser!" Edie shot out of her mouth, between bullets fired at him, which did miss the crowd, for now, thankfully.

As everyone else saw it, the Peace promoting Progressive Governor Elect turned ICE continued chasing the homeless, busker, who yelled out a Spanish accent, "Me no illegal...No criminal. No terrorist!"

“No illegal but fucking immoral Criminal murderer. Dangerous vermin,” she yelled out between ‘warning shots’ that came close to wounding or killing her prey. ‘Stop, you piece of....’.

Just as Edie was about to catch Busker, with a tackle as legal as anything on the NFL gridiron, she fell to the ground, tackled by a small framed brown skinned 9 year old boy who wasn’t large enough to be a waterboy for any football team.

“Shit!” Edie blasted out more times than she could count as she tried to pull herself up from the bloody ground, and even more times than the crowd could handle as Richter got away, sneaking around a corner, disappearing into another crowd.

As for the crowd around Edie, they clapped enthusiastically. Then congratulated the brown skinned lad with every proud descriptor appropriate for an East Indian, Mexican, Hispanic, North American Indigenous person and Siberian Native. The compliments were appended with contributions of money, business cards for future employment and appearances on tv shows to be seen world wide. The rest of crowd members hurled wads of spit on Edie, or if they didn’t have enough saliva to do so, the brown contents of their coffee cups and red colored fruit drinks.

“Hey I was chasing...him!” Edie asserted to the mob, who threatened to tar and feather her, literally and figuratively. She pulled out a picture of Mike Richter, as his old and new self, to crowd.

Evans finally arrived on the scene, flashed his badge, then grabbed his service revolver from her hand. “She’s with me,” Evans announced. Helping Edie up, seeing more red than dirt under her, he called home base. “I need a bus.”

“To take her to fucking jail!” came from someone in the back of the crowd, and now mob, confirming that assessment with a cheer.

“Or the psych ward!” emerged from another onlooker, arousing a cheer of approval that shook the foundations of the street, and three mantle layers below it.

“A LOCKED ward!” followed, deafening the ears of anyone around who wanted, or needed, to hear otherwise.

Evans, with his hawk-eye vision, saw the Busker reappear on the distant corner, then hailing a cab. A black Umer appeared, whisking him away, but not without Evans getting a good look at the out of state license plate.

## CHAPTER 8

“So, Officer Oli, what did you get from the back up special squad you called in?” Edie asked Evans between coughs from a hospital bed in a very private room, with no number of it in the hallway.

“This,” Evans noted, with downturned eyes, gently removing a paper from his breast pocket, throwing it onto Edie’s sewn up thigh.

“Ticket for obstructing traffic for, wow, almost as much as you’d get for trading in that last century rustmobile truck for parts,” Edie sardonically noted.

“And this!” Evans barked, throwing the next document onto Edie’s, thankfully for the unborn and the born, non-pregnant abdomen.

“Hmmm,” Edie noted. “A BBB notice. Been a bad boy reprimand. Every cop or doc worth their salt has gotten one, two or....in my case...three of them. All erasable when I become governor.”

“Yeah, about that...” Evans said, pulling out his portable think pad, referring Edie to the items so she could see, and read, them for herself.

“Seventy-two percent pre-disapproval rate on me now?” Edie noted. “But...a bump in the road. I got elected fair and square. In a fucking landslide!”

“Not according to these people, Edie,” Evans said, as Oliver, after which he showed her feeds from websites that normally supported her many ambitious across the isle wishes, desires and agendas. Jews for Jesus. Redneck Vegans. Mother Earth’s Misfits. Atheists Are Us. Farmer’s Forum. Anarchists for Law and Order... “And everyone on the left whose agenda matches with yours, and everyone on the right who would rather have an honest Liberal in office than a crook from their own camp.” .

“Mike Richter?” Edie gasped. “A mass murderer who---

“---You THINK shot innocent people at your celebration rally,” Evans related as gently as possible. “Who, according to a new state law...” He led Edie’s wanting to be averting eyes to another website. “Will take over the governor’s chair.”

“Which he’ll turn into a throne, again!” Edie blasted out.

“After winning a special election to come,” Evans, said, so Edie hoped anyway, regrettably. “As the candidate with the next largest amount of votes in the last election, assuming that it was a fair and square landslide election. And who, IF it wasn’t a fair and square election, Edie.”

“What are you saying? That I fucking fudged the goddamn mother fucking numbers?!!!” the once confident literary Renaissance woman spat out like a rejected, drunken common whore.

“Or someone else in your organization did,” Evans proposed. “Which, well, would be the practical thing to do. If this were 1933, and you could manipulate the democratic voting process that got Hitler elected so he’d be out on his ass scrounging for work as a painter of greeting cards, or houses....So that 30 million people wouldn’t be killed in WWII, or even more in WWIII....An altruistic soul might do some creative counting of ballots on election day.”

“Not me, or no one I know, would do that!” she replied, the volcanic rage inside of her bursting intensely enough that it busted open two of her stiches. “Honorable people CAN get elected to their office with honest elections,” she continued, looking into the mirror, seeing another person in the reflection. “Honorable people like you were and can get elected.”

.

“Depending on who counted or counts the ballots,” he pointed out, averting his eyes.

“What are you saying, Oli? That YOU got elected Sheriff by---”

“--Moral necessity, according to some anyway,” he related and confessed with downturned eyes . Emerging from the realm of woulda’s and coulda’s behind his poker face, he turned to Edie. “Which requires me to, distance myself from your case against Mike Richter, Doctor Capillano.”

“Out of professional necessity, Sheriff Evans?” Edie delivered with a condescending eyeroll.

“And biological necessity!” Evans asserted, blasting every emotion brewing in his head into Edie’s half open eyes. “ I have kids. And you have a husband, Lars, who...”

“---Is not going to let Edie go through this alone, Oliver,” Lars barked out to Evans after entering the room, unexpectedly, carrying beautiful flowers and ugly thoughts about what was ahead of himself, and his still legally and probably morally married wife. ”This being...what, Sheriff Evans?”

“Something that I have to...distance myself from, Lars,” Oliver delivered, turning around towards the window, seeing something he didn’t like, understand or explain. He laid business cards from his breast pocket onto Edie’s night table. “Some people who CAN help you, Edie,” he related with more care and authority than Edie recalled him showing to anybody, including his most beloved and chronically rebellious horse.

Lars picked up the cards before Edie could, as Evans slowly strolled towards the door. “Hmmm, Oli. Private Investigators who—”

“Work more outside than inside the law,” Evans replied, his back turns to the re-united in ways they would soon discover couple. “Who work for the side that pays them first, rather than pays them best. Really.”

“And...?”” Lars pressed regarding the other cards, moving his hand towards them.

Edie beat him to it. “Psychiatrists. Shrinks” she gasped. ”I’m not fucking crazy, and I’m not fucking mad!” To prove her point, Edie pushed her hurting abdomen on top of her cut up legs, setting her bruised arm to the task of trashing the hospital room.

“Mike Richter IS a murderer!” she screamed between crashes of pans, smashings of glass and upturning of anything she could lift off the floor. “The gunman at my rally! MY rally! Who shot MY people! My people who...”

Exhausting all of her energy, finally feeling all of the physical and mental hurt inside of her, Edie fell into Lar's arm, then broke down, tears flowing down her red face, her consciousness absorbed by intense tremors accompanied by a blank stare. Nurse Angela and two Security Guards who did not bear nametags on their chest rushed in. Lars assured them all was OK, with his fingers, but unable to do so with his eyes. "It's alright...I'm just taking her...home," he assured the very unagreeable trio.

Lars nervously retrieved a generous portion of greenbacks from his wallet and dumped them on the upside down night-table.. He pointed to the trio, then to the money, then placed his index finger in front of his nose, then his hand in front of his mouth.

The Security Guards nodded 'no' to the offer. Lars put more on the table, the guards nodding 'yes' to it. The six foot 5 behemoths pocketed the money, then left, closing the door after being requested to by the five foot 4 nurse.

"Lars," Angela, after securing the lock on the door, uttered as if she knew Lars better than he knew, or wanted to know, himself. "Edie needs some....".

"---Time alone, with ME!" he insisted, feeling seen through in ways that made him feel valued, and threatened. "Doctor to patient, confidentiality," he related by way of explanation referring to Edie as the former, and himself as the latter...

Edie chuckled a bit, awakened somewhat from her trance. She sincerely got and appreciated Lars' wit and humor, something the NPR Poster husband and wife always competed with at home, determining the winner with metrics of their own of course.

Angela processed it all, or so it seemed to Lars that she did. Still, she turned to the partner in that unorthodox marriage she knew and, despite such, cared about most. "Edie! Are YOU okay with this?" she asked.

"She is!" Lars shot back. "Right Edie?" he asked, turning to his wife, friend, companion and, so he told himself anyway, most favorite lover.

“Yes....I am,” Edie assured Angela.

“With a discreet exit route?” Lars asked Angela. “Something tells me that those curious reporters in the hallway and anti-Edie, soon to become pro-Richter mob of commoners outside I was, I hope, lucky enough to sneak around without being noticed, won’t be very understanding of ANY of our situations.”

“No, they won’t be,” Angela confirmed, averting her eyes so as to not amplify that hardest of facts in a world where the truth contained so little fact.

## CHAPTER 9

“You can’t trust your opinion about any town unless you’ve seen the garbage,” Edie recalled from Jack Iverson, the lowest paid, most travelled and as a result of such most learned professors she had experienced at Columbia three decades ago. “But you get an added insight as to such when you get a first hand SMELL of the ‘trash’ and/or ‘refuge,’” she speculated to herself from inside one of the garbage bags on a cart wheeled out of the hospital by Lars, as a lower rank mentally challenged Orderly, led by Angela as a self-absorbed ‘me no speak or have to English’ Puerto Rican cleaning lady.

“So, I AM a piece of garbage, and a piece of shit, who should die?” went through her head and, as she self-observed, her mouth, as a new song she couldn’t get out of her head. Thankfully, it was knocked out of her by someone outside the bag, hopefully Lars, knocking her the head, whispering a ‘shhh’.

Once out the back door, the rancid odor of human and industrial waste products at the dumpsters confirmed her assessment that the more ‘professionally presentable’ a facility is to a closed eye the more putrid it was to the open nose.

Through a hole made in the supersize and superstrong bag, she took note of Lars dumping two other bags into one bin, then being offered assistance by men in paramilitary multi-pocketed pants. She felt herself being lifted up, then dumped on top of an already overloaded bin that smelled like shit, her ears hearing creatures that made it, her skin feeling six legged critters who processed it.

After three appeals to a God she felt the need to re-acquaint herself with, offering promises to Her, AND HIM that she hoped she could keep, Edie felt herself being taken down from the pile, then laid gently on the ground. Fearing discreditation as garbage more than being dumped in the river as garbage, she pushed her way out of the bag. She looked up at the bin she had been rescued from. “So,” she said to Lars, feeling, for now, the courage to transform obedience demanding terror into voluntarily expressed dark humor “You could have at least dumped me into the bin that said re-cyclable. The when to be recycled this lifetime, or next, being...”

Edie’s next witticism was appended by another ‘shh’. This time from Angela, now clad as an overly dressed male Uber Driver for the rich, famous and blameless, directing her and Lars to a plain black sedan. She threw Edie an oversized white robe with an enlarged hood, the kind that GenZ girls (and now loser Boomer women) used to hide themselves from the world and themselves in, instructing the, for now anyway, governor elect to bury herself in it. Lars gently laid her down on the back seat of the sedan as it zoomed off to places unknown, to Edie anyway. She felt a pin prick in her arm, then drifted off into an...all things considered...happier place between her ears. Not the kind of vacation a misery loving, struggle embracing, challenge seeking servant of Global Enlightenment would voluntarily pay tickets for.

## CHAPTER 10

“So, did the last tornado hit this trailer on the inside?” Angela asked upon entering the more rust than aluminum sided travel trailer nestled in the pristine woods Lars insisted on bringing Edie to for recovery and seclusion.

“One they named after me, in my, well darker days,” Lars said carrying a semi-conscious Edie over the ‘threshold’ on the rocky floor “Before I met...”

“Me..me...me..me..me...me..me?” Edie sang. The combination of Lars’ weaker than expected arms and her expressive song in a political Beethovenian opera of her own making to an audience of imaginary friends, landed her feet in the floor. She stumbled her way to a more ‘real world’ consciousness, then stepped on the tail of a barking bass on the floor. Feeling the ‘dog fish’ in primal terror led her feet through a floor covered with remnants of pizza boxes, clothes that had become rags, and loose papers with faded ink onto other dolls which evoked even louder auscultations of even bigger and fiercer canines, landing her onto a cot which afforded her physical stability and, after burying herself in a hole ridden blanket, emotional shelter.

“Cheap burglar alarm systems,” an un-apologetic Lars explained to more than ever angry Angela. “Roommates for lonely nights,” he went on, opening up some of gates to his mind and soul, “When I, ya know..”.

“---Should, want and need to be alone?” Angela proposed utilizing the invisible crowbar she employed so often to pry the darkest secrets and most crucifiable desires in patients, people and doctors.

Lars silenced his robotic canine bodyguards, then reached into his wallet, offering her the lion’s share of the money in it, placing it into her hands. “Thank you,” he said, in the way that people in real need eventually mean it.

“No!” she insisted. “Edie is going to need it for therapy. Which will cost more than ever now that Richter and his goons are more electable than ever. The public wants someone who could cure, ignore or cure PTSD, not have it.”

“You think she’ll be okay?” Lars asked as he looked at Edie, huddled under the blanket, the childless woman rocking back and forth like the kind baby she didn’t want to have, and probably couldn’t handle.

“Her political slogan was nature never gives you a problem without a solution,” Angela offered, and allowed herself to believe.

“And the solution is...?” Lars asked.

“You,” she replied, seeing or sensing anyway something...different about the husband Edie talked about rarely, if at all, to the public, or herself. “For tonight anyway.

With that, Angela bid a nod of approval to Lars. He edged his way towards Edie, he tries to hug her, but she pulls away, shivering. He put another blanket on her. She took it, hiding even deeper under it. Lars could only imagine the horror of the movie in her mind which was amplified into three D pictures and all around stereo.

From Edie’s perspective, the key player in the memory about the shooting at the victory festival, the only time in twenty years where she dared to ‘let loose’ and enjoy the day rather than vigilantly worry about the ones to come. No, it was not Richter this time, but the mystery festival attender bearing red, white and blue sneakers with the likeness of a smiling Ghandi on them who tripped her just as she was about to shoot him. Then dragged her to safety, coincidentally at the location where she woke up soon after where that ‘special patient’, the paralyzed brown skinned Jamaican woman, was waiting for her.

Trying to be an active rather than passive dreamer, Edie’s soul struggled to push her mind into seeing more than the images which were imprinted on her brain. Edie tried to place herself above herself to see who that sneaker owner was. A blurry picture emerged, its features about to come into an effectively utilizable consciousness when—MUSIC blarred out. The rousing Flight of the Walkurie, sung by Bruhilde. The heroic maiden who boldly rode her horse into the walls of Valhalla as a goddess demoted to being a human who became more powerful than ANY god or goddess in her Promethian Mission to enlighten, empower and educate humanity.

But this time, or this rendition, was more frightening than it was inspiring. Upon waking up, Edie saw that it was coming over Lars phone, the expression on his face being that of a terrified, ashamed and helpless mortal.

After taking in a deep breath, Lars answered the phone. “Yes, please. I can’t talk now,” he said calmly, after which hung up. “So WE can talk about...” he said to Edie.

But before Lars could finish his thought, and offering, the phone rang again. “Yes?” he said impatiently to the caller. “And...how did you know I was here, and we were here?”

“And ‘you’ is who?” Edie inquired.

“Nobody you need to know about, E,” he replied.

“You sure, L?” she shot back, inviting and needing a real answer.

“Yes. I’m sure,” Lars replied, laying his firm hand on her shaking shoulder.

“Sure of what?” Edie pressed, finding the strength and need to get up on her own two feet, approaching Lars, slowly. “Sure of what?” she repeated two times, with renewed curiosity, and courage to accept whatever answer it was, with each cautious step towards her oldest, and most trusted, friend. Who turned away from her, closing the blinds facing the woods to the east. Just in time for bullets to fly in from the window facing the west, and north, the bullets shot from automatic rifles shot by two black jacketed bikers wearing COVID masks and bandana’d passengers in three green sedans. Such was all Edie could see from under Lars’ so far uninjured body after he pushed her down to junk covered and shaking floor.

“We gotta go, now!” were the only words Lars related by way of what the situation was, and what to do about it.

“Where?” she asked and demanded.

“Somewhere...else,” Lars answered. He grabbed a vintage Winchester rifle donated to him after being historical advisor on ‘How the West was Lost’, the most honest Western ever shot East or West of the Mississippi, and firing off seven shots at the assailants. The gun jammed just as he was about to unleash an eight round. With the five second delay in returning gunfire Life granted. With a rusty axe, he converted hole a dog door on the south end of the trailer, converting it into a man and woman escape hatch put into active service three seconds before the shower of gunfire from the unexpected visitors turned into a monsoon.

Lars led Edie into a hole covered by a carpet of thin logs, placing her into the passenger seat of a submerged vehicle. A vintage VW Van covered with psychedelic memorabilia celebrating peace, love and harmony. Along with, of course, the use of cannabis as a means to obtain such.

“Just like in the old days when Maui Wowi was five bucks an ounce instead of fifty dollars a toke,” Lars said to Edie as the vehicle made it out of its hidden garage, making a getaway down an heritage wagon trail that hadn’t been upgraded since the invention of the internal combustion engine. “When we knew that civilization will, in this still nuclear armed world, not end with a whimper but a...”

“Before Lars could end his quip, and prophesy, with ‘bang’, ‘boom’ or kaboomie’, the real thing happened. A large explosion behind the van, converting the carefully reconstructed 1969 trailer into a billion pieces of rubble. Driving around the bonfire it left behind were the three cars and two bikers, carving a path in front of them with even more firepower.

“Just like the old days, Edie?” Lars said, trying to alley Edie’s fear as he zig zagged on the wagon path.

“This is serious!” Edie reminded her once partner in distribution of illegal pharmaceuticals that funded their academic educations and, in later years, their contribution to rehab centers to save those with addictive personalities from a one way dead ended trip to Heaven, Hell or a wide variety of Purgatories in between. “This is fucking serious!” Edie yelled out again, trying make herself heard over the gunfire, and her pounding heart.

“I know,” Lars acknowledged. “And this is a serious Walkurie helmet, Bruhhildie,” he continued, pulling out a WWII helmet he had converted into a Viking helmet with two cow horns, which he custom made for a student film he had produced which was too human to be a commercial success. “Keeps bad bullets out, and good thoughts in,” he said. Edie took his advice, knowing that the former was true, and praying that the latter was as well. While putting it on, she felt then saw Lars abruptly turn to a logging road, which was more pothole than road. He was skillful, or lucky, enough to maintain speed, and composure.

One of the drivers of the cars behind them took a deep dive into a hole in the road, then a big jump on the other side, landing it on its side. “One down,” Edie found herself saying, the outer

margins of her lips turning upward with delight at seeing one of the cars blow up, not caring somehow about its inhabitants.

“And four more to go!” Lars added, after which he knocks on the glove compartment. The door fell off, dropping cassette players of ‘Up In Smoke’ and ‘Cannon Ball Run’ onto Edie’s lap, along with a fresh revolver and box of bullets.

“Rule of the jungle, Edie,” Lars as he crashed into a fence, onto a pasture of cows leisurely eating grass and (according to pathologically WOKE components of Edie’s rapidly shrinking fan club) destroying the ozone layer of the atmosphere with their methane containing farts. “Best shot with a gun, at the arcade or anywhere else, gets to shoot the gun as a rapidly approaching predators,” he continued. “Like that one at three o’clock,” he said pointing out the passenger window.

Without thinking, or maybe with too much thinking, Edie shot at one of the bikers who was about to land a shot at the side window into her Helmet, or Lars’ exposed, by immediate necessity, swelled head. Before the barrel of the biker’s automatic rifle could empty be emptied into ‘friendly’ flesh, Edie fired two rounds at the unidentified biker in the black jacket, aiming at the wheel of the hog. She missed, the bullet hitting him in the chest, throwing him onto the ground. She saw, or thought she saw anyway, the colors on the back of the Jacket.

“America First Bikers for Jesus,” she noted. “Who I just sent to the devil.”

“Yes, you did,” Lars said. A compliment the once most active supporter of gun restriction laws and the use of them against anyone accepted, proudly. “As we have another one to worry about at...”

“I got him,” Edie said, firing away two more shots. One hit a cow, sending it painfully to the ground. The other took out the front leg of the second Harley hog, leaving the rider under it trapped.

“And mother earth is just about to get us,” Lars said as the van stopped dead in its tracks, then sank slowly into a vat of quicksand, turning over on its side, releasing all of the contents in the

back. Lars was stuck in the driver's seat. Edie pushed herself out of the van, struggling with all her might to pull Lars out.

"I'm sorry," he said to Edie. "I'm sorry about all of it, E."

"You mean that?" Edie said regarding the approach of the two remaining cars in the distance, then stopped. They fired more rounds, missing Edie and a very internally and externally hurting Lars.

"And everything, E, like..."

"Like what Lars?" she pressed as more bullets flew. And one of the downed bikers resurrected himself from the grave, shooting at her as he limped forward, then taking cover behind the wounded cow. She shot back as many times as she could. The biker stopped shooting. As did the inhabitants of the cars, all of them showing themselves and their weaponry to her from a distance. A far enough distance to not be able to take them out with a revolver, according to her calculation and number of missed bullets.

"You're sorry about what Lars?!!!" she demanded to know while reloading the revolver. "Like fucking what!!!" She spotted out of the corner of her wide open, terrified eyes, something amidst the junk that fell out of the VW Van.

It was none other than the red, white and blue sneakers bearing the likeness of a smiling Gandhi. Size fourteen. With his name on them. She turned to Lars, who nodded 'yes'. 'Yes' to him being the sneaker wearer at the festival shooting who tripped her just before she could shoot Richter while he was making his getaway. Just as Richter, as she now realized, was shot by a bullet from his own gun to make a wound that only she could heal. 'Yes' to Lars being the 'sneaker guy'gal' who then pulled her away to a place of safety. After which she felt a big 'wasp bite' in her arm that made her fade out. After which she woke up, finding a female Richter next to her with a probably faked paralysis who she was supposed to 'save'. "Yes," she said to Edie as she found herself pointing the loaded gun at Lars' aching head.

"No," Edie said, walking then running away from the last man who she ever thought would betray her. "No!" she said as she advanced in the field, shooting the wounded biker dead, then the cow, putting them both out of her misery. "No!" as she did the same for, or to, a calf

limping over to its dead mother. “No!” when grabbing hold of the biker’s automatic weapon, blasting at the cars, sending their drivers and passengers into the woods. “No!” when hopping getting on the motorcycle left by the dead biker, heading off into the wood.

As Lars saw it, a helicopter landed in the middle of the field, a videographer emerging from it.

“Did you get all of that?” his boss asked him.

“Every bloody and broadcastable detail of Vegan Philosopher Queen Edie’s hunting expedition when she went after human and animal prey, Governor Richter” he replied. “And as for the editing?”

“You’ll get your usual feel for your usual service,” Richter assured the middle aged man who he considered a lad. “And as for YOU!” the now all macho again aspiring Emperor of the “New, Larger than Ever” America said to Lars. “It’s time to for you to get what you deserve,” he said.

“And,” Lars said as he was pulled out from under the van, with less injuries than he thought he would incur from the ‘accidental’ fall into the swamp. “Am I permitted to know the charges against me?”

“Why not?” Iron Mike said, as he asked his assistant for a gun. “Stupidity,” he said, after which the first bullet went into Lars’ left knee. “Kindness,” the second accusation, followed by a shot to the arm. “And...” the final declaration, the barrel of the gun pointed at his head. “Treason and...Disloyalty”. The next two shots ended Lars’ ability to have progeny, the next for putting to an end his ability to think.

## CHAPTER 11

“Well, it’s another day of ‘what is Crazy Edie Capilano up to?’ veteran newscaster and winner of the American Association of Senior Stud of the year Jack Bradley said to the cameras reaching out not only to the Empire State of New York but the Empire known as America. “Tonight, areal footage of the anti-hunting, anti-killing and anti-violence mayor elect of the Great State of New York doing a not so great shooting spree of a cow, calf, two recreational American Christian motorcycle riders, then the Doctor Governor elect disappearing into the woods.”

“Soon to be prosecuted Governor elect, Jack,” Barbie Barone, Bradley’s replacement once the old newscaster came in to work too slowly, or lost any more of his Golden Girl appealing silver

hair , added. “We know the number of the bovine victims of her latest shooting spree, but still not the name of the two departed to Heaven America First Bikers for Jesus,” she delivered to the camera lens ‘with a smarter than you’ll ever be, Boomers’ smile.

“Two shithead imposters wearing our colors!” Axe yelled at the TV screen from the Upstairs office of the Cannibal and Roadkill Café, feeling the raspiness in his nearly 50 year old throat.’

“Hired by who, boss?” twenty-five going on fifteen year old Prospect Karl Holderman inquired of his most recent role model, and future boss.

“Some questions, we DON’T have to answer,” Axe informed his newest ‘convert to the Cause,’” “And shouldn’t!” he blasted back at the slow witted recruit who was only alive because Axe’s former wife knew too many secrets about her former husband.

“For now, Uncle Ivan?” the Prospect asked, softly.

“Uncle Ivan?” Axe growled back at his nephew, thankfully out of range from the established members of the club. “Yeah, some questions we don’t have to answer for now, Jesus, Buddha and Allah help us,”. the President of the America First Bikers for Jesus whispered, after which he crossed himself with his merged index finger, ‘fuck’ finger and thumb apposed, going tom the right to left shoulder.

“But,” Prospect Karl inquired, with an intense curiosity and millennial snowflake innocence that would have kicked any other newcomer to the club out the front door and, if it came to it, into the hogs behind the garage as food, or as the masterfully flavored ‘wild chicken’ to human customers. “Aren’t we, you and me anyway, like, ya know, Catholic?”

“Yeah, we are,” Axe confessed, and related, making the sign of the cross in the Catholic rather than Eastern Orthodox manner, with an open hand, going from the left to right shoulder. “Been around too many Slavs lately,” he said by way of explanation, finding it easier to say that than to start lying to Karl, and anyone with any real political power, about who his real Russian Glasnost mobster father was, and KGB grandfather.

Axe crossed himself the Catholic way, with open fingers moving them from the left to right shoulder, his last movement bashing the smart assed nephew and pathetically naïve prospect in the face, for the kid's good, as well as his. 'Uncle Ivan' then changed the station on television to CHIPS.

"Cultural appropriation biker Cops!" yelled at the more cute and cuddly than cruel and clever California Highway Patrol Officers clad more for a Chippendale party than a showdown with real bad guys. He opened up the, for more ways than one, necessary diversion by throwing a rotten tomato at the screen. The full members behind him did the same, screaming at the Ponch and Jon for being Pansies, Fags, Wetbacks and Spiks, finally clumped together as 'Satan's Minions' by President Axe, aka Comrade Commissar Ivan.

## CHAPTER 12

It wasn't the cleverly edited television footage of seeing herself shoot at and kill innocent bovines and people that irritated Edie most from Angela DeMore's apartment couch. Such was expected. Nor was it, ironically, the supplemental clips of crowd chanting for Mike Richter to be elected governor and subsequently President. Such was predicted. What did, in the immediate scheme of things, irritate Edie most were the claws gingerly scratching at her arm, the teeth gently scraping the skin on her neck. And that the short haired white blue eyed cat doing such somehow was fascinated with the smiling images of Iron Mike Richter flashing on the screen.

“Yeah, like he thinks he’ll be, with the recount he requested, and will count, illegally, the governor of this fine state, then somehow will be legally elected President of this very unfine fucking country,” Edie grunted.

The feline nuzzled her smooth head against Edie’s sore neck, seeming to purr out ‘don’t worry, everything will be okay if stroke your troubles away behind my neck’

.

“No!” Edie yelled at the cat, pushing away its auditory and tactile invitation to trust life, and connect to her former kinder, gentler and more intuitively rational self. “Fuck off!” she commanded the somehow friendly feline who lingered by her side, extending its paw onto her forearm. “Are you fucking dense!” Edie yelled at the purring feline. “I said f u c k fucking off!”

“Hey!” Edie heard from Angela as she turned off the remote, then laid a backpack next to Edie. “That’s Therapy,” she said, pointing to the still present cat. “His name and function.”

“For you maybe,” Edie replied, somehow finding the faculty of empathy within her tortured soul and disrupted brain. She turned around counting the number of feline bodies in the 14 by 20 foot living room. “But having 12 hair shedding shitters.”

“Fourteen feline companions!” Angela asserted.

“Which, I know, beats having had, and trusted, one male humanoid companion Judas turncoat,” Edie acknowledged, shaking the second layer of white cat hair clinging to her black dyed and blood stained jeans. “Who I’ll...” she continued, clenching her aching fingers into a tight fist.

“Therapy” licks it, loosening Edie’s fingers. Her hands started to shake, afraid. She looked at the cat, inviting him to come hither with her other hand, but the feline support shrink decided that ‘her hour was up’, or that he was more interested in chasing a female cat in heat inviting him to become a lover, daddy or (if spayed) ever useful fuck buddy.

“Does Lars know where I am?” Edie asked Angela, trapped into the ever-present agenda of self preservation even the bravest of souls can’t put aside for more than a brief time. “And where

YOU are, Ang?" she continued, stumbling onto the agenda of self sacrifice which so often, with Edie anyway, came with a proportional amount of self-sabotage.

Angela didn't answer. A tense delay which fell upon the room, and into all four and two legged inhabitants of such, she finally answered, averting her eyes but not her soul. "No...Lars doesn't know where I am. But if Lars he's still on this side of the dirt, he's probably looking for you, Edie, but not..."

Edie read the name on the ID Angela pulled out of the backpack with tired but still somehow determined eyes. "Rachel Horowitz-Hakim? Married to---"

"---Her own survival," Angela replied with the kind of truthfulness and honesty only a fool wouldn't trust. She poured the contents of backpack onto sofa. They included a short curly grey wig, and dark blue maxi dress. "Your size I think," Angela said regarding the latter.

"But not my hair color or style," Edie said regarding the old lady wig. "Not yet anyway."

"Or size, yes, I know, but..." Angela said pointing to the topknot that said 'done with life'.

Edie tried wig on, feeling that it hurt. "Maybe a burka would work better?" she proposed.

"Not for an Orthodox Jewish woman who convinced Achmed, an Islamic Seminary man, to convert to become one of God's Chosen people and an exceptionally rich and well respected Mench," Upstate New Yorker Angela said with a Yiddish Downstate diction that was as authentic as it was strained. "But when it came time for his brisque. And when Rabbi Rabinowitz took off the foreskin from his," she continued, pointing to her crotch. "You know what, I tell you, Liebshin, oh did Achmed act like a deshrukn kleyn meyd!"

Edie allowed herself to express and enjoy a three second chuckle. "An interesting and encouraging story," she noted..

“You bet your tukkos!”

“But...Moslems do circumcision on their male children within a few weeks of being evicted from the womb, Ang,” Edie related.

“Damn! I didn’t know!” Angela shoot out in a 200 percent goy Bufallo, New York diction.  
“Sorry. And I’m sorry for...”

Edie edged her way towards Angela, enforcing a hug on her best girlfriend and most trusted medical colleague before it was asked for. “You weren’t supposed to know. Or required to. But...”

Feeling that Angela got her full, allotted and allowable dose of empathy, Edie released her from the supportive embrace. It was time for questions, and answers

“Question one,” Edie said, reaching in to the pile of ‘new life’ on the couch, perusing the driver’s license, passport, social security card and, the most useful of items, Cosco and Topps Grocery Membership cards. “How did you get these, Ang?”

“A still functionally married Russian mobster who came in for some discretionary treatment to the ER, who DIDN’T work for or like Mike Richter,” she explained. “Wanted to give me a tip for going above and beyond the call of duty and the standards of doctor patient confidentiality,” she continued. “No better forger on line or off than an ex Commie Ruskie who knows how to steal from the Collective legally. Honest Injun!” she declared with an upturned right hand.

“Yeah...But rightly or wrongly, verboten cultural slurs aside, Comradksi,” Edie pressed  
“Question two. Aren’t you on Richter and my ex husband’s hit list along with me?” she hypothesized.

“Probably. But if the greatness of a man, or woman, is measured by the number of her enemies, right?” the reply.

“Yeah...Used to believe that, but...Question three,” Edie forged on. “What’s your. defense against those enemies? Your getaway plans for WHEN you need them?”

Angela pulled out a crucifix from around her neck, with likeness of Jesus on it. A kind one, showing him smiling on the cross rather than showing a grimace making the bearer of such feel guilty for his having endured that fate.

“Oh yeah. ‘Him’,” Edie commented, attempting to be realistic about her relationship with the J man along with being of service to a fellow member of her endangered species. “Jesus. Who said do the right thing and right things will happen to and for you. An interesting campaign promise to constituents who presumably have free will to vote for him for Highest of the High office as---”

“---And this,” Angela interjected, more angry at life than at her witfully Atheist friend who could afford to hire a good Jewish Lawyer to negotiate her entry into the Pearly Gates. She carefully removed an envelope from a drawer, handed it to Edie and invited her to open it. We

“Pellikan Falls Medical Center, Stage Four Cancer,” Edie read. “And for shits and giggles, AIDS which---”

“--Are occupational hazards,” Angela related with the cool, calm and (as some would say) pathological collectiveness of a doctor.

Edie edged her way in to hug Angela, but she pulls away from Edie’s welcoming hug and caring eyes “Anything I can do?” Edie said, the standard answer but with a deeper intension than she recalled giving to any patient, or friend.

“Somehow get back into politics AND medicine, Doc,” Angela requested turning her head towards but not to Edie. “So that cancers can be stopped at stage 1. And win that do over election...honestly this time.

“But we won the election. Didn’t we?” Edie dared to ask.

“If you got the chance to fudge the ballot boxes when Hitler was elected Chancellor of Germany, would you do it?” the retort, said straight at and into Edie.

“Would, or did, you, or anyone else fake the count to prevent Fuhrer Richter from getting elected?” Edie muttered having heard that justification before but not with such impact on the mind and soul.

“Some say ‘yes.’” The painful reply.

“But no one I know would do it. They cheat, we cheat, and no one is the winner, right, Edie? But...”

“Believed facts and the truth are different animals, Ang...I know.

Edie took in a deep breath, then put the wig on. It hurt. “Pain. Price of a big brain...or swelled head,” she noted by way of explanation.

She looks down at cancer letter on table, took a picture of it when Angela moved on to feed the cats. Her...‘Therapy’.

## CHAPTER 13

Edie, clad as an elderly and subservient ‘Rachel’ shuffled through the park hoping the fresh air would provide new perspective. And knowing that if she lingered at Angela’s apartment, a caravan of cars and motorcycles armed with gunmen, or gun women would arrive, leaving no one alive, even, and especially, the cats. Edie was exhausted, her empty belly saying ‘feed me or I’ll send more horrible to your brain than a pounding headache,’. She also knew first hand that if hungry medical patients become starving mental ones, who drift into the abyss without warning to friends, family or themselves. And that if brain cells don’t get fed with enough blood glucose, ketosis sets in, acidifying the blood while nuking out key elements of the muscle between the ears.

Eddie shuffled herself to a young, energetic hot dog vendor who boldly wore a red and white Boston Patriots hat color coordinated with a bright blue New York Giants sweatshirt. Perhaps he was one of the two personality people whose favorite past-time was arguing with himself. Or, perhaps, he was the NFL posterchild for bringing common purpose rather than rivalry between Beantown and the Big Apple. His bushy hair enveloped ear buds, his mind engrossed playing a video game on his phone. The artistic renditions of the 'All Natural' meat-lover's wares in his oversized cart were convincing enough to woe any vegan into becoming a carnivore.

"So, what will we have?" she asked her grumbling stomach in the old lady Jewish Russian accent in keeping with her new identity as she announced in words what her finger pointed to. No matter how loud she ranted, or accidentally knocked the cart over, nor cleared her throat, the on duty thirty something Vendor remained off the clock, not noticing her. Or perhaps, Eddie suspected, actively NO notice.

FINALLY, after clearing her throat three times, nearly barfing up the empty cookies in her growling stomach, she heard "Yeah" from the vendor.

Upon raising her head from hunched back old lady to upright 'adult level', her eyes beheld two thirty something tourists wearing Jets tee shirts half her biological and a third of her 'Rachel's in front of her, ordering a 'chili-loaded hound dog' and a 'bacon blast wolf burger'. The goods were delivered with lively conversation about sports, life and speculating on the benefit of putting snowflake GenZers into football camps so they could enjoy the thrill of winning and with the insights only obtainable by losing.

Eddie prepared her own comments about and suggestions as an old Russian lady for a discourse that would perhaps bridge the gender gaps between American, which she claimed were an integral reason for the gap between rich and poor that afflicted citizens of all ages. But before she could order a hot dog as a prelude to entering that conversation, the two sports fans scurried off, leaving a space between Eddie and the vendor. It was filled in less than a Downstate New York millisecond by two no older than twenty year old hipsters on skateboards, requesting what they wanted with their fingers. After the half head shaven girl and the long, purple haired boy were served, they buggered on their way, knocking Eddie to the ground.

Upon arriving yet again, determined to not use common sense of feeding her canteens from an easily accessible watering hole, Eddie's entry to that All Natural Hot dog was blocked by a Soccer

Mom and her daughter. The mother had a faded 'Being Rich in Spirit Beats being Rich in Pocket' tote bag on her shoulder, sporting around her long, swanlike neck an oversized scarf with LGBT rainbow colors, with and a large, perhaps real, diamond ring, on her minimally moving left hand requested a 'whatever is fastest'. The daughter, in her uniform, was told by her mother to order whatever she wanted because she had done 'her personal best' at the game. The 15 year old brat who had that 'I fucking lost again' grimace on her mean girl in training' face ordered the 'super loaded vegan puppy dog', demanding that all of the items it came with were to be modified in amount or replaced with something else.

"Too much of nothing, and not enough challenge," Edie thought to herself as the reasons for the misery behind both Mother and Daughters eyes. But after they got their requested culinary delights Edie saw something that caused more distress. They stopped at another stand, in front of which was a basket marked 'to throw away'. In it were every variety of campaign buttons advertising Edie's face or most important bullet point credos. The mother pulled three of her own buttons from her purse, tossed them into the garbage can then invited daughter dearest to empty her backpack of Edie memorabilia. They then proceeded to the vendor, buying two 'Mike Richter for EVERYTHING and ANYTHING' promo hoodies, then put them on, walking past more bearers of the same.

"So. Is just you and me now, Boris," she said to her stomach in the voice of Natasha from the Bullwinkle and Rocky cartoons. Or was it the Rocky and Bullwinkle cartoons? It didn't matter. Edie was hungry, and needed to fuel up and as she remembered from her past experiments with trying to fast her way into Enlightenment, there is nothing more self-destructive than an empty stomach not fed.'

Yet again, she tried to pull the vendor from his beloved video game. Nothing, not even tugging at his apron worked. "So, terribly strange to be seventy," she self observed herself singing loud enough for the vendor to hear, and with enough identification for him to ignore, or not notice. Considering that it was the latter, Edie stole a bun, a hotdog, then the lion's share of every topping available. She placed money in front of the sun-glassed game player, saying "Spaceba," Seeing that there was no response at all, she took the money, giving him the finger, and taking the hotdog in hand with her, along with snatching a one, two, then three menus from the 'All Natural Dog' stand. "Alright already!" she yelled at he grumbling empty stomach. "Hold your horses, or doggies," she said while proceeding to an isolated bench. She allowed her hurting and over-padded ass to plop onto the hard, wooden slats. She opened her mouth, then heard kids behind her yell out 'die you pathetic creatures'

Thinking that maybe she could save at least one old before or in her natural time lady, or man, or someone in between from being rewarded with a premature death she turned around. Two sadistic lads no more than eight years mean, wearing 'We Love Mike Richter' jackets and his new trademark American Eagle armband in the manner of Hitler Youth, were shooting paint guns at pigeons.

"Hey!" Edie screamed out. "You stop that, now!" she commanded in the manner of a the Socialist Commander of old who had freed Russia from the Czars, then the Nazis, pulling out her cane.

"Or you'll do what, Babuchka?" they yelled back.

"Edie's thinking brain, pushed wisdom and power into her arms. She threw rotten garbage at the lads with deadly accuracy, shooing them away from the flock of birds they had cornered and were about to discolor and kill. They walked away, to cause mischief somewhere else, giving her the finger. She gave them the fist. The threatened flock had taken to the the sky. But one birds, an older one by the looks of him, came back to either see if humans could be trusted, or to extract revenge for the birds the lads did disable. It flew then walked toward Edie, placing itself in front of her. He did the 'feed me' dance with a back and forth motion of his head and stomping of his feet in a distinct rhythm.

Edie looked at her yet to be eaten hotdog, took a bite out of it, then looked at the ingredient list on the menu. As expected, more artificial preservatives than natural ingredients, but...it did fill the piehole and kept the car moving to the next gas station. The bird approached, wanting and needing something from her. "Okay, then," she said to the bird, feeling like inventor Tesla when he found his only true love in the form of a female pigeon who, some say, he dedicated some of his inventions and most of the rest of his life in exile to. "You asked for it. A song."

Edie broke into non-other than the lyrics of her favorite satirist in her youth, and role model when after she advanced to middle age, Tom Lehrer, who in his later life gave all of his songs to whoever wanted to use them, royalty free. "All the world seems in tune on a spring afternoon When we're poisoning pigeons in the park." She sang to the bird at she threw portions of her hotdog to him. He, or maybe she, ate some of it, then looked at her with concern as she took her portion into her mouth.

“Hey...We both grew up in the Big Crab Apple. And are immune from all the toxic preservatives in this All Natural Mother Nature hotdog,” Edie related, in a quiet voice as herself. She takes another bit of the hotdog to prove her hypothesis as valid, then taps her stomach, appending with an ‘hmmm, good’ that was not totally dishonest. She then proceeded to feed her fellow al fresco diner, who gobbled up the crumbs and bits with voracity. And, of course, no good breaking of stale bread is complete without the appropriate dinner music. Edie continued to sing, in a Russian accent, adding a Slavic flavor to the already rich feast for the hungry ears, “every Sunday you see my sweetheart and me. as we poison the pigeons in the...”

The avian diner took a dump on a newspaper article pasted to the ground. Under the flowing, creamy and not too distastefully odorous detritus she noted a headline announcing the official ruling of the Supreme Court unanimously approving another election for the governor of the Empire State.

“Nice try, my fine feathered, still I hope, friend,” the Promethian candidate for governor who dared to challenge the laws from the newest gods atop Mount Olympus said from the current subdivision of the Twilight Zone life seemed to be assigning her to. “Seems you can’t change the rules of politics. But we CAN change of laws of nature. Make cures happen when...”

Deciding to stay on the same message, deliver it to where it is perhaps less heard but the Party Who most needed to hear it. “Yeah, make cures happen that you say shouldn’t happen. It might be Your Will that Angela not see her next birthday.MY determination that she outlive her cats so she can be a crazy 90 year old with even more cat sand more crazy!

With that, Edie removed the phone from her purse, bringing up picture of the cancer letter from the hospital. She dialed the number below the semi- brown and gold engraved document. Self-reinstated Doctor Edie waited impatiently for the operator at the Pellikan Falls Medical Center to answer. Her reactivated soul and mind that hopefully was in service of it were the numerous cures for sadistically independently growing cancers and schmucked immune systems that she stumbled upon, discovered or inadvertently stole from previously ignored medical geniuses. Meanwhile, feeding the lone wolf pigeon food rather than medical data seemed both appropriate and necessary.

“Please hold while we connect you,” kicked in with friendly tone made all the more lifeless by its excessive dose of ‘happy-pleasant’ within every syllable of the monotone greeting.

“Hold onto fucking what?” Edie said to herself.

The answer came in the form of pathologically pleasant muzac with no essence in its repetitious refrains and even less vitality in the notes.

Edie tapped the worn out soles of her ‘old woman Rachel’ pumps to a rhythm intentionally NOT with the soothing melody, trying to get it out of her head. Finally, what sounded like a real human answered. “You are now connected to a real humanoid representative,” a young voice said with an upbeat tone that, to the speaker at least, seemed real, even though it probably had not been life tested. “This is Amber. Speak your mind, soul and agenda...if you dare. Please.”

Edie cleared her throat, pulled her downwardly bent chin upward, and set in with her best ‘stiff upper lip and upper caste’ English accent, the kind which intimidated more American listeners than any citizen bearing a US passport would admit to. “Ah, Amber! A medical center that has wit, vitality and humor! Fantastically finally!” she exclaimed, recalling her own struggle to instill REAL humor and vitality while a full time Doctor working around physicians and researchers afflicted with dull out disease, and not knowing they were soul dead. “This is Doctor...A. Patricial Wentworth. Associate Physician to Angela DaMore. Patient number 322200,” she went on. “A specialist she hired. Ms DaMore gave me permission to speak to Doctor her primary medical practitioner there, Doctor Wisnewski—”

“Doc who?” Amber inquired.

“Wisnewski,” Edie repeated, checking to see if the name was correct. “Y. R. Ivan Wisnewski to be exact. I wanted to talk about a mutual patient, who is also my sister.”

“Huh?” Amber replied, in the manner of it being the new American Battle Cry.

“This is...607-398-3850, is it not?” Edie said, checking the number.

“It is that, for better or worse,” Amer’s reply..

“Pellikan Falls Medical Center? PFMC?” Edie inquired, still very much as Doctor Wentworth.

“No, this is FCFMF,” came over the phone.

“Huh?” Edie self observed flow out of her lowered jaw.

“Fitness Center for Forty, Flatulent and for the moment, Fattie Fatties,” the cheerful reply.. “And you are....?”

“Sure that I dialed the number my best friend gave me. Or that I stole from her,” Edie replied, her ‘Professor Doctor Wentworth’ English accent vanishing with every painfully auscultated syllable.

“We can be your new best friend,” Amber offered, something that sounded like an opportunity that had to not be passed up. . “For a nominal fee, which I can, like, maybe reduce,” the GenZ mastress continued.. “I, like, ya know, campaigned for Social justice and equality. And your voice sounds, like totally familiar. Are you, ya know, like...?”

“No! I’m not her!” Edie yelled into the phone, after which she ended the call. “I’m not anybody anymore,” she said to the pigeon, who flew away. “I’m not anyone anymore!” she loudly said up to the rest of the flock in the sky flying to better places than where they had been. “But,” she went on, even louder considering that now that she was in her own universe, there were certain advantages to being stuck there, as no one on two or four legs paid her any notice. Edie opened up her ‘old lady’ arms, took in a deep breath then bellowed out, “And ain’t it great to be nobody anymore.” “Ain’t it great to be garbage!” she sang to the fates as loud as any Broadway performer she had listened to on stage. “A piece of shit tttt,” the melody went on, accentuating the t’s “A nobody noooobody who nooobody knows. You fates! You somebodies...Maybe Buddies who...”

Edie finally got the attention of an audience. Not the birds in the sky, the fates above them or even the God who maybe did control the world He, or She, created on a ‘bad experiment’ day way back when. This time Edie’s rant, and appeal, was from below. A four and six year old, by the looks and size of them, who were fascinated with her rhythm and vocal range.

“Yes, You...little buddies. Edie said to her potential new converts, crouching down to their eyeline. “Don’t trust any bodies. But you still have to be somebody. Somebuddies who can maybe, sometime, somewhere change the world. Change it into---”

The parents of the musically drawn in children weren’t amused, impressed or fascinated. They snatched their progeny away from Edie’s eyes, then pulled them away from the sound of her voice with the utmost alacrity, and terror.

Edie’s next admirers were three Cops twice her size who snuck in from both sides, grabbing her arms. Every citizen within twenty feet diverted their phones from being listening devices to being cameras. Still, Edie looked to the four year old Amazon princess who could become President and her older brother who still had the chance to become a better husband than Lars turned out to be. Despite their parent’s pulling them away, the fascination in their offspring’s eyes still kept Edie going. “I hereby knight you both to change the world into something even these goons will WANT to defend!” she commanded the kids. Instead of having to...”

Edie felt a bolt more powerful than Thor’s lightening penetrating into her arm. Glancing at its source, she saw a Cayuga County Sheriff’s Department decal amidst the blurred image overtaking her sight. “And fuck you too, Occifer Oli ali Evansosskkiiis, she slurred out of her mouth. ”

“Fuck who?” echoed into her ears in a deep baritone voice from the man holding her left arm.

“Fuck if I know,” came from a distorted face to her right bearing an elephant sized nose and a beard with hairs that waved back and forth like a field of fall grass desperately trying to not be blown away by a winter wind.

Then...nothing...

## CHAPTER 14

You couldn't ask for a more comfortable room. Padded surfaces on the ass to sit or lie on. Hard soft surfaces behind your back lean against. No view or hearing of the outside world to disturb you. And windows on the walls that you can paint as anything you want, with a view of whatever world you want to, or should, imagine on the other side. And...an audience of imaginary friends to listen to and appreciate your artistic expression.

As for the latter, very white skinned Edie bolted out as a Black Gospel singer, "Nobody knows that trouble I seen, nobody knows but..." She looked up to the sky. "Jesus?" she said, expecting an answer, but not getting one.

"I knows," she said as Mamie Edie from the Alabami Plantation. "Heaven watches, earth works," she noted with a Black voice feeling the old lady Rachel wig around her aching head, the loose fitting vintage dress below it (minus belt and any pins of course) feeling like they were constricting the guts and glory out of her torso.

She went on singing, "Nobody knows da trouble I seen' at an even louder volume, finally evoking an audience member from the world of, theoretically anyway, the living.

"So, former renegade now Masser Sheriff," she said in her to Evans after he established himself in front of her, locking the door behind her. "Nice, comfy and probably expensive threads there, Commissioner DA or maybe Counciller Evans," Edie said feeling the texture of his plain grey business suit. 'Come ta book lil ole me fer cultural appropriation?' Edie laughed at her own joke. "Yeah, capital offense in da woyld I used ta come from, and maybe helped create."

"It's citizen Oliver Evans now," Evan said, calmly. "Who---"

"---Cames ta hear me singin'?" Mamy Edie exclaimed loudly, following by another verse of 'Nobody knows' which was even more thunderous.

Evans crouched down, leaned in to Edie, then put his hand over her mouth. "I'm serious," he said, his stare penetrating through her blood shot ocular portholes. "It took everything I could do, and give up, to find you, and see that you were held here, and not in worse places, as Rachel Horowitz, not Edie."

"Why?" Edie shot back, as herself.

"Because it's just you and me, against the world now," he related, and confessed.

"And him, the J man, or maybe woman posing as man?" she replied, pointing to the sky.

“People who are, for now anyway, more determined to put right what Mike Richter is making wrong, Edie,” he replied. “Who are once again loyal to me, as I am loyal to you.”

“Because?” Edie pressed.

The answer with a kiss, delivered gently on Edie’s lips.

“That trick worked with Lars, but I’m not going to be fooled again by---”

Evans’ kissed her again, tighter, firmer, sending vibrations from somewhere into her lips, head and abruptly lightened chest.

The melody to “It’s there in his kiss” echoed between her ears, lingering after he finally pulled away, still holding her hand. A lexicon of undefinable emotions Edie never felt before zoomed up and down every Shakra in her spine. “So, what do we do about all of...this,” she asked the only person in this world and the beyond one who she could, and wanted to, trust.

“We start with this!” Evans said, pulling out a syringe. “The rest is in motion.”

What that ‘rest’ was, Edie didn’t question. Not that there was any choice in the matter.

## CHAPTER 15

Several generations ago, the Royal Arms Hotel did host royalty. Three presidential candidates on their way to successful campaign conventions further Upstate and in the Mid West and as many British Monarchs en route from Canada to New York while touring the Empire. But like so many Upstate New York locations built with the best construction materials available in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the centers of power and influence moved downstate. Such left the once five star hotel as a three and a half establishment boasting more prestigious black and white photos in the lobby rather than five star generals, kings, presidents, heads of state and world famous authors in the rooms.

But a revival of optimism and decorum emerged as Iron Mike Richter decided to resurrect 'The Royal' as his Upstate base of operations, appended by an infusion into slowly declining local

businesses with funds whose source was not questioned. Such included the bookstores and NPR stations. "We Like Mike" echoed from the crowd outside, crowd control being taken care of by the America First Bikers, now clad in new 'We Love Jesus CHIPS like uniforms whose colors were calming to the eye with LGBT colors on their lapels, enveloped by American flags and a smiling Eagle resting on an olive branch. Meanwhile, in the lobby, a celebration of local cuisine and talent awakened the glory ghosts of old who had been slumbering within the walls.

The smiling, pathologically perky face on the super-wide screen tv in 'only three more days before the newly inserted gubernatorial election day' said it all. "Yes, it is a new and very very much liked, and kind as well as strong Mike Richter," Barbie Barone delivered to the camera lens on the 'Great Morning Finger Lakes' show syndicated throughout every portion of the Empire State except, of course the neighboring foreign country of New York City.

"And it's not because he shaved off his trademark beard and traded in his strong man grunt for a kind man smile," silver but still amply haired Brad Bradley added, a picture of the new, improved Richter behind him.

"Well speak for yourself, Brad," Barbie added with a twinkle in her 'refusing to admit she hit 40 last week' botoxed eyes. "He's a catch for any woman looking for a kind man. And a strong one." She leans in towards the camera. "And, girls, Mike, now Michael Richter is single," She displayed her freshly manicured empty fourth finger on her left hand. "As am I, Michael!" exclaimed.

"Barbie," Brad interrupted, evoking a dirty look from his newest 'partner' broadcaster. "I mean Barbara," he continued. "Sounds like you want to be the first to have a dance with him after he's officially elected governor next week."

"Or sooner," Richter, in an eco friendly suit bearing American, UN and LGBT flags on its lapel, in front of the TV at the gala event. Beside him stood Axe, his beard trimmed, in a 'citizen' suit as well, the first time he was clad and groomed as such since his required court appearance when he narrowly escaped an all expenses paid Grey Bar hotel stay for life in Attica.

"And after the waltz in the ballroom, a private dance in my hotel room. Then, after she's been

trained appropriately, yours, Norman,” Richter whispered to his, as far as Axe knew anyway, still favorite enforcer.

“Axe. Still axe, Mike,” the America First Biker for Jesus, or anyone else who would reward him first, asserted with a low voice.

“Iron Mike,” Richter asserted with a quiet but intense grunt, with a clenched fist.

“Of course,” Axe replied. “Iron---”

Mike and/or Michael was tapped on the shoulder by one of his new thirty something Aide, who doubled as a reporter for the local ‘New Voices’ radio station. His skin was black as coal, contrasted by his gold earring on both lobes, smelling of androgenous perfume, a slender most likely vegan body under the love beads around his neck which thundered out ‘gay and black pride’.

“Mike,” the aid said with a soft voice.

Richter pursed his lips, shaking his head ‘no’ to, to axe anyway, anticipated intruder.

“I mean, eh, soon to be governor elect Michael,” the Aide said, converting Richter’s consternation into a glow of satisfaction in his eyes and, as illuminated by the lights behind him, the bright aura around his perfectly and hipply styled golden hair. “The limo to take you to your new cabinet is ready,”

“The commonly affordable, all electric powered VW bug I requested, Larry?” Richter replied, sneaking a look out of the corner of his held in place eyes at the Aide’s nametag.

Larry winced, looking downward. “Yes, sir,” he said.

Richter puts his hand on Aide's forearm, warm and seductively. " I mean Lawrence. Comrade Brother Lawrence," he replied.

Lawrence treated himself, and Richter, to a warm, accomplished.

"All ready to go, Comrade, Bro, Michael," a revitalized and liberated Lawrence said, giving Richter a 'bro' handshake which was immortalized by the broadcast cameras and the cameras on more personally owned phones than Axe could count.

Lawrence retreated to his NPR tote bag carrying 'peeps'. "He is one of ours now," He declared.

"You mean one of YOURS, Lawrence," a Millennial blonde, blue eyed metrosexual sneered at his fellow 'social justice warrior'.

"Yeah," Lawrence replied, with pride.

But, as the show must go on, Lawrence opened all of the long and manicured fingers on his hand to Richter, indicating the five minute countdown to delivery of the limo. Richter waved a 'thank you well done' thumbs up back, with friendly grin directed at his new constituency. But, to Axe, he slurred out, "five minutes till we leave. Ten till your bikers outside take that Commie Nigger Fag to the education camp so he'll be born again to OUR kind of Jesus."

"And if isn't...convertible?" Axe inquired.

"Accidents happen. Right?" the reply.

"Yeah...they do," Axe conceded.

“Especially to bodyguards who are dumb enough to not work for the highest bidders,” the expected reply, delivered with unexpected intensity. “Anyone in your organization we should worry about?”

“No, Mike,” Axe replied. “Eh...I mean...Michael.”

Arriving on the scene, disguised as Richter fans with tacky sun glasses, bad wigs and patriotic red, white and blue tacky attire, were non other than Oliver Evans and Edie. She carted a backpack with medical insignia on it.

Evans looks at the crowd, taking note of the multiple ‘I Like Mike AND Michael’ signs. “The pathology, Doctor Edie,” he offered.

Edie reached into the backpack, holding onto the handle of a revolver. “And the cure...”

Evans pushes Edie’s hand down. “No! ....Not yet anyway.,” he instructed her.

Cheering from crowd escalated. Richter emerged from the Royal Arms onto the antique red carpet which had last been stomped on by ‘nothing’s been better for all of us’ Governor Alfred T Smith a year before the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and waved to crowd, Axe lingered him, out-shadowed in physical stature as well as emotional expression. The new, kinder and flower rather than modified swastika wearing ‘America First Bikers for Jesus’ keep the crowd from rushing towards their new Red and Blue and Everything In Between Messiah, chanting his name.

A VW bug with Peace and Love decorations on it, along with LGBT flags and an abundance of American flags, was driven in to the door. Richter and Axe got into the back seat, the door opened for them to do so by none other than the winner of the last ‘Empire State Beauty pagent bearing flowers for the former and an active shooing of distain for the latter. The crowd kept offering even more and louder chants the chant. The ‘people’s limo’ edged its way out of the entrance to The Royal, led from the front and protected from the back by a multi-MANNED motorcycle escort.

It was a frightening thought as ever to the chants heralding Mike Richter as Governor of the Richest State in the Union. An even more horrifying idea put into voice by the chant devolving into naming and pre-affirming him as the next President of that Union.

“You sure you know where they’re going?” maybe still Doctor Edie asked definitely not Sheriff anymore Evans. “And that its where he’s going to meet with his new cabinet and advisors, a week before the election that will make him their bosses?”

“Sure as anything, Edie,” the reply.

“Including you were wanting to get into my pants as much as getting into my administration?” she pressed,

“Yes,” the admission and confession delivered with an open heart but averted eyes. After which he looked at and into Edie with more determination than she ever felt from him, or for that matter, anyone else in recent, though admittedly distorted, memory. “Time for us to....what was your main platform? Save the world from itself. And from any of us who become one of them?”

“And for any of us now?” her retort, fear and prophesy.

## CHAPTER 16

As for ‘saving the world from any of us now’, the hand picked members for Richter’s Governor’s future advisor board in Albany and, to be inserted at the chosen time, Presidential cabinet in Washington had gathered at the top of the off season Mohawk Mountain Ski Lodge. In the center of it was a modest ten million dollar three story chalet built to house and entertain the kind of billionaires who were so rich and powerful that their names never reached the cover or fine print on Fortune 500 or the Wall Street Journal Said ‘conference center’ was located atop a

tall enough hill to be called a mountain, at least by East of the Mississippi map makers. That mountain had been named in its four hundred year long history for two different Native tribes, one French Canadian trapper-bootlegger who defended against British occupation in the War of 1812 and the mistress of the developer of resort after WWII who used it for 'special conferences' with its namesake. What 'Victoria Mountain' and the state beyond the art ski resort around it would be named next would, according to the plan anyway, involve 'Richter' in some form or another. The air lifted in WMO (coincidentally, white male only) attendees were gathered around the 'buffet table' at the top floor of the mega-sized varnished log cabin fortress which was visible by air for the WMO, (white males only) .

Around the table of custom ordered culinary delights, also shipped in by air, were Joe Lacombe and I.M. Grossman, twenty something cyber geniuses who had never worn a shirt with a collar or do any kind of blue collar joe job in their lives. Their expertise included making computer games that trapped any user into being addicted to playing them rather than connecting to real world reality and made every adult over thirty have to buy software they had designed when dealing with issues of financial or biological survival.

Then there were those who never took off their white shirts and had stayed in university long enough to get overly degreed, such as C. Joshua Fergosen, MBA, Ph.D., M.D. and Hershel Shapiro, MBA, ESQ. The most clever and greed is great' doc and lawyer combo that money could buy and compliments with titles could secure.

Rounding out the bad old boys club was Fernando Ortez, former General of the Argentinian Army and, until he lost CIA support, President of that country who when drunk related stories about being sung to by his great uncle Adolf. Then there was once-Stasti operative now European Oil Company CEO Gunther Telleman, who eased his way from being a servant of Socialism to a master at Capitalism after the fall of the Soviet Union. And there was proudly bubba bellied General 'Billy Joe' Jackson, whose Old Southern roots and very selective compassion for White rather than alternatively skinned people, or for that matter anyone not born in the US, went back to his ancestor, Andrew 'Old Hickory' Jackson.

As for who was more concerned with the special guest to arrive for lunch than gobbling up the appetizers for such, there was the Committee of Three. The three 'I's,' Ira, Iliya and Ian, to each other anyway. They stood in the observation deck, a darkened from which they could see everything and everyone around the buffet table, concerned who was not there.

“He’s late,” Ira said, after looking at his watch.

“Iron Mike shouldn’t be taking taken so much time convincing these local peons, that he’s Mild Mannered Michael,” Iliya noted. “But, I suppose we have to expect errant behaviors from such students their wise teachers.”

“Wise MASTERS,” Ian asserted. “And as for his new cabinet,” he continued referring his colleagues to the new executors of Richter’s soon to be created executive orders” . .

“Easily amused ‘magic makers’ and, according to Richter, useful idiots,” Iliya added. “Or when he’s wowed by them, ‘magic makers’.”

“Does even Richter know where the term ‘useful idiots’ came from?” Ian proposed.

“Maybe, or maybe not,” Ira replied. “But it doesn’t matter. Because as we know, everything that goes up comes down.”

“Including us,” Ian added. “As Richter is...going up. And could make life difficult for the three of us and the world we created.”

“Or blow it up,” Iliya suggested. “Before, well...”

“We blow it up first to take it out of its and our misery?” Ira added.

The three men shared a laugh, then a toast. Each of the old power men silently asked themselves why Richter was even more fashionably late than normal for his unofficial coronation in the courtroom that mattered. One in which the crown so often could be stolen by a young prince, or newly born devil.

## CHAPTER 17

The woods on the road up to the top of Veronica Mountain were dark and deep. And Richter had miles to go before he would sleep, going upward and upward. Yes, whoever built the road heading to the Mohawk Ski Lodge did a very good job maintaining it without potholes. Legend had it that the contractor who built it had a limited amount of building material, less time, and a lot of dynamite, constructing steeper than any code in the valley road with safety features. On the cliff side of there were no shortage of rocks walls somehow embedded with tall trees that not even the most spry doe or buck could traverse. On the other side, with barely enough

shoulder to handle any stray bicycle rider, drop offs, a plethora of tips of pine trees daring anyone to look down to see how far 'bottom' was. Indeed, as the sign proudly said in English, German and two Native languages on the side of the road up to the summit, 'No one's going to build a Walmart or Ecohouse on this sacred hill.'

From his secure position in the passenger seat of the VW 'people's limo' bug, Wagon Master Richter 'Forward Ho'd' the biker escort in front of him, impressing the reporters in the 21<sup>st</sup> century motorbus behind him. An all in all magnificent transport for a convoy whose Mission was to film the 'meeting of meetings' for the world below to see, as well as perhaps any ET spaceship captains passing by who were thinking about sending settlers to Earth before the upstart Earthings found a way to colonize their home planets. All until...

"Why are we stopping?" Richter said as the limo stopped. He turned away from the Reporters then at Axe, now in the driver's seat, who had halted the car. "Why the heck are we stopping?" Mild Mannered 'Michael' asked. "Silvestor 'Stonewall' Steiner, your head biker, deciding he needed to take a piss break after drinking too much Moose Brew local beer?"

Axe got out of the car, then pointed to and proceeded to something ahead, around the bend, leaving Richter in the back seat, alone and impatient.

"Pothole that you'll have fixed after you become governor next week?" a reporter asked. "Filling it in with the ashes of rapists, anti-Semites, terrorists and pedophiles? As promised?"

"And as delivered my good friends!" Richter waved back. After which Axe tapped him on the shoulder, requesting that he get out of the vehicle to examine what was holding back the convoy. Three steps after setting foot on the solid pavement, and seeing what was on the downward side of it, Richter's legs shook. He fell back limo, holding onto the doorhandle for dear live. Axe intervened, apparently intrigued with Richter's fear of heights, explaining why he decided to take planes rather than choppers from one place to another and, when forced to get from point A to B by helicopter, put on a Lone Ranger mask so he could 'get a few hours of shut eye' or 'not let the bad guys chasing him in the air know who he really is.'

With more discretion than he intended to utilize, Axe guided Richter to a location from which he could see what the problem ahead was, without seeing how high up from the valley the road

really was. "What the fuck?" Richter said upon seeing a freshly chopped large fallen tree lying across the road. 'Stonewall' picked up a note posted on the tree. "It says..."

Richter 'shhhd' Stonewall, motioning for him to throw him the note. It fell out of Richter's presumable 'glue like hands' as soon as it hit the palm, falling onto the ground. Keeping his eyeline away from the drop-off side of the road, Richter motioned for Axe to pick it up and read

"It says, 'Michael my man,'" Axe said. "'We were here first'. Signed---"

"Some Indian eco activist who threatened to go on the warpath with us unless we give back this mountain and this country to him and his drunken redskin losers?"

"Worse," Axe related, showing Richter the note.

"'Philosopher Queen Edie and the real tree huggers?'" Richter read, after which he wrote something back on the note, throwing it back to Stonewall. It fell short of the mark.

"About fifteen minutes," Axe's second in command related with three openings of his hand as his underlings set upon moving the oversized log.

Richter returned with two openings of his hand, appended by a 'or else', and a hand across his throat, directed at Stonewall.

"Ten minutes top, folks," he yelled back to the reporters, after which he worked his way back to the limo, avoiding eye contact with his fans, and the demons down below begging him to take 'one giant leap downward for all mankind'.

True to his promise, Stonewall and his crew did manage to pry the log from the hold gravity and lose ropes had on it, emerging with pink blotches on their Biker Colors, along with stenciled motos including 'loser', 'corporate slave', 'born stupid' and 'scared of everything'. Each biker

threw them off, except for Prospect (and, as such, servant to all of the bikers) Karl Holderman, who, due to luck or perhaps divine design, was unbranded by the labels worked into the wood.

“Well, sometimes, there are no collateral damages in war,” Edie said to Evans from their vantage point on the from a secluded small slope on the other side of road. “Pink paint for Red State Visitors,” she commented to Evans, who held the remainder of the paint in his hand. “Good choice.”

The MAUN (‘Move America Upward Now’) convoy did move forward, stopping yet again by a log blocking the road. ‘Fucking again! More ‘protests’ from cowardly, whining WOKE Motherfucking cunt sucking losers who---’ Before Richter could blast out and five alarm racially and otherwise offensive expletives, he was held back by Axe pointing his attention to the faces of some curious reporters behind him. Some were looking impatiently at their watches.

Estimating how long it would take the now jacketless bikers ahead of him to remove the obstacle, he flashed ‘ten minutes’ with his fingers. “Tops!” he appended with an all is beyond well smile. He then turned around, placing his right hand over his eye so as to not see the drop off.

Yet again, there was a note on the tree freshly torn from its roots. Stonewall gingerly grabbed hold of the note, keeping his men from touching the log. He texted its contents to his boss.

“We, those below, will replace you who will not be on top anymore?” Richter read. He fumed, but before the volcano could burst out the most vial labels he gave to ‘loser’ populations, cultures, countries and people, Axe put his finger up to his own nose. “Yeah I know,” Richter conceded.

“How much long THIS time?” Richter texted.

“Fifteen minutes,” the reply from Stonewall. “Maybe twenty.”

“Make it a quick DOWNSTATE New York five, or being fired will be the last of your worries,” Richter related in print. “A little bit of touch love to keep my crew from becoming slackers,” he explained to Axe.

"OUR crew," Axe asserted.

"Of course, Axe. Listen to what I mean not what I say," Richter said to his partner in slime while laying his large bearlike claw over the shoulder of the Napoleonic sized biker President.

Pressured by the consequences of not achieving life's assigned tasks on time, the bikers set to move the log off the road, which they did with far less effort than they thought necessary. But jumping over from the ancient fallen tree which finally succumbed to age, made more so by artificial food stuffs pressed into it, were six legged creatures who didn't take kindly to being disturbed by two legged invaders. Invaders who shed their shirts as if they were ablaze with fire, slapping their naked chests with more ferocity than monks of old whipping their sinful bodies into submission to the 'Good Lord's' Iron Will.

"Ants, cockroaches and leeches, Doc," Evans said to Edie from their still hidden observation post "Haven't changed in a million years."

"And still don't have to." her reply. "Well done."

"Thank you, Edie," Evans said with a thankful bow.

"I was referring to them, Oli," Edie's reply as she put down the field glasses. "Our six legged... constituents.

"Right," Evans added, both offended by Edie's, perhaps justified, arrogance and inability to follow instructions given to her by good people who worked with her and a Good God who was working overtime to work FOR her. Business as usual, for better or worse.

The roadblock was on flat ground. No walls of rocks on the left, no drop offs into a black hole to the right. But still, it was a tree. A really big one this time, with no note on it. Stonewall

halted his motorized scouts upon seeing it. The VW limo and reporters motorbus moved forward, closer to the Presidential escorts than at the last two stops. Richter got out of his seat, then marched towards the disturbance, tapping his watch impatiently en route, no doubt thinking that since he was master of finances, people and corporations, dictating the passage of time was in his toolbox as well.

'Onward, you cowardly losers! Get that log out of there, Stonewall, or should I say 'Snowbal' Steiner?'" Richter yelled at the head of the flesh eaten, exhausted and angry motorcycle escort.

Stonewall edged his way to the oversized log, trying to move it. His buds were unable to budget it as well. He nodded his head in the negative to Richter, Axe and, as they were in view of what was going on, and more curious about it, the reporters.

"Then we fucking go AROUND it!" Richter yelled out. "That means on the grass, you imbecilic pansy retard! You expendables fucking first!"

Stonewall took in a deep breath, clenched his right hand in a fist, then walked over past the shoulder to the left. Upon stepping on the thin layer of grass, the earth below it decide it was hungry. It swallowed his boot and, nearly foot. Using a stick, he tested the footing on the other side of the road. With the same result. He nodded 'no' to Richter.

"I've seen this before," veteran enforcer, biker and wilderness explorer Axe informed his boss. "We have to turn back, maybe find another way up the mountain."

"The way up the mountain is THAT WAY!" Richter yelled out, pointing to the American flag flying over the chalet within the Mohawk Ski Lodge. "I have a very important meeting up there!"

"Which, maybe you can call them and say you're late?" Axe suggested.

"Yeah, great suggestion, IF these towers and satellites are working! Which they aren't!" Richter blasted out.

“What’s going on here, Mike?” Axe asked Richter, as a friend who was becoming even more dangerous to himself, or others.

“I don’t know what’s going on!” Richter said, then screamed then blasted out to the sky. “But I do know what is NOT going to go on,” he grunted, grabbing hold of Axe’s gun. “We’re moving forward. No one is going backwards!” he screamed at Stonewall, shooting two rounds at his feet. Ranting ‘Not one step backwards’ as a battlecry, the one that Axe recalled was what the command was on the Russian front in WWII where carnage was the rule rather than the exception, Richter shot at, and hit, the feet of his nephew. The bikers around him got on their hogs and zoomed down the road back to the valley below. The driver of the press bus turned around, motioning for the passengers to scurry back inside in favor of saving their own lives than getting more footage to expand their careers, or save their jobs.

The gunfire turned to the bus as the engine finally kicked in. “What are you looking at?” he yelled at the reporters. “Especially YOU, Larry Loser!” he screamed at the gay Black Aide who, for whatever reason, had not been transported to an America First for White Christians education facility. Larry continue to film until he was shot in the arm, then pulled into the van, which made its way down the hill at warp speed.

Axe made a run for the VW limo. “And You stay right here!” Richter yelled at Axe, shooting him in the right shoulder just as he opened the door to the vehicle. “And I’m driving!” he commanded, stepping on the accelerator, zooming down the hill, dumping Axe on the road as excess baggage, then running flat out into a tree.

Iron Mike Richter pushed himself out of the loudly honking vehicle, landing on his back in the kind of physical pain that matched any mental anguish he inflicted on anyone else. “And you shut up!” he yelled at the VW bug, shooting it out of its, and his, misery.

Through backroads that were not on any map, Evans drove his quad up the road, stopping to observe the accident. “So, the masochist moron who used to think that he can stop progress,” Richter related with hurting back, sore feelings and busted leg.

“With my partner, now in more ways than one,” Evans said regarding Edie, carting a back pack.

“Ah, as I see by your luggage there, Doctor Edie!” Richter scoffed, having noted the medical insignias on Edie’s all purpose back pack. “Who, according to that outdated ‘above all do no harm’ motto of yours, saved me from the dead, or thought she did anyway. Come by to do it again? What kind of “‘magic snake oil potion’ or ‘miracle surgery’ do you have in that bag to make things better? ”

“This,” Edie said with a sneer, pulling a revolver out of her medical bag, aiming it at here least favorite and, in some ways, most interesting patient.

“No Edie!” Evans screamed out. He outstretched his arm over her elbow, doing his best to wack it down. For his trouble Edie dug her other elbow into his gut, causing him to double over in very expressive pain.

Edie edged closer to Richter, noting that his leg as beginning to bleed, a bone sticking out of the flesh. Evans rushed in to put a tourniquet around it, but was pushed back from doing so by her shooting a two inches next to his own feet.

“A warning shot, Police Commissioner Evans, or maybe District Attorney Oliver,” Iron Mike proposed. “No matter what my campaign media people put out, she doesn’t have the balls to intentionally shoot anyone. At least this up close. Or at least now. And, Oliver, are you going to let a woman tell you what to do when it comes you your duty? Not fixing my leg is hurting you more than me. Which is...”

“Correct, God help me,” Evans confessed and related, after which he grabbed hold of the broken femur, rammed in back into place, then placed a tourniquet above it. He then slapped cuffs on both of his wrist. “Iron Mike Fuhrer Richter, I am now placing you under arrest as...”

“...A citizen with no official power or legal authority,” Richter shot back.

“Shut up!” Evans yelled into his face. “Shut the fuck up, you pathetic, mean loser!”

'Guilty on counts one and two, my friend, but certainly not three. It's you who are the loser, because of throwing in with your new girlfriend, rediscovered lover, muse or 'mommy'." Evans pulled his hand back and forced it into a fist, aiming it at Richter's smart assed smiling mug, held back from delivery by Edie's gentle hand on his shaking wrist

Richter then threw his sweet tasting venom at Edie. "But as for you, I've turned you into a winner. Almost a winner anyway. Someone who acts like me. Yells like me. And now believes like me, that might is right. And that it IS cool to be cruel. And if I die, now or a week or day, or years from now, YOU will be carrying my agenda. As an arrogant and power hungry leader who knows that the world needs an Hard Ass Empress, who enjoys...yes, fuming at the throat..."

Edie shot a round into Richter's other leg.

"Great aim, Doc, if you were intending to give me a flesh wound, but don't you admit, you feel better? More worthy to be Governor, President of Queen of the fucking world? You will if you..."

Another shot entered into Richter's left arm, delivered by Axe.

"No!" Edie protested, trying to push him aside so she could get another clear shot. "This I my kill!"

"And your death," Axe added, pushing Edie aside, towards and into the arms of Evans. "You kill him, you become him. But...if I do it!"

Axe appended his claim and unavoidable consequence by landing one round into Richter's left shoulder, another in the left knee, a third in the groin. His body shook like a leaf. His mouth screamed escalations echoing through the woods. Behind his eyes he saw every 'great, beautiful and wonderful' movie of his life as a boring, humiliating failure. It was then that Axe put the final bullet into his head. "And so there it is," Axe said. "Only two death's today. Mine, and his. And so to balance the legal books here, and the moral bookkeeping up in the sky..." Axe said, after which he held up his hands begging to be cuffed. "Everything I did with and for

Richter to discredit you, Doctor Governor Callillano, I will confess. Along with what how I was not outright honest Injun with you over the years, Officer Oli.”

“Along with the WHY of what you did?” Evans asked.

“Fully explained, to the extent that I remember and understand them at least,” Axe put forth. “Would make a hell of a book which, you, Doctor E and any charity of YOUR choice with enough bucks to buy any house, yacht, country or elections monitoring organization.”

“And, what about any charges against your crew?” Evans pressed.

“Dropped, completely, as part of my deal,” Axe proposed.

“Hmmm...In exchange for, as you were about to propose, me giving your a full pardon after become governor? So you can make things Right outside of jail after minimizing some of the cruelty and ignorance behind bars?” Edie threw into the mix.

“Maybe, if it’s your wish, or more importantly, God’s Will,” the confessor’s final word on the matter. “Now, Sheriff Evans. Do your duty. Or I’ll...”

Axe aimed his revolver at Evans, getting no reply, then turned it on Edie. The dynamic duo had never encountered a more non-committal, repentant and self-defeated criminal. The biker who valued freedom above everything else, seemed to feel liberated when the wristlances clicked closed.

## EPILOG

As for what happened up the hill at the Lodge, there was no shortage of impatience when it was decided by a minority of the new appointees, and most importantly, the full majority of the Committee of three to call the choppers and private jets, so they could go back home to the

business or being themselves, and preventing their underlings from advancing themselves. But the business of the committee of three was not concluded in the Empire State.

After being elected in a confirmation election, 100 days after taking office and administrating her duties and implementing her agendas with virtually no opposition from either side of the aisle, she got a congratulations birthday card which was personally engraved. The return address was 'The Three Wise Men', the country of origin of the stamp eluding her. Three inscriptions jumped out of the page from the card. The first, Latin Glory is Fading. The Second, Absolute Power Corrupts Absolutely. And finally the Third. She who is late to accept golden opportunities in life gets buried under a mound of coal.

"Posturing for something, Oli," Edie said to her new husband and most trusted political advisor BECAUSE he had no title.

"Yes, but who, and for in game?" his reply. "But, something we can consider after our private 100 days in office dinner, E."

"Yes, maybe, Oli," the reply.